

Presentation of “Li-Naltaqi” Movement

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It is easy to notice if you wonder in the streets of Lebanon that we have many Lebanons in Lebanon. But it did not struck me to take any action as if it is normal until one day I was passing through one of Beirut’s suburbs and noticed a state of confusion, where people were hurrying towards cafes to watch television. It seemed as if a major incident had occurred. In a nearby neighbourhood, five minutes away by car, the situation looked completely undisturbed. People were acting normal as if nothing has happened. It was then that I asked “how many Lebanons do we have?”, in the sense that people could live in neighbouring areas without having any common concerns.

I further wondered whether I had the right to blame others for being different from me and for being unaware of my identity. Consequently, the following questions arose:

- 1- Why are we different?
- 2- Are we supposed to be similar?
- 3- Does similarity define citizenship?
- 4- And most importantly, am I personally familiar with the other parties?
- 5- Do I acknowledge their concerns?

I then realised that I actually wanted others to resemble me, lest I categorise them as being in the wrong. It came to my mind that I do blame other parties for not familiarising themselves with me, while not reciprocating the practice. I gave myself the right to differ from them but deprived them from that right.

In this respect, blaming others for being different is simple; the challenge remains in understating and accepting them.

A fact remains that Lebanese differ at several levels. In fact, religious differences are only one part of the whole picture, yet it is emphasised in a manner that overlooks the remaining dissimilarities. In this context, people judge other communities based on their religions, as if these latter were in a constant state of war. People also hold preconceived thoughts of other communities, falling into the trap of generalisation, thus slipping religion into unrelated fields.

Realising the above, I decided to embark on a journey of knowledge of other parties, and started by founding "Li-Naltaqi" (Arabic for "Let's Get Together") movement with Mary Chaftary, without much expectation and based merely on the will to succeed.

We admitted the following facts and convictions:

- Lebanese are worlds apart in terms of beliefs, despite the short distances that separate them
- The prevalence of differences is a fact of life
- All religions call for love, forgiveness, dialogue and openness
- Religion, when seized, can be a lethal weapon to dignities and individual rights, especially when severed from the divine spirit, used for personal interest, and defaced to justify policies of oppression and aggression
- Humans do not live with other humans, but rather with the image they hold of that other. This image, on one hand, is usually unfavourable and thus justifies one's negative feelings; on the other, it glorifies one's own image through boosting the ego at the expense of degrading others.

Three Main Digressions

1- Ignorance of others

Humans are enemies of what they don't know. Ignorance of and ignoring other parties feed into insecurity and prejudgements which lead to

2- Mutilation of others' images which also leads to

3- Fear of other parties

The result is thus an other that is unknown, defaced and dreadful.

What is to be done?

- Focus should be given to life-related, rather than religious, dialogue. In fact, a dialogue that bridges gaps and secures common grounds is one of a social and human basis. Religious dialogue nonetheless is fruitless, as being built on divine truth that every party believes to possess.
- Islamic-Christian dialogue ought to be transferred from the top of the societal pyramid to the popular base
- Intolerance and ignorance should be transformed into openness on one hand, and establishment of citizenship rather than sectarian identities on the other

Who We Are

“Li-Naltaqi” Movement was established in the summer of 2005, through the initiative of Muslim and Christian women interested in reinforcing the co-existence of all religious and cultural identities

Purpose of the Movement

- The current era is dominated by violence that supersedes the call for dialogue. Thus dialogue and interaction are urgently needed, yet hard to achieve, especially now that media presents a stark contradiction between the ambition of populations to interaction and peace, and the realities of wars and divisions that some populations endure.
- Lack of communication feeds into framing others into prejudgements and generalisations. As we are convinced that religious affiliation does not obstruct interaction with other religions, we work for establishing dialogue with the purpose of co-existence among different parties on one hand, and overcoming obstacles created by prejudgements and radical ideas on the other.

The initiative came as a result of our concern that our children may face a dreadful and intolerant future, that is we do not our past to be their future, as well as our belief that humanism brings us together, and that religious diversity is a source of civilisation. We lived together in simplicity and compassion, and emphasised the concept of humans as humans rather than elements of certain sects. We discovered that our concerns and goals were similar and thus worked together to achieve them, while keeping politics at a distance, lest it disturbs dialogue. In addition, we admitted the mistakes of our own parties in order to be able to overcome them.

My country, Lebanon, is the only Arab country that enjoys this diversity, a fact that led Pope John Paul II to believe that Lebanon was a message. Therefore, we ought to be a model. In our movement, we practiced co-existence and avoided theorising it.

Our experience remains modest, and managing it becomes harder as time passes and incidents occur. In fact, it is not easy to face the wind and swim against the current. Yet, my experience with Mary and the other women, although limited, taught me a lot:

- To view things from the others' perspectives, appreciate what they appreciate, enjoy what they celebrate, and respect what they revere.
- God is not restricted to certain groups, but exists in the hearts of all people.
- To sense with my feelings and mind rather than my instincts.
- God's message is universal and superior to any attempt at manipulating it.

This is why we decided to collaborate in order to achieve what we deem necessary, rather than what is imposed on us, and to take our destiny into our own hands.