

APPRECIATING AND CHERISHING OUR ERITREAN IDENTITY

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An Eritrean identity is a multifaceted concept that describes how Eritreans develop and experience a sense of pride and belongingness to our country and its culture. Traditions, customs, and feelings about our cultural heritage are also important factors in our ethnic identity development. Eritreans, like any other people, progress through different stages as we learn to identify ourselves with our own cultural heritage, whereby we come to understand our ethnic customs, indigenous knowledge, values, and wisdom, and ultimately identify who we are, our Eritrean identity. The only true happiness in life is knowing who we are – our true Eritrean identity because to know who we are is the greatest power and pride of all. It is better to be hated for what we are than to be loved for what we are not. Nothing of us is original. We are the cumulative combined efforts, knowledge, ethics, and values of our forefathers and mothers. In view of the importance of appreciating, honoring and cherishing own identity a short story is narrated below.

There was an old chicken farmer who found an eagle's egg that rolled out of a nest of an eagle. He put it with the eggs of his chickens and soon enough the egg hatched among the many eggs of the chickens hatched. The young eagle grew up with all the other chickens and whatever they did, the eagle did too. He thought he was a chicken, just like them. Since the chickens could only fly for a short distance, the eagle also learned to fly a short distance. He thought that was what he was supposed to do because that was all that he was taught he could do and that was all he was able to do. One day the eagle saw a huge and majestic bird flying high above him in the sky. He was very impressed. "*Who is that mighty bird?*" he asked the hens around him. "*That is the eagle, the king of the birds,*" the hens told him. "*He belongs to the sky. We belong to the earth, we are just chickens.*" The young eagle never thought and never has been taught that he was an eagle just like the eagle in the sky. Finally, after a long life living as a chicken, one day the eagle died not knowing who he was. He became what he believed he was or that was what he thought he was. It is sad to learn from the story that the young eagle must lose his real identity. The young eagle was deprived from following his natural habitat and learning his ancestral origin when he was growing up with the chicken. The young eagle was made to believe in the process from the very beginning that he was a chicken rather than he was an eagle. Likewise, it has been the never-ending dream of the present and previous governments of Ethiopia trying to make the Eritrean people to believe and adapt the Ethiopian identity. They have been attempting to identify and exploit our weakest link to make Eritrea part of a new map of Ethiopia. It is necessary that we must be encouraged to appreciate and cherish our Eritrean identity. We may have been brought up in a kind of similar situation that limited our understanding of our own identity, but it is time now for the past to lose its hold on us. We should not live thinking like we are somebody else instead of being Eritreans. We need to soar high, just be all that we are meant to be and that is to be Eritreans at heart and soul.

An Eritrean identity is not only an important thing for the Eritreans; it is everything for us and one of nature's masterpiece given to us. We did not choose our Eritrean identity. It is the sacred gift of our Almighty God to us as we are also God's gift to Eritrea. An Eritrean identity is not just a name given to us by which we need to be named and it is not a precious pearl that we need to wear around our neck. It is neither a name nor a thing; it is who we are. The best and typical behavioral characteristics of an Eritrean

identity are the expressions of its unique spiritual morality, humility and nobility as Eritreans. God has breathed life in the Eritrean families to respect and honor our Eritrean identity. As Alex Haley indicated, *“In every conceivable manner, the family is the link to our past bridge to our future”* because we are the extension of our parents and those before them and our Eritrean identity is the bridge to our current younger generations and those who come after them. As the fruit of a tree does not fall far away from the surrounding of the tree, it is also encouraging to observe that children of Eritrean families who were born, grew up and lived through out their lives in Diasporas far away from Eritrea, do not reject or abandon our Eritrean identity. They do not pretend to be somebody else, instead they do not hesitate to declare loudly to the world that they are proud Eritreans. To this effect, our Eritrean communities and religious institutions can be our mighty rock to hold on and the fortress where we can be safe and secure our Eritrean identity. It is really a blessing from God to have around us in Diasporas our Eritrean ethnic communities and religious institutions as sources of knowledge and wisdom that enable us to explore and understand our cultural heritage and our Eritrean ethnic identity.

