

Two ideas about faith

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Over the top

One concept is destructive and sees the 'other' as always wrong, while the other can see many ways to become closer to God.

MALAYSIA has a problem. A big problem. No, it's not the economy, and it's not the politicians. It is simply ... us.

Yes, us, we Malaysians, most of whom profess a belief in a religion – which is fine as long as we do not judge people of other faiths according to our own faith.

I believe there are two different ideas about what faith is. One idea allows us to connect with those of different faiths. The other idea will wreck this country and turn us against each other, and this is an idea shaped not by any sort of proof but merely inherited from culture, history and tradition.

If we are to live with different faiths, then we really should reflect on our own and ask ourselves whether we have been handed a poor definition of faith by the religious teachers in our midst.

Of course, we would all like to believe the words of our clerics, just as we all want to honour the words of a teacher-engineer or a teacher-architect or a teacher-surgeon.

When you learn from teachers, you tend to have complete faith in them because they are perceived to know best simply through their own experiences.

Our religious teachers seem to know all, and have become the type of person we aspire to be. Thus, faith is believing in our teachers as well as the books of old that profess to "know all".

Secondly, such teachers use a

"comparative method" to teach us, comparing our faith with other faiths to make a point about the importance of the differences. With this method, the followers of other faiths are looked upon as "unclean", as "sinful", "faithless" or "Godless" – or even just plain evil.

Even when we perceive, say, a neighbour of a different faith as being a good person, we are taught to assume that this person will eventually become immoral and end up in our idea of hell.

This idea of what faith is simply boils down to this: we are right and "they" are wrong, always and forever.

For me, this kind of faith will destroy any idea of nation-building or sharing, or even just living in peace. Proponents of this idea of faith believe that only one religion is accepted by God, and other religions are just wrong and unacceptable.

Now, which religion teaches this concept of "we are right and they are wrong"? All religions, I assume. Which is why we will never trust one another and live in peace.

Now, what if there is a different idea of what faith is? I consider the idea of faith I discuss above a "beginner's faith", not one developed through maturity and progression.

If we progress into maturity by reading widely, engaging widely, and in inclusion with many different faiths; if we experience the closeness

of friendship, of surviving a catastrophe or exchanging a life by giving blood or an organ with others not of our faith, we will discover a new idea of what faith can be.

This idea of what faith is says that when we try to be close to God, it is not through mere rituals, pilgrimages and loudly "protecting" our religion; it is through directly helping others in all aspects of life, and also graciously receiving help from others.

Can we truly say that we can live an entire lifetime without any "others"? If not, then why the arrogance of rejecting the kindness of others because they are of a different faith? Are we not taught to never reject blessings from God, and if that blessing comes wrapped

in another faith, what do we make of this gesture of God's? Think about it.

In Malaysia, we are people of different faiths and cultures. Is that good or bad? Do we just have to accept it and "tolerate" each other until some politicians create nonsensical narratives of fear to get us at each other's throats?

Is that how we have to live now and how future generations will live? What an awful life prospect that is!

I would not like to live in a country where one group of people think that they are always right and that others are forever wrong. Would you marry someone who thinks that he or she is right all the time?

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Can we be certain that God will not reward us handsomely if we help and trust and love all human-kind? It seems to me some of us Malaysians believe that we should only love, trust and help our own kind, and only then will God allow us into heaven.

Well, I personally would not want to enter such a heaven because it has bigotry and arrogance written on its doors. I would like to go to a heaven full of souls who help others selflessly without checking their religious, social or racial classification.

We need to decide which definition of faith will bring us closer to God and which will destroy us as a nation. To do this, we must take a leap of faith and consider new ideas perhaps never imagined by our religious teachers and books.

For me, faith is not instructional, it is a feeling of belonging with those who have the same need to be in a kingdom devoid of historical, political and educational constructs. Faith depends on our experiences and the context we live in. Faith is dynamic, ever-changing and versatile, and cannot be shaken by mere visits to different houses of worship or reading other scriptures, or simply observing each other's holy events.

Those who think that faith is so easily shaken may have inherited an instructional guide that has no meaning. As Lao Tze says, the way that can be told is not the eternal way.

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