

## Listening for the heartbeat

a contemplative experience

"We're off to Mongolia." Finally we had made the decision and could tell people. "Why Mongolia?" was the usual reply. Why indeed, for we knew little about the place. However, there was a reason. The reason was a photo. A photo we'd seen in the travel section of a newspaper. A photo taken in Mongolia.

It was in the latter part of 2012 and my husband Andrew and I were considering where next to travel. Hence, reading the travel section of a newspaper to source ideas. This particular day one photo caught my imagination and drew me in. The photo was of a ger (nomadic family's home) pitched on a huge expanse of flat land, which in turn was flanked by hills. Something within me responded to this photo with "wow, what would it be like to stand upon that land?"



I thought no more of that photo as our thoughts turned toward travelling in Tibet. We explored a number of Tibetan treks. Some were too long, some too short. Some seemed too hard for our now out-of-shape bodies. Some seemed too easy for us former trekkers. Then one day as we were flicking through yet another travel brochure, there it was again, Mongolia! And once again I experienced the pull of the land known as Mongolia. And once again I said, "Andrew, let's go to Mongolia!"

As it turned out, there was a tour, a road trip, that suited our time-frame and our desire for adventure. So it was settled. Mongolia it was to be. Andrew set about booking the trip. Over time, the intense feeling in response to the photo subsided. It was then all but lost as we prepared for our trip; made the flight firstly to Beijing, China; explored the sights of that city including the Great Wall; then flew on to Ulaanbaatar, the Capital of Mongolia and met up with the tour group. However, after a few days acclimatizing to the daily routine of the tour, my thoughts began to peacefully wander and the photo once again surfaced within my awareness. "Hmm . . . I wonder what that was about?" I asked myself.



So as we drove along the dusty roads of the Gobi Desert, I chose to re-enter the experience of being drawn by this land. After some time, what came to mind was Parker Palmer's phrase, "sit patiently at the base of a tree and breathe with the earth." Well, there was not a tree in sight at that stage! However the notion of breathing with the earth seemed to resonate. And even though I didn't exactly know how it would take place, I decided to listen for the heartbeat of the land.

From that moment as we walked over sand dune and drove over dusty steppe, I would listen and wait . . . listen and wait . . . sometimes almost straining to perceive the heartbeat of the land. It was fun at first, like playing a game. However as time went on and still I heard nothing I began to feel dismay. I wondered, "Could it be that I have come all this way in response to the call of the land, to hear nothing!" While I felt saddened by such a thought, I was well enough practiced in the art of transformative living to know that I could not force anything to happen. So I chose to surrender the yearning. I chose to no longer focus on listening for the heartbeat of the land.

Sometime later a question came to mind accompanied by an embodied image. The question was, "why are you looking outside of yourself for the heartbeat of the land?" The question struck a chord with me. So I chose to use my imagination to enter and play with the embodied image. And then the aha moment dawned. The heartbeat of the land is also my heartbeat. I don't have to seek it outside of myself, it is beating within me. We share in the same heartbeat of Life Itself. Also, the animals, birds, insects, rocks, sand, dust, plants share in the same heartbeat of Life Itself. Everything shares in the same heartbeat of Life Itself. I let this insight re-sound within me. Then by way of commencing to integrate it, I chose to gleefully exclaim, "hey rock, you and I share in the same heartbeat of Life Itself!" Or "dust. . . flower . . . goat . . . you and I share in the same heartbeat of Life Itself!" Although, I did struggle a little when it came to the pesky flies we encountered as we walked the eight kilometers around the lake. However I chose to say "yes flies, I know you and I share in the same heartbeat of Life Itself!"

Such an insight then gave rise to a new understanding for me. An understanding that while we all share in the same heartbeat of Life Itself, we are also unique in our own being . . . rocks are unique, humans are unique. . . dust is unique . . . even flies are unique! Each facet and species of the earth community has their unique place within the ongoing evolutionary process. And as I continued to let this understanding wash over me, the tender tears of profound joy welled up.

Why was this insight and understanding so meaningful to me? Well, for a number of years I had had an intellectual understanding of the interconnectedness of all things. Such an understanding included the notion that interconnectedness did not mean sameness. However, I had not experienced such interconnectedness within my being. Now I had direct experience. What I had previously known intellectually was now also known experientially. I now knew myself to be both interconnected and unique within the earth community and within the wider evolutionary process.

Of course, such a peak experience and corresponding transformational shift in my inner being is still in infancy. However, as I remain open to this inner movement and continue to discover language which gives expression to it, the transformational shift will continue to mature in the way it takes form within my daily living.

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