As some concerned Eritrean elders indicated, the love of Eritrea is the oil that eases friction, the cement that binds Eritreans closer together, and the music that brings peace and harmony in our Eritrean society. Obviously, the love of a nation and the courage of Eritreans are derived from the unity and integrity of all Eritreans made up of a powerful Eritrean family, a solid Eritrean community and a brave religious institution. If we do not respect our Eritrean identity, we have no respect of ourselves. If we have no respect of ourselves, it is evident that nobody will respect us. If nobody respects us, we are considered as nobody and even the other animal species cannot accept us as distant relatives in the animal kingdom. It is our choice whether we want to reject our Eritrean identity and live as scared chickens or to honor our Eritrean identity and live as proud eagles. It is imperative that we need to stick around our own people in our own Eritrean communities and our own ethnic religious institutions. Our associations and affiliations with them will always strengthen and enlighten our Eritrean identity. Without the Eritrean identity we are nobody and we just become the lost sheep from its herd. We can be called African-Americans, African-Canadians, or African-Europeans because we are people of African origin. But these identities are for those people who can not trace the origin of their ancestors. Since we have specific identity, we can be called Eritrean-Americans, or Eritrean-Canadians, or Eritrean-Europeans because we know exactly from where we came. Our children and grand-children and those who follow them, will not have any problem tracing the origin of their ancestors. It is essential to educate our children that they are Eritreans and should be proud of their Eritrean identity. At any time, place or situation, they should never forget who they are because they are always Eritreans.

The Almighty God through his divine power and grace has given us our beloved country, Eritrea. He gave us Eritrea endowed with abundant natural resources and the best strategic maritime location. What else did He give us that we need for life? He gave us patience for raising our children; wisdom for relating with relatives and friends; tolerance when we face hostility and crisis; courage in the face of opposition; peace when we are under pressure; faith in the face of tragedy; comfort when we are in grief or sorrow; love when we feel lonely; healing when we are wounded; strength when we are overwhelmed; and hope when we are in despair, His divine power has also given us our Eritrean elders from whom we can acquire wisdom and learn values we need for life. We, Eritreans in

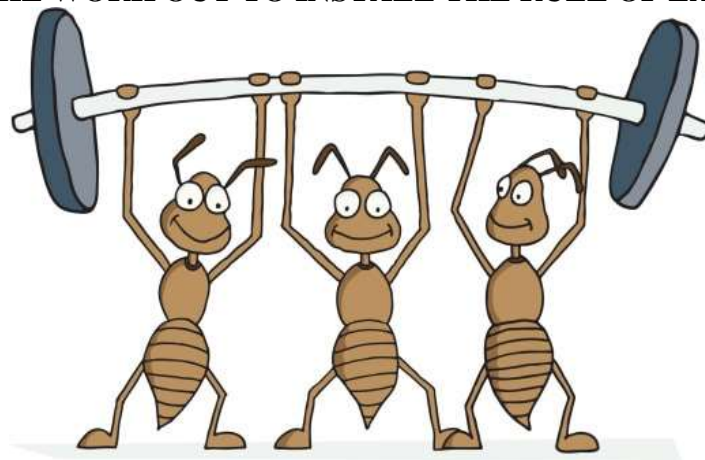
Diasporas, if we trust and believe in ourselves as Eritreans, we should never be bullied into silence from supporting the Eritrean people's movement; we should never allow ourselves to be made victims of harassment, character assassination, humiliation, intimidation, or any other ill-treatment by anybody; we should never accept somebody's definition of ourselves; but we should be able to define ourselves by ourselves. We cannot spend our lives letting other people tell us who we are. It takes courage and full determination to grow up and realize our own Eritrean identity. If we really believe to be Eritreans, then we must be destined to be Eritreans, committed to respect, appreciate and cherish our Eritrean identity because in the social jungle of human existence, there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of an identity. We all need a firm sense of identity as true Eritreans. It is usually true that we become what we believe we are.

