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Living With Other Gods

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Living With Other Gods

Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"America the melting pot," how many times have we heard this remark, yet it is so true. It is a diverse melting pot of many people, cultures, and religions. Diversity can lead either to intolerance or to acceptance. It is up to us, as Homo sapiens, or wise humans to accept the latter. This however comes with a challenge, for we are compelled to defend ourselves in the face of ignorance and cruelty. We live in a very complex country and time, yet we face the same problems that humans all over the world and different eras have. Even though we are all humans, it is hard to accept another person at a same level as us, and it is hard to comprehend that those who are different from us, share the same emotions and feelings as ourselves. We are also sometimes afraid to share our life with those who have other gods or a different God. Religion plays an important part in human life and affects millions of people worldwide. This great worldwide variety of religious devotion indicates that for thousands of years, humanity has had a spiritual need and yearning. Man has lived with his trials and burdens, his doubts and questions, including the enigma of death. Religious feelings have been expressed in many different ways as people have turned towards God or their gods, seeking blessings and solace. With the wide diversity of religious expression that has developed around the world over the past 6,000 years, it is at least educational and mind broadening to understand what others believe and how their beliefs originated. After all, all religions try to answer the same questions raised by humankind: Why are we here? How should we live? Where do we go after we die? In many countries now, owing to immigration and population movement, people of different religions share the same neighborhood. Therefore understanding one another's viewpoint can lead to more meaningful communications and conversations between people of different faiths. It may also decrease some of the hatred in this world based on religious differences. People may strongly disagree about their religious beliefs, but there is no basis for hating a person just because he or she holds a different viewpoint. The ancient Jewish law stated, "You shall not hate your kinfolds in your heart. Reprove your relative but incur no guilt because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love you fellows as yourself: I am Lord" (Leviticus 19:17-18 Ta). In addition, the founder of Christianity stated, "But I say to you who are listening, Continue to love your enemies, to do good to those who are hurting you...your reward will be great..." (Luke 6:27). The Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, also states a similar principle. "It may be that Allah will bring about friendship between you and those whom you hold as enemies...and Allah is powerful, forgiving, and most merciful" (Surah 60:7). When it comes to worship, God himself should not determine what is and is not acceptable."

“Living With Other Gods” Essays



Quratulain Majoka

First Place Winner

“America the melting pot,” how many times have we heard this remark, yet it is so true. It is a diverse melting pot of many people, cultures, and religions. Diversity can lead either to intolerance or to acceptance. It is up to us, as Homo sapiens, or wise humans to accept the latter. This however comes with a challenge, for we are compelled to defend ourselves in the face of ignorance and cruelty. We live in a very complex country and time, yet we face the same problems that humans all over the world and different eras have. Even though we are all humans, it is hard to accept another person at a same level as us, and it is hard to comprehend that those who are different from us, share the same emotions and feelings as ourselves. We are also sometimes afraid to share our life with those who have other gods or a different God. Religion plays an important part in human life and affects millions of people worldwide. This great worldwide variety of religious devotion indicates that for thousands of years, humanity has had a spiritual need and yearning. Man has lived with his trials and burdens, his doubts and questions, including the enigma of death. Religious feelings have been expressed in many different ways as people have turned towards God or their gods, seeking blessings and solace. With the wide diversity of religious expression that has developed around the world over the past 6,000 years, it is at least educational and mind broadening to understand what others believe and how their beliefs originated. After all, all religions try to answer the same questions raised by humankind: Why are we here? How should we live? Where do we go after we die? In many countries now, owing to immigration and population movement, people of different religions share the same neighborhood. Therefore understanding one another’s viewpoint can lead to more meaningful communications and conversations between people of different faiths. It may also decrease some of the hatred

in this world based on religious differences. People may strongly disagree about their religious beliefs, but there is no basis for hating a person just because he or she holds a different viewpoint. The ancient Jewish law stated, ‘You shall not hate your kinfolks in your heart. Reprove your relative but incur no guilt because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love you fellows as yourself: I am Lord’ (Leviticus 19:17-18 Ta). In addition, the founder of Christianity stated, “But I say to you who are listening, Continue to love your enemies, to do good to those who are hurting you...your reward will be great...” (Luke 6:27). The Qur’an, the holy book of Islam, also states a similar principle. “It may be that Allah will bring about friendship between you and those whom you hold as enemies...and Allah is powerful, forgiving, and most merciful” (Surah 60:7). When it comes to worship, God himself should not determine what is and is not acceptable.

