

Tolerance results not from tolerance, but from

LOVE

Nationhood is still considered an important value. Recent attempts like the European Community, where several nations attempted to forge a unity particularly for the purposes of economic benefits have had only limited success. As long as nationhood is considered so valuable, tolerance is required between nations.

Inequalities between persons and groups are based on their origins and roots. Besides upbringing and nurture, nature endows people in a variety of ways making them achieve so differently, that a group of children all brought up in identical environments, may yet show sharp differences in the way they settle themselves later on in life.

Ideologies of various types dreamt of removing inequalities, and several attempts were made in the light of their tenets, but they too have had only partial success. Removing inequalities altogether is a pipedream. What we probably need rather, are ways to deal with it in such a way, that we can live well and beyond it.

Persons are individuals by their own right. They have a value of their own, and not only as members of groups. One feels much happier when others acknowledge one's individuality and recognize one's worth as such. Tolerance is a necessary condition for this to happen.

Religions propagate tolerance in one form or another, and yet religious persons probably are the first to flout it. The louder their claims to be closer to God, or to be the truer religion, the more are they likely to slip into intolerance, however unintended it may be. One may add here that just as most religions can boast of glorious chapters in their histories when they championed for tolerance and fraternity, just as surely they should admit to ignominious periods and dark ages, when they fell into unbelievable manifestations of intolerance of others. The solution never lay in doing away with religions,- which most people agree is a positive force-but in being aware of the pitfalls, and guarding against them.

Rev, Jerry Thomas gives five Ways to develop Tolerance:

1. Respect the feelings of others
2. Start at Home to cultivate an open, prejudice-free mind
3. Get to know people of other cultural settings and enjoy the good things there
4. Believe that people are basically good.
5. Forgive

Unity in Diversity

The one principle giving a strong foundation to tolerance is the principle of Unity in Diversity as accepted by the founding fathers of the Indian Constitution. It seems to hold the key to many a malaise symptomatic of intolerance. Suggestions for inculcating this principle in young minds:

1. CELEBRATE CULTURES:

A day is set apart in the school calendar for the celebration of different cultures. Celebration means appreciation of different cultures and making one another feel that we appreciate their culture. It is usually done through stage presentations, folk games, prayerful get-togethers etc. when a whole group experiences how it feels to do things in ways proper of different cultures. One must be careful about competitions; in fact prizes, and ranking should be kept out of it.

In one school in Calcutta, this function is held regularly. After students of a cultural group finish their presentation, some student belonging to another cultural group spends about five minutes speaking about the beauty of the presentation: what he liked about it, in what way he thinks it enriched the audience etc. He ends it by leading the audience to express their appreciation for that culture, in some tangible and feeling way, may be a prolonged clap, or some nonverbal way of showing how much they like and appreciate the culture concerned.

2. APPRECIATE DIVERSITY:

Diversity can be viewed as something of a problem, or it can be seen as another source of enrichment for everyone. The latter view helps in tolerance. When authorities and teachers promote the view that diversity is not a liability but an asset, it helps students to choose to belong to groups where people of diverse cultures are present rather than those of one's own culture. Of course one may feel not so comfortable in the beginning. But those who have done so claim, that in a short while the feeling of comfort is no less.

A certain lady who was present at one of the political meetings of Abraham Lincoln was very scandalized at how lovingly he spoke about his enemies, and questioned him: How can you speak so well of those who would gladly and wilfully seek you life? Should you not rather seek to destroy your enemies?" "Madam", said Lincoln as he gazed slowly into her face, "Do I not destroy them when I make them my friends?"

A HUMANIZED BELIEF SYSTEM

Necessary condition for Tolerance

One needs to believe that it is more human to do things that are right and proper. One may say that everyone follows what is comfortable naturally. Not so always. One may be instinctively attracted to what is comfortable, but there are lots of people who opt to do the right things, even though they may not be so comfortable. Opting for tolerance involves every now and then opting for things that are right and proper even though they may be less comfortable.

Struggle against Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is an attitude of unbalanced love for one's own culture that depreciates other cultures. The term was introduced by W.G. Sumner (1906) and means that one considers one's own group as the most important, and culturally superior to other groups. Consequently one may become distrustful of the 'outsiders'. It contributes much to today's sufferings, just as it did during World War II. Only a compassionate eye can see the basic equality of human beings.

Doing an injury puts you below your enemy;

Revening one makes you but

Even with him;

Forgiving it sets you above

him.

(Benjamin Franklin)

Teach a History of Tolerance

Much of the history we teach in school and elsewhere deals with man's intolerance towards one another. Wars, intrigues, battles etc. fill the canvas that we paint for our students day after day. Little wonder then that they grow up with intolerance in their hearts. Could we have someone write different history texts, which highlight the survival of civilizations due to their tolerance of one another, progress of peoples due to their ability to accommodate and assimilate various groups; how instead of fighting for winning battles, courageous people were able to affect the course of history by intervening positively on time, thus making the use of force redundant. A different history is the need of the hour.

While we wait for such a day, there is much that a history teacher of today can do even with today's syllabus, by highlighting, the truly great doings of the past. Perhaps even adding a word in support of values that will ultimately help our children to live together in harmony with each other.

Respect and love ought to be extended to those who think or act differently from us in social, political, and religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we come to understand their ways of thinking through courtesy and love, the more easily will we be able to enter into dialogue with them.

(Vat. II Teachings of the Catholic Church)