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What to carry as we build peace

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RECENTLY, I was invited to speak to a group of young adults from all over Asean on what it would take for youth to spearhead peace-building in the world.

If these young people are to be the bridge between chaos and peace, how would they begin and how would they proceed to rebuild the world?

I thought about the matter for a few days, and while watching my favourite *Outdoor Boys* YouTube videos of Luke Nichols and his sons camping in the freezing cold of their hometown in Alaska, I came to an epiphany about "backpacking" our values.

Now, please understand that I have never been camping before and I am certainly not about to start in a year in which I turn 64, but I felt the analogy strongly, and it allowed me to look at the problem with clarity and see a possible solution.

The idea is, just as we would before going backpacking in the wilderness, we have to think about what baggage we need to leave behind and what baggage is essential for survival so that the journey towards peace becomes less cumbersome and tiring. What we want is a journey that is full of exhilaration, excitement and meaning.

There is baggage we need to shed and values we need to take with us on any journey towards unity.

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Over the top

Hatred, mistrust and enmity are parts of the baggage that weigh us down terribly when we are climbing that steep incline towards peace. To me, this is baggage we inherit from our education in history and politics.

Firstly, if history teaches us that "our" race was here first, and that others came later, there we already have baggage that would haunt us in trying to keep or build peace among the cultures of diverse peoples. My first question would be, which race came first to these shores? The Perak Man, whose 10,000-year-old bones were discovered in that state, was from which race?

But then, we enter our school

years and we are presented with constructed boxes of identity that are not of our own making but are forced upon us by the notion of authority. So we need to discard this baggage of historical identity and put a pause on that knowledge until we can read and understand more about how those made up constructs are not the real deal.

Then there's the baggage of politics. Politics is the art of spinning history, religion and other subjects into a storyline designed to help particular political parties win votes. We do not have to believe the storyline. If we did believe it once, know that it was a spun story, nothing more and everything less.

Put a hold on what these stories tell you, what they say about who to hate and who to trust, and let your own conscience, infused with your own hard-won knowledge, do the job of deciding where your vote goes.

Putting aside these types of baggage would make us feel lighter and able to walk free and upright.

But what are the essentials to

take on this backpacking adventure of peace-building? I would recommend that we take our blood, our interdependence and our humility. We only need these three items to survive this camping trip of ours. We can go anywhere and be with anyone if we hold these three close to our thoughts and hearts.

Our blood is what reminds us that we are of one human species, that we are related, all of us. The bonus that God gave us is that we all have blood types that are the same with that of some others and can save each other's lives when necessary. It matters not that our skin is black, white or brown, or that we are of one faith or another, or of one race or another, because if we share a blood type, then we are brothers in blood – blood brothers. How much closer can we get with this perspective?

The second essential item is the realisation that we depend on each other as we are frail and weak as a species. We depend on others for help with our careers or with our health or simply in

surviving life – we can never live alone within just our own faith or race. This interdependence serves as a bridge that will bind us together for eternity as long as humans rule the earth.

The last item is our humility. Let us stop thinking that we are cleverer than others. Let us stop fantasising that we are better than others. Let us stop thinking that God favours only us and not others. If we can have that humility, then we can live with anyone. But if we think we are perfect as we are, then susah lah – for everyone.

So to young people, I say hit the pause button on your ideas about history, religion and politics. Instead, look deep into your biology and your economic interdependence, and also open your hearts to humility of the highest order. With that, we will be lighter, stronger and more resilient in facing all manner of conditions and challenges as we journey towards peace.

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