

Individualities and Differences in Syriac Culture

According to Syriac culture, originality and differences are the essence of creation. The main source of this essence is the spirit. The spirit is a divine software program in humans. If this software, which provides renewal and development, is learned and used properly, things become easier and better. Because the spirit is the essence of humanity and leads to the source of absolute freedom. Without knowing and learning this essence, it is not easy for a person to know himself. A person can only know himself as much as he discovers and understands this essence. A person can only develop an awareness of life to the extent that he understands/comprehends this essence. Otherwise, he becomes alienated to his own essence. He falls under the influence of software/programs that are alien to his own essence. Though this "software" is much sought after, it actually deprives the person of peace. Because all endeavors/projects that do not involve the spirit are always partially inadequate. For the manifestation of knowledge, which is the light of the mind, and of love, which is the light of the spirit, it is vitally important to be mindful of this in all scientific/social endeavors/projects. Those who do not abide by this are doomed to fall into a void.

This truth can only be attained with love of wisdom and knowledge, and through a journey knowing/finding/being. This is an existential excavation toward the essence of something, in order to grasp its essence, its spirit. To put it simply, the essence of something is its untainted, natural, innate state.

When looking from this perspective, we see that there is no uniformity/similarity in existence, in the universe, and in social life, but that there is plurality as well as seen and unseen individualities and differences. These values which sustain social life (individualities and differences) were divinely designed so that we might rely on one another. They are like the social keys that uplift human dignity. As long as they uphold/promote justice and equity, they are just as vital and meaningful as other human values.

Valuing humans and the spiritual world with this awareness, seeing another person as another of oneself is a form of respecting the basic rights that stem from the dignity that person is entitled to as a human being. The balance here between freedom and individuality is of vital importance. For awareness is a beacon between freedom and individuality. Without awareness, the spirit cannot thrive and differences cannot be appreciated. Pure hearts and outlooks are needed in order to see this.

This basic but forgotten truth is what really must be remembered. This must be the starting point of our life journeys.

Because in truth, "You" are just another "I". And "I" am another "You"!

You cannot see or recognize in me what is not inside yourself.

What is true is the one who sees and creates beauty.

Meaning that while I make you YOU, YOU make me ME!

Our country/region is in great need of these attitudes that make you YOU and make me ME. It needs this as much as water or oxygen!

Don't forget that what makes a diamond a DIAMOND is its tiny particles. Nothing of value comes into being on its own. What makes something valuable is that it coalesces with its other pieces.

It will take some time before truth/life can evolve into the desired new insights and transform minds without clinging to humility, virtue, sincerity, responsibility, loyalty, simplicity, peace, discipline, spirit of self-control, strong will, social maturity, harmony, diligence, hard work, justice, equality, originality, freedom, proactive, constructive language, running from excess, balance, high frequency feelings, and consistent morality, all of which have been pushed across the threshold.

When delving into the subject of truth in the depths of Syriac culture, it is impossible to avoid the truth that holds that, "**Humans are human when they act righteously toward God and truth, and morally toward creation.**" I find myself face to face with these points/themes whenever I try to understand the feelings of dear Syriac malfones/masters, connoisseurs of word and pen, healers of the soul who tried to tell the truth through the fascinating associations of words and salve our spiritual wounds with their creations.

According to the literary productivity of those masters, the spiritual and material growth of a person relies on the generosity and work discipline that they exercise in their field of responsibility. If they have internalized a service-oriented mentality, they value human dignity. Thus, they are empowered by the spirit. Vital energy courses through their ego and keeps it illuminated. If they haven't adopted such a mentality, vital energy turns against them and they fall victim to their self (ego). A service-oriented mentality necessitates giving back to life, pure

and unadulterated, what one receives from it in order to gain more back. If all material and spiritual possessions are monopolized out of greed and laziness, they stagnate. With time, they depreciate and cause impoverishment. If a watermill refuses to unload its water, it will soon drown itself. However, if the water flows free, it will prove invaluable to the watermill by generating power. And everyone can enjoy the resulting ground flour. The same goes for humans. We are required to give back to life the gifts of divine will as assets toward our own self benefit, altruistic benefit, and individual and social peace. Otherwise, like the watermill, they will inescapably drown in their own water.

In the effort to understand and make sense of life, one of the essentials of life is sharing. Humans must mature in this respect, thus opening the doors to the social formulae that prevent a desperate and hopeless muddling along in the confusion of life. For this reason, all institutions and establishments that serve life/humanity are like the various organs in the human organism. Besides their unique functions, the organs complementing one another work together in seamless harmony for the longevity of the organism. Just as a disturbance in the smallest organ affects the entire organism, the harmony/discord between civil and public establishments affects common life as well.

But it should be known that knowledge is useless as long as it is not acted upon. Because through action, comprehension becomes wisdom; and that action turns knowledge into wisdom. In the words of famous German thinker/writer Goethe, **"It is not enough to know, one must apply; It is not enough to want, one must do."**

A big name in Syriac literature/mysticism, St. Aphrem of Nisibis (306-373 A.D.) emphasizes that, **"Just as every organ in the body serves the need of another organ, the people of this universe also serve global needs for the general benefit. In that case, let us be glad that we are in need of each other. For the harmony and accord between us is a result of this situation. It must be because people need each other that people of high rank switch over to humbleness without being ashamed of ordinary people. Thus, ordinary people turn to the people of rank without any fear. In fact, we see a similar thing in our relationships with animals, that our need for them makes it necessary that we approach them with care and caution."**

On this subject, Saint Basilius (+ 378 a.d.) is of the opinion that, **"None of us can fulfill their bodily needs by themselves. Far from it, each of us is in need of another in order to fulfill said needs, and therefore, we must be mindful of one another's concerns/benefits, which is impossible to do by isolating oneself and living alone."**

