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Towards spiritual intelligence

By Datuk Dr Ibrahim Ahmad Bajunid
iabaiw@yahoo.com

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Malaysia can foster learning about different faiths

THE great religions brought about great transformations. Islamic history has chronicled that Islam transformed human civilisation, contributing to the continuity of human knowledge and scholarship during the medieval age in Europe.

Islam is against ignorance (jahiliah) and for enlightenment. It is for a reading and thinking culture. Islam means peace. Islam also means surrender to God.

The Crusades and the dominance of the secular world have led to the marginalisation of religion in communist societies and the control and holding in abeyance of religious influence in secular societies.

However, many societies continue to profess and practise their particular faiths of Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism. With great misunderstanding and distrust throughout the world, especially after 9/11, there has been religious profiling, particularly of Muslims.

In multireligious Malaysia, the school and university systems have made it compulsory for students to learn their own religions. Muslim students take Islamic Studies and non-Muslims take Moral Education.

For non-Muslims who want to go further in their respective faiths, religious communities provide continuing education and intra-religious bonding.

As there is greater demand for Islamic education, more institutions have been established to meet such demand. The release of the Islamic Higher School Certificate results indicates higher levels of excellence in religious qualifications.

These students, who will be the religious elites in society, will continue their education in Malaysian universities, in universities in the Islamic world or even in the western world. Various Islamic institutions have

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been established to provide leadership for the Islamic way of life.

In Malaysia, among the most visible are the International Islamic University, the Islamic Science University of Malaysia and other state Islamic universities and colleges. Other institutions which provide religious education include a growing number of Al Hafiz Schools.

An increasing number of Muslim students are becoming Al Hafiz -- those who memorise the Quran. At the popular level there are the well-received television programmes, Young Imams and Exemplary Muslim Lady Teachers (Ustazah Pilihan).

Clearly, there is a growing critical mass of graduates from religious education who have presumably developed to the highest levels of spiritual intelligence and potential leadership.

As Malaysia grows its religious elites, it has the opportunity to provide Islamic religious leadership globally. The religious elites in Malaysia could be different from those elites who live in mono-religious societies.

In all societies and religions, the notions of fundamentalism, extremism and moderation will continue to be raised and challenged. The religious stakeholders, believers and opportunists will continue to use religion for their own ends.

Malaysia is unique among the nations of the world with the potential to foster the believers of all faiths learning from each other and about the beliefs of "the other".

Just as Malaysians have vast opportunities to learn languages, Malaysians also have opportunities to learn religions and philosophies of those significant others. Malaysia offers opportunities for the exercise of authentic religious dialogues.

If Malaysia develops competencies and the spiritual intelligence which enable dialogues among faiths successfully in our context, then religious leaders from Malaysia will be better prepared to contribute to religious dialogues globally.

In this respect, the launch of the "Global Movement of Moderates -- In Pursuit of an Enduring and Just Peace" by the prime minister last month charts out the role that Malaysia can play to reduce world tension caused by religious distrust and ignorance.

The quest remains whether the school and university systems enable each learner to learn about others with enlightened religious empathy using respectful minds. On the other hand, the question has to be raised whether our miseducation has led us to be righteous and arrogant religiously and dismissive of other people's faiths and beliefs.

The nature of spiritual and emotional intelligence being cultivated in the context of education has to be examined by parents, scholars and every individual in search of truth.

In Malaysia, during the celebrations of the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, awards are given to anyone "from any religion or of any gender" who meets the criteria of significant contributions to the community.

This principle reveals the universal nature of Islam as practised by the prophet.

Among his virtues are justice and fairness, piety, passion for knowledge,



Inspired by spirit of Aragones

A vertical advertisement for EPSOM COLLEGE IN MALAYSIA. The background is dark blue. At the top, it says "Educating the world for over 150 years since 1855" in white. Below that, in larger white text, is "Not Just Another International School". Underneath, it says "New Intake in SEPT 2014". The EPSOM COLLEGE IN MALAYSIA logo is centered, featuring a crest above the text. At the bottom, there is a blue button with white text that says "Find Out More" followed by a right-pointing arrow. Below the button is a photograph of a young boy wearing safety goggles and a white lab coat, looking intently at something off-camera. At the very bottom of the ad, in small white text, it reads "Boys and Girls | 3 - 18 Years", "IGCSEs and A-Levels", and "Day and Boarding Programme".

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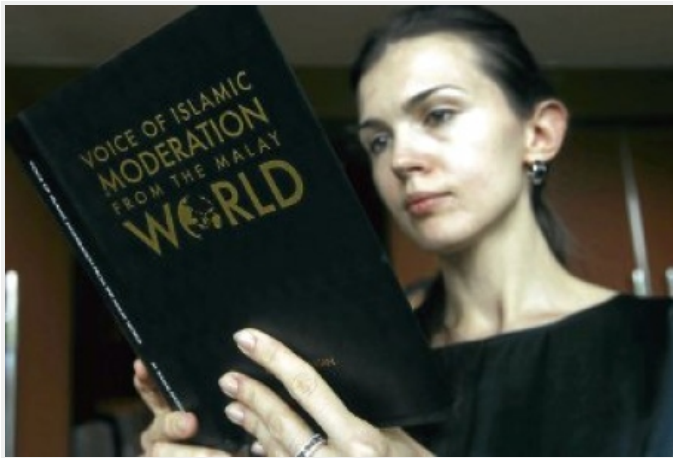
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forgiveness, mercy, gentleness, courage, generosity, ethics, sincerity, truthfulness and respect of others (he even established the rights of animals), politeness, love of purification, humbleness, patience, contentment and fear of God.

Whatever the type and level of education of Muslims, their behaviour is expected to be based on Quranic injunctions and they are expected to model their lives after the characteristics of the prophet in all manner of relationships with all peoples.

Underlying the virtues is the principle that man is the vicegerent or the khalifah responsible for peace and prosperity on this earth. Religious elites are expected to be an unfailing force of goodness, virtues and justice.



Delegate Irina A. Sorokina with the book 'Voice of Islamic Moderation from the Malay World' by Tan Sri Dr Mohd Kamal Hassan, at the Global Movement of Moderates Conference in Kuala Lumpur last month.

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