

Bangladesh Reflection- David

Good morning or “Suprabhat” for any of you wishing to learn a little Bangla today. I would actually like to begin by teaching you a second word today. The phrase is “Dhonobhat”, which roughly translates to “thank you.” Any traveler to Bangladesh will find this word invaluable. I cannot even begin to estimate how many times we all said that word. “Dhonobhat” seemed to follow us everywhere. It followed us from the congested and dangerous streets of Dhaka, through the corridors of Mission Hospital in Rajshahi, and finally to the remote, rural villages of the Shantal people. Never in my life has the phrase “thank you” been so essential. However, there came a point during our trip where “Dhonobhat” just didn’t cut it anymore. A point where one word simply couldn’t express the depth of the gratitude I felt for the people of Bangladesh.

Our third day in Dhaka was definitely the most intense culture immersion I have ever experienced. After crossing the Buriganga River to the slums of Dhaka, we helped the Morgans with check-ups and we visited a few of the Morgan’s long time patients. The final patient we visited lived with her family and several other families in tiny tin homes surrounding a courtyard. The courtyard sported only a large, shallow pool filled with muddy, stagnant water. By this time we were all on the brink of losing our composure to the relentless Bangladesh humidity and needless to say we weren’t too excited about standing in the thick mud surrounding that germ-infested water. After exhausting my Bangla skills with the men beside me, rather quickly I might add, I noticed an old woman crossing the water. I didn’t think anything of it until I saw that she was carrying a bench under her arm. She placed the bench in front of me, gestured to it, and said “Basen.” (means you sit honorific). After bombarding her with at least six “Dhonobhats” I finally took my seat with Madeleine on the bench. That alone was more than what I expected or deserved, but a few seconds later another woman emerged from her small home and placed a wooden panel underneath my feet to keep them from the mud. While this experience is what stands out most in my mind, there are countless others just like it.

What could I possibly have done to be treated so graciously by these people? I’m just some immature college kid from Louisiana. It is as if the story of Mark 14 has been flipped on its head. I am unwillingly being anointed with expensive perfumes while everyone around me cheers and scrambles to find more perfume.

I have tried to think of ways to give back to these people who so eagerly gave us so much of what little they had. For now I can only think to share my experiences with you all, and hope that maybe you can come up with something better than “Dhonobhat.”