According to this mindset which gives life meaning and enriches it, the main thing is to turn from a desire for material gain, to a spiritual desire for giving. Because material things are a tool for spiritual maturity. It is necessary to remain in servitude in the flow during this maturation process. For to give and to complete is the essence of the spirit. Just as oxygen is needed to live, it is vitally important for continuity that us humans contribute positively to loving action/the flow, improve and enrich life/the world. At this point, we really need this for a comfortable and happy life. In this context, one way we can keep our conscience and the voice of our heart clear without abandoning the good that is within us and without resorting to wickedness, despite events and circumstances that compel us to do evil is to stick to an unwavering sense of justice and strong spirituality. In this context, the key to all healing is remembering our own divine truth, our essence which is love. As we come closer to this truth, we come closer to our innate ability, which protects human dignity and watches out for others. This is how we better achieve true friendship and fellowship. It is impossible to successfully apply what is known, what is learned without knowing and recognizing this truth. For truth is humanity's compass. Hence the words **"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free"** (John 8:31).

The purer, cleaner and smoother the mirror of one's soul is, the easier it is for them to understand and comprehend the truth. With a spirit of self-control, they take command of themselves. Self-perception and outlook on life will develop and grow to the same extent. Who knows, perhaps this is what St. Isaac of Antioch (d. 491) was feeling when he bequeathed us in all their aesthetics the words, **"Truth is superior to rank, effort is superior to authority. And justice is senior to rules and order."**

Despite the difficulties of life, if social life were to be conducted with an attitude that sanctifies human dignity, in a way befitting human values and virtues, with loving and respectful discipline, the negativity prejudice that occasionally catches the eye in common life would turn positive of its own accord. However, it is painful that walking away from this results in estrangement. This creates problems for different people, beliefs, identities, and cultures in society. To resolve such problems, it is necessary to feel, understand, know, and read. St. Jacob of Sarug (451-521 A.D.), who pointed to intellectual wealth and foresaw that with knowledge comes responsibility, has this to say on the subject: **"Those who sow ignorance reap misery. The more we invest in education, the richer our minds become."**

Sometimes it is necessary to love, feel, ponder, and live life in order to understand it. Though this road may be narrow and uneven, setting out on this road of truth with the breath of love is a great achievement. It is a great contribution to personal and common life. For love is the flavor

and appeal of life. In other words, a life without love is cold and worthless. A life stimulated by love gives vitality to common life and rejuvenates its social dimensions. The harmful conditions and conditioning of negativity prejudice cannot take shelter and come to life in such an environment.

It should not be forgotten that the outreaching and inclusive aspects of truth are a form of perception based on the obligations of merciful awareness and altruism. This reasoning gets its strength from discipline and culture. It emphasizes self-knowledge and self-discipline. In its eyes, remorseless, deceptive attitudes such as manipulation, abuse, and exploitation which harm people's inner worlds are morally evil and oppressive to the spirit. It teaches that without cultural riches, material riches serve no other purpose than bringing new dimensions of extravagance. Hence, this form of perception reveals the difficulties of remaining in the flow without possessing moral consistency and cultural values. **The path of morality and culture is the humane path which lays the foundation for inner transformation and growth. No matter how tall the mountain of material things/carnality/selfishness is, the path of morality and culture spans them.**

This comprehension is as important as daily routines, food and drink, nutrition. It should not be subjected to arbitrary, high-handed treatment. It should not be abandoned to irresponsible applications. It should be known and remembered that nothing that has been prevented from taking place in the inner world can show up in the outer world. As emphasized in the meaningful words of St. Isaac of Nineneveh (613-700), who said, "**He who judges himself has no time to judge others**", the possibility of this happening depends on the person's starting from himself, knowing himself, and illuminating his spirit with divine truths. However, it is not easy to transform the selfishness that harms the inner world, to overcome the jealousy which ruins the spirit, to shed the false self and seek deliverance from it. Though it may be a difficult, thorny, and painful process, people cannot return to what is essential, their essence, the spirit without reading or being able to read their own book. They cannot tap into their inherent treasures and riches. But anyone who wants to can achieve this. To whom it shall be opened, he who asks for help shall receive it.

It should be known that no matter what one's position or rank in the context of social standards, each person is equally responsible for his/her own spiritual and civil development in the light of these writings. This principle, which must be fulfilled with awareness of incompleteness binds people of all ages. The more we clean and widen our inner roads, the more we fill up inner potholes, the more we heat up inner coldness, the easier will our outer journey be. **When our**

lives become meaningful thanks to this convenience, life is no longer an arena of strife and competition, but an exciting journey of discovery and service.

What matters is to preserve moral tenets and retain human values while on our life journeys, while serving; to fixate on self-love, self-respect, self-control, self-appreciation, and self-compassion without putting on airs and resorting to oppression. During the process of giving back, if a person's service can reach in and touch their spirit, then the words of their mouth, the words they write down, and anything they offer life will be equally valuable and meaningful. There is no responsibility or task greater than being the earthly representative of divine love and justice. A pleasant expression, smile, or word can refresh a person. A mean look, word, oppressive behavior will ruin one's day and break their heart. Because a person's greatest asset is their heart, their spirit. This heart, this spirit always long for understanding. This is the depth that grants people their true nobility. A person of such nobility, is aware that he is superior to no one and constantly competing against his own previous state.

This is all to say that social peace/harmony/stability is dependent on the sincere preservation of human dignity and the rights that arise from this dignity, as well as the development of a meaningful whole that is accordingly consistent. At the end of the day, everyone is destined to be buried in their own conscience. Whatever we give to life, whether good or ill, is a self-investment. Whatever we do, we do to ourselves. People experience the reflection of the light they emit.

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