

Sherif

Let me inflict one further Turkish Tale on you. While we were away Jenny and I embarked on a two week tour of Cappadocia and the Black Sea regions of Turkey. There were 13 of us, ten Aussies two New Zealanders and a Canadian, as well as a local guide and a driver. But it is the guide's story that I want to share with you.

Our guide, Sherafettin, (he asked us to call him Sherif) was from the city of Batman in eastern Turkey. He was a gentle man with a fount of knowledge about his country, its history, geology and politics, A man who shunned violence, he told me he had no interest in football because of the violence it causes in Turkish society. A man who did not attend mosque, but who I discovered was imbued in Sufi spirituality. And a man who told us part way through the trip that he was a Kurd, that large minority in Turkey whose culture, language and very existence is at risk. And whilst there are extremist elements notably the PKK that seek independence for the Kurds, Sherif is not one of them. However there was a deep sadness about him as he told of the plight of his people, and specifically of a woman on a bus in Western Turkey, turned upon by her fellow travellers when she answered her phone and started speaking Kurdish. In Turkey if you're Kurdish you immediately attract suspicion and discrimination.

But as I said, Sherif our guide was not interested in violence and the origin of his non-violence stance became evident when one night he told us of his grandmother. In her village in Eastern Turkey there lived some Armenians. One day a man gave some children lollies to attack an Armenian boy. The boy was tossed into a well and the other boys began to stone him. Sherif's grandmother incensed at the bullying interceded and chased the others off, thus saving the boy's life. She knew what it meant to be marginalised, and felt strongly that all people should be able to live in harmony. The boy left the village soon after, but Sherif tells of how over sixty years later the descendents of the boy returned to the village to thank Sherif's family.

Sherif's passion for justice stems from this story of his grandmother. And remarkably he weaves his pacifist stance into his work as a guide. Like the time we stood in front of a castle wall in the Black Sea town of Sinop. The stone wall was made up of round classical Greek columns, large square Roman blocks, smaller Byzantine stones and small Ottoman bricks. Sherif pointed to the defensive wall and said "Wouldn't our world be a better place if we were like this wall. All these different stones moulded together to make something beautiful, something strong."

As I See It Sherif was more than a tour guide, he was a spiritual guide who spoke to our oneness as children of God.

Tony would be more than happy to chat about the above article.

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