Islam View

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Nationalism vs Brotherhood ...

Dear Reader: Before you read this article, I would like to ask you a simple favor: Take a deep breath, close your eyes for a moment, and think how fortunate you are. You can read!!! A very simple thing that we living here in this country and other industrialized nations of the world are taking for granted.

In fact, this is not the only aspect of fortune that most of us enjoy, there are many more. We have plenty to eat and we do not go to bed hungry at night, we have a roof over our heads, and we have a fairly high standard of living compared to other nations. Not to trivialize, but some of our daily decisions ar to pick what we eat, how we dress, and in sometimes the color of car we drive. In the meantime, there are those "others" in a far less fortunate situation that are dying of thirst and hunger. I hate to tell you that they exist, and there are quite a few of them, some even in this country. They do not have the choice of what food to eat or going to bed at night with even their basic needs provided for. The people in need have the same desires as we do; to be abl to provide for themselves and their family.

There are two questions we need to ask ourselves. The first one is: what responsibility do we bare in these cases not only in this country but in other countries? The second is: If we do have a responsibility, what role can we play to fulfill this responsibility?

To address the first question, we must ask ourselves, what is our relationship with each other? In principle, it is supposed to be one of brotherhood. Thinking globally, we all belong to the same race of human beings. We all descended from the same origin and we have so much in common. We all share the same earth in the short time between our birth and death. Yet, we are all unique, not one of us is the same. This individualism and diversity are what gives the human race its great strength. In the mean time, this individualism and this diversity can also be to the detriment not only to the people of one community country but to the world at large. Individuals as well as nations have to look past the differences in culture, background, and heritage, to look past their backyards and territories, to get to know their neighbors near and far.

Unfortunately, as individuals and as nations, our local attitudes and our near-sided heritage decide how far we stretch our hands. Our tribal and nationalistic ideology acts as a barrier between us and those in need. Rather than thinking of our neighbors as brothers in humanity, we think of them as limitation and restriction to our freedom. Instead of sharing with the needy we claim that we can't afford to contribute of ourselves. A rich nation borders a poorer one, and a new born on one side of the border has so many resources while his counter on the other side is entitled to almost nothing.

Worst of all is that we are serious about this attitude. We believe as individuals that we are entitled to all what we have. Very little we can give away. As nations, it is even worst. Each nation is so protective of its resources and the strong overtakes the weak. Moreover, instead of uniting forces and integratir resources, many countries are being divided into hatred and wars and more suffering and starvation goes on. Worst of all is that we defend such divisive and individualistic attitude by giving it a name; we call it nationalism and we call it patriotism.

We must all take the time to think about the life we live. Although we can argue the point that we are where we are by chance, it can be stated that most of those who are less fortunate than we have no control of the situation they are in. A child would not choose to live in a country in which there is no food to eat. We must realize that although we have constructed all of these man-made artificial barriers such as race, heritage, national borders, etc. we are one. We all inhabit the same world; humanity is one nation, if you will call it that, on this earth. In order to make this world a better place we must look at our fellow man as a brother, no matter what their background or nationality. We are all responsible for not only those less fortunate, but the welfare of all other and the world we live in.

The second question is more important, how will we exercise our responsibility? Many times talk of needy and those less fortunate elicits monetary contribution to provide for those in need. In this regard, one may ask, are we doing enough. Have we gone as far as the meaning of brotherhood implies? Or are we thinking of those in need as true brothers? I am sure that we all can do more. I am certain that if we take the meaning of brotherhood seriously there will never be a human in need on this earth.

Although monetary contributions are worthwhile and do help in providing services, food and shelter, this is not the only way we can help. A man may be rich financially, but very poor, whereas a man may be very rich but have no money. There are many needs in this and other countries, not only financial, but social and spiritual needs as well. The best place to start is in your own backyard. Look around and see what the needs are of those around you. You can provide help in a variety of ways, from helping an adult read, spending time with children and sharing your experiences with those who have no one t talk to; spending time with the elderly in nursing homes, helping to build needed housing, etc. Monetary contributions to various causes can be very worthwhile, but you cannot put a price on many simple experiences such as: the smile of a child who has gone camping or seen a baseball game or a zoo for the first time, the self esteem an adult has gained by learning to read for the first time, the pride a family has in living in their first house or apartment or even the joy elders have in someone sharing time with them. All of these are intangibles for which all of the money in the world cannot buy.

We must remember that there are needy all over the world, in our country and other countries. The future of our world will be in how we provide for the needs of all peoples. We are people made up of many nations, races and background, but above all we are a brotherhood of human beings on this earth.