I have dealt with many religions living in America. I moved from Pakistan, where the majority of the religion is Islam, when I was seven. Living in America has taught me tolerance but also made me aware of discrimination that I had not dealt with before. I went through constant harassment in elementary and middle school, but my true and difficult battles began the afternoon of September 11, 2001. My sophomore year was going quite well. I was in another school and had made friends. However, one big change was that I had started to wear my “hijab”, or scarf, in ninth grade. I was in the hallway walking to my class when I heard the horrible news and I was suddenly aware of some conscious glances my way. I prayed that people of my religion had not committed this crime, but my hopes crumbled along with the towers as I saw the broadcast and heard the reporters. I went home and cried for those who lost their lives or loved ones, but I also

cried for the uncertainty and hate that would soon brew because of this. My mother was afraid for me because I wore my hijab and encouraged me to leave it off for a few days. I wore it anyway, not wanting to compromise my faith to the ignorance of others. Moreover, it was ignorance that allowed hate to come my way. People would walk on the other side of the hallway, avoiding me if I was the one who had planned this tragedy. No one realized that the extremists and the fundamentalists did not represent Islam; instead, they caused many problems for many who lived peacefully in America. Fear led many to commit hate crimes against Muslim all over the United States, and my Imam of my mosque received a death threat. The fear was understandable, but the extent to which they turned on their Muslim friends or co-workers was cruel. When fear and ignorance lead to confusion and allowed the mingling of truth with rumor, danger increased. Others told me to go back to my country, the Middle East. I am not from the Middle East, which is a region, not a country. It hurt me that some of my peers could not even distinguish right from wrong. My close friends and family supported me as I wrote letters in my school newspaper, telling students how America is my country too and that not all Muslims are terrorists. Every religion has believers who follow another path, a path that many may see as unorthodox and wrong.

Ignorance frustrates me, and I am even more disappointed when “educated” people harbor hate. I understand their reasons for fear, but I have learned to accept diversity and I do not understand why an educated society will not learn to understand the truth. After all, the purpose of education is to make us wise humans, capable of maintaining societies with order and peace. In order to bridge differences and to improve mutual understanding, education is vital. When parents teach their children to accept

diversity and lead by example open-mindedness and acceptance is achieved. Reaching this achievement only happens when a victim forgives their perpetrator and pushes for a common ground between two humans. Through an intense mutual understanding of this world achievement is reached. This world would not be as precious as it is now if there was no diversity; we would be robots living in a bland society. I have always believed in forgiving and moving on through my obstacles. However, I have also believed in preventing these ordeals by education and getting involved with the youth of my community. This month I am coordinating an event to get the Muslim and Jewish youth groups of Rochester to get together and talk and have fun while learning about each other. We are more alike than we are different. It is time we accept this fact openly and show our communities that even small things such as smiling at people can lead to bigger achievements. We should learn to embrace the diversity in America, but also around the world. With education and support, I have learned to be tolerant, respectful, and open to many new ideas.

Now if in this modern era, conflict and mistrust could be put aside, we would see more tolerance and more unification. We would also see that these different religions are more alike than they are different. On the surface, the many religions in existence today seem quite different from one another. However, if we strip them of the things that are mere embellishments of later additions, or if we remove those distinctions that are a result of language, or other factors, it is amazing how similar most of them turn out to be.

Someday I will be able to live my life without prejudice, but for now, I can only prevent it from expanding and hurting another human soul. Millard Fuller reminds us with a cherished idea. "For community to be whole and healthy, it must be based on

people's love and concern for each other." We must reach out and try to eradicate ignorance from the schools, offices, and our thoughts. The first step towards this understanding is by starting to cooperate within our families, then moving on to our schools and businesses and then on to a national level. Small steps can lead to giant leaps across muddy waters and allow us to become a bridge connecting one human soul with another.