

Creating, sustaining unifying forces for good

IREFER to the letter "Back to Basics: Unity begins at home" (NST, April 16). If this point is taken academically, it echoes the idea of what society is all about as advocated by French sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904).

In the theory of imitation, Tarde argued that society, which comprises individuals, easily imitate what is close to them, such as parents and family members, and later, more authoritative individuals, such as early education teachers.

In the context of Malaysia, if we follow this simple yet effective way of building society, we are actually creating one the way we want it to be. Our society now, in terms of unity, is that our attitudes have never been innovative, but rather "following" what has been done by others.

Similarly, this is how Tarde observes "society", where people have the tendency to follow others, than "see" and then "invent"

for better results.

So, let's use this simple way of imitating others to "create" unity among the society. As individuals like to follow other people, parents, family members and teachers are the first group that would help in creating unity within our multicultural society.

The general rule of thumb is that, the more exposure we have about other cultures, the better acceptance we would have on the cultures.

Based on my experience while studying in Nottingham, the UK, for four years (Nottingham has a multiracial community), speaking with the English who live in multicultural areas, most of them appreciate such heterogeneity.

On the other hand, those who have never lived with people of other cultures usually regard such areas as unsafe and unsuitable for living.

While to some extent, in the context of the UK, safety might be an issue, but what we can learn from

here is the fact that cherishing different cultures would require a certain level of exposure. Exposure can be in the form of storytelling by parents to children and advice on the types of books children should read.

Cartoons about cultural difference and cultural awareness are examples of how children can learn from others, thus imitate something from there and learn the reality from their future experience.

In schools, the environment actually supports the theory of imitation better. This is because students of various cultures are already there, learning in school. Teachers are agents who can organise programmes of cultural awareness and these experiences are learnt and told by the students to others.

Through such experience, they will imitate similar attitudes pertaining to cultural awareness in the future. And, for those listening to them, they will also imitate something from the points made. This is

one simple step of creating unity.

By creating, when each individual starts to mingle with people from various cultures and get to know their lifestyle.

Attend other cultural festivities, visit our neighbours of different races, or if we do not have much time for that, use various online tools for that.

Send Facebook messages to our old friends, and plan a reunion, requiring all to wear their folk costumes.

All these can be done at individual level, if not by parents or teachers. When each of us imitate these actions, the level of unity will gradually increase.

Although it is wrong to claim the direct association that it has, it will help to "create" unity over time.

Living in a multiracial country like Malaysia needs effort to sustain it.

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