

The five pillars of the Rukun Negara are strong foundations of unity for our multiracial country. In the next few pages, notable Malaysians describe how each pillar is crucial in building a more harmonious home for us all.

Muslims leaving a mosque after performing their prayers. (Inset) Dr Zulkifli emphasises the higher values of the human heart in order to become a good citizen.



Harmony through religion



By DATUK SERI ZULKIFLI MOHAMAD AL-BAKRI

MALAYSIA'S harmonious and multi-religious society reflects the first principle of the Rukun Negara: Kepercayaan kepada Tuhan (Belief in God).

Humans inevitably seek God, desire the truth and strive to do well. Faith offers direction, imposes limits and creates awareness of what God loves and detests in human conduct.

All people were born to be believers in God and – we as Muslims – believe the revelations of the Prophets simply awaken and reinforce the nature that is already inside us.

Even polytheists, who believe in multiple gods and deities, often believe that there is an even higher power, an even greater God watching over all of them.

Since all humans can sense a higher power, they will intuitively turn to God in times of danger.

Every person, at some point in his or her life, will have an intense experience that causes a natural reaction to turn to prayer and a sense of belonging to God.

The philosopher Al-Ghazali described this innate religious disposition as an urge for people to “seek knowledge of the reality of things”.

He called this spiritual longing for truth a “thirst” that must be quenched. It is an uneasiness with existence, which must be filled by finding the meaning and purpose of life.

While reason is an important tool to

achieve faith in God in Islam, it is still merely one step along the spiritual path as Al-Ghazali said: “Beyond the level of reason lies another level that opens another eye by which one gains insight into the Unseen and into what will occur in the future, among other things.”

Knowledge of God resides primarily in the heart and is reinforced by reason. Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbali said: “Knowledge is not memorising many narrations or sayings, but rather it is a light that Allah places in the heart by which a servant understands the truth and he distinguishes it from falsehood.”

It was reported that some philosophers intended to discuss with Imam Abu Hanifah on the existence of God.

Abu Hanifah said: “Tell me, before we speak on this matter, about a ship on the Tigris river moving by itself and filled with food and goods, then it goes back by itself, then anchors itself, then unloads itself and continues to do all of this itself.”

They said: “This could never happen.”

Abu Hanifah said: “If it is impossible for a ship, then how is it possible for the entire world in all of its vastness?”

In other words, things in the universe do not change their movements unless an outer force acts upon them. We can refer to Isaac Newton's first law of motion.

To truly believe in God demands the conviction of our hearts. His wisdom should guide us in our life. No matter who we are in our lives, we should abide by faith, love, fear and hope given by God.

These are the higher values of the human heart. This is what we need in order to be a good citizen.

If more of us believe in God and know Him better, we can overcome the many social ills of the world. Malaysia will then be a better place for us to live in.

Malaysians, let's uphold decisively the first tenet of our Rukun Negara – Belief in God.

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A Hindu devotee carrying a paal kudam (milk offering) during Thaipusam.



A man praying below spiral incense coils at a Buddhist temple.

Strength in our differences

By REV DR HERMEN SHASTRI

THE majority of Malaysians have a religion. This means they believe in a transcendent divine power that guides their thinking and actions.

Their goal in life is to live a decent and worthy life, and to contribute to the love, peace and harmony in the society.

The fact that the Rukun Negara, formulated in 1970, emphasises Belief in God as the first tenet goes to show that it is grounded in the aspiration that our respective religious beliefs should bring us together as a people to work for the common good and harmony of our country.

Our respective beliefs should not divide us or teach us to hold bigoted views of our religion up against the others.

The value of interfaith harmony is when we all agree to live by the Golden Rule, that is, the principle of treating others as one would want to be treated.

It is a maxim found in all religions and an ethic of reciprocity.

What is the value of belief in God if we



cannot love God and our neighbours in a just and compassionate way?

In Malaysia, we find politicians using religion for political gain. This is definitely contrary to the spirit of the first tenet of the Rukun Negara.

Religious beliefs and practices should not divide us. Our youth should mix freely in their neighbourhoods and schools with people of other faiths.

They should learn that in today's world, people of great conviction of any faith are expressing new forms of living together in peace. They should learn to celebrate such differences as a sign of the strength of multicultural and multireligious societies.

To accept the tenet of Belief in God requires that we reject the privileging of one religion over the others.

All human beings are creatures of God and possess inherent dignity, and should be guaranteed to be treated equally and justly as stated in the Federal Constitution.

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