If we have closely observed what have been happening in Eritrea over the years, the situation indicates that Eritrea is in great danger. The recent fake celebration in the name of peace, the fanfare politics and the officially undisclosed agreements signed between the Ethiopian and PFDJ leadership must have a dangerous hidden agenda in relation to the sovereignty of Eritrea. The economic hardship, the social misery and the political corruptions in Eritrea are unbearably far beyond tolerance. Eritrea is characterized as a duplicate of North Korea in Africa. Eritrea is the only country in the world ruled without a legitimate constitution. It is a country where appropriate and formal election process of political leaders is never undertaken. It is a country which has not demarcated its borders with its neighbor Ethiopia. It is a country in which the whole country is converted to be a huge prison. It is a country which has lost the great majority of its most productive younger generation to other countries through migration. It is a country where prominent political and religious leaders are put in prison indefinitely without the court trial. It is a country where the compulsory national military service of the Eritrean youth is endless, and it is compared to modern day mass enslavement. It is a country where the fundamental public needs, namely the education and health care programs, water and electricity supplies, and other basic needs are in a state of complete disaster. It is a country where human rights violations are the order of the day. It is a country where freedom of the press is completely absent. As we all boil in a pot at different degrees of temperature, we all do not observe and understand the above-mentioned deplorable situations in Eritrea at the same time and level. A demon-possessed and mind-drained person must only be who is insensitive and deny the existence of unbearable conditions in Eritrea. Alarmed about these critical issues some devoted and concerned Eritreans have already initiated and propelled the Eritrean people's movement. Many other Eritreans are now joining and actively participating in the movement at a great speed. Others, very few Eritreans are still dragging their feet from joining the movement and hopefully they will come to their senses to wake up in support of the Eritrean youth. Now more than any other time in the past, our unity and integrity are essential to know and respect our faithful friends and to identify and recognize our evil enemies who attempt to ridicule our Eritrean people's movement and to disrespect our Eritrean identity. We must also understand that as a single plant makes no garden, a single cow makes no herd, a single person also makes no nation; but together we can make a difference in defending and securing the sovereignty of our country and safeguarding our Eritrean identity. Unlike a drop of water which loses its identity when it joins the ocean, an Eritrean should never lose his or her Eritrean identity anywhere in North America, Europe, Australia, Asia, Middle East, or Africa in which he or she lives

as a legal immigrant. Thus, it is quite evident that an Eritrean lives as an Eritrean and dies as an Eritrean, nothing more and nothing less.

Finally, if we believe that we are true Eritreans, we must live up to our expectations and commitments as Eritreans. To fulfill these basic requirements we need to respect, honor and appreciate our Eritrean identity. As genuine Eritreans we have the noble national obligations and humble moral responsibilities to defend and safeguard the sovereignty of Eritrea and to propagate and advocate for the welfare of the Eritrean people. As Eritreans we need to be concerned about the pains and sufferings of the Eritrean people by joining and actively participating in the Eritrean people's movement in support of the Eritrean youth who are leading the way to victory and to transfer the political leadership to the Eritrean people so that we will have justice, democracy, peace, and the rule of law in Eritrea. It is about time to have a smooth and peaceful transition of political leadership to the Eritrean people as soon as possible. However, the current ongoing Eritrean people's movement which is advancing like wild fire in many countries of North America, Europe, Australia, and Africa, needs to be inter-connected at inter-regional and inter-continental levels. The Eritrean scholars and professional must play an important role in providing a professional advice and an expert guidance to the Eritrean young men and women so that we can have a united and well-coordinated people's movement that represent all Eritreans in Diasporas. To prepare an effective and efficient service for the movement, there is an urgent need or call for all Eritrean scholars and professionals to bring ourselves together in unity and to organize and conduct conferences at inter-continental levels at most convenient time and in suitable locations. We need to meet and discuss as to how we can all be of great service to the Eritrean people's movement to make it move forward. For example, we need to meet in Atlanta for those of us in North America, in Frankfurt for those of us in Europe, in Melbourne for those of us in Australia, in Kampala for those of us in Africa, and in Dubai for those of us in the Middle East. We need to learn from the words of advice of Mahatma Gandhi, "*The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.*" As usual, if we do our best, No problem, God will do the rest. God bless Eritrea and its people!

ERITREANS IN THE WORK OUT TO INSTALL THE RULE OF LAW IN ERITREA!



They say, individually we may be small; separately we may be poor; and divided we may be weak. However, together we are big; collectively we are rich; and in unity we are strong.