**Eritrea Is a Grateful Nation**

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If one runs into any Eritrean and ask how she or he is doing; the answer is always, “Al Hamdu Li-Lah” or “Temesghen Amlakh”, which means thanks to God/Allah. This is true no matter what the time, place or prevailing circumstances. It is Eritrean nature to always be grateful no matter what.

During the struggle for our Independence; Eritrea faced some of the darkest moments in her history. Yet, from the beginning of the struggle until independence, Eritreans espoused unshakable faith, confidence and gratefulness. When the archaic monarchy of Ethiopia ascended on the people of Eritrea and started killing and imprisoning Eritreans en mass; Eritreans gathered their faith and braced for the struggle ahead. After the start of the struggle, Eritrea gradually turned into a big prison. Villages were being torched by Ethiopian soldiers to teach Eritrean communities lessons with one aim, to quell the rebellion. And as the struggle progressed Eritrea’s trials and tribulations intensified. Yet, Eritreans doubly intensified their faith and braced for more.

To make matters worse, on top of the war with Ethiopia, Eritreans fought a civil war that cost the lives of thousands of dear Eritrean youth. This was a source of major anguish for the mothers and fathers that saw their beloved perish needlessly. In addition the Derg hankered down, shutting all the check points, cutting cities from villages in an effort to secure its stronghold. Families were cut-off from each other and barriers were created making traditional trade difficult. People were unable to get commodities. Everything was scarce and expensive. People were unable to work; schools were shut forcing students to become aimless wanderers.

Those days were very dark. Eritrean families were beset by problem after problem mired in a cycle of seemingly endless violence that affected the lives of every family. With the help of the Soviet Union, the military regime of Ethiopia intensified its military campaigns that suffocated every aspect of Eritrean life and forced thousands to flee to Sudan. At one moment, it seemed as though Ethiopia succeeded in destroying Eritrea’s aspiration and momentum. Eritreans also faced daunting instabilities when villages, cities and towns were changing hands between the fronts and Ethiopia. The hardship, the killing and the bad news kept on mounting. Eritrea became hell on earth to compel some to say, “Even the stones are burning.” People were destroying furniture for wood, no electricity, water, food or money. It was extremely dire that it felt time stood-still as the nation was being torched. It was a nightmare and hell on earth. While Eritreans have endured many challenges; those were the darkest days that could serve as a measuring stick to the depth of sufferings Eritrea endured to get to here and now.

However, Eritrean mothers and fathers remained faithful and thankful and prayed day in and out. They prayed for the victorious return of their children and peaceful life. They prayed to free their children from shackles and Ethiopia’s dungeon-prisons. They prayed and kept praying anguished. Yet they remained faithful and grateful.

Then freedom, jubilations and hope for a better future resonated on the hearts of all Eritreans after 1991. However, the TPLF regime, at the behest of its masters cast darkness into the fresh wounds of a nation that just begun to exhale in a brief respite. That was a calculated move based on a belief that Eritreans have let their guards down. But, to quote President Isaias, “Eritreans reacted like bee, when its hive gets attacked.”  Mothers, fathers and kids escorted their sons, daughters, brothers and sisters with joy handing them whatever they can. Mothers went to the fronts giving those fighting milk and comfort. That too passed. As it passed, it tested the will, endurance, the unity, commitment, loyalty and above all, it tested the will-to-sacrifice of every Eritrean. And Eritreans passed it with flying colors.

But, why did Eritrea succeed when all the weight of the world was weighing mightily on them?  How did Eritreans manage when all was denied to them? How did Eritrea survive when all those who were tested in a similar manner faltered in despair? How did Eritrea use that negative into a positive? What inspires Eritrea to persevere? What is the secret?

Eritrea survived and is thriving in a transformative stage as a young nation. We can credit it to unity, perseverance, dedication, commitment, selflessness and sacrifice and so on for the successes…but, gratitude stands as the key ingredient above all tying it all together. When things were rough, scarce and, people suffered as a result; Eritreans never lost their gracious nature. Neighbors looked-out and supported each other with grace. No matter how bad things got, Eritreans always raised their level of tolerance and perseverance knowing those golden days will arrive. There was no time-frame, just a hopeful outlook, a can do spirit and a belief that our better future lays ahead.

At the height of the wars, it was uplifting to see mothers gathering everything they had and, take it to the fronts with the hopes of seeing their sons and daughters. They gave all they had to support their kids at a great risk to their lives. They traveled a great distance often on foot following a hunch of the whereabouts of their kids. On the way, they always encountered Ethiopian military check points that conducted intrusive and extensive searches. When they reached the areas occupied by Eritrean fighters (Tegadelti) they were not often successful to find their sons and daughters. However, they got satisfaction by spending time with the Tegadelti. Here is a beauty. These mothers never asked their kids to come back with them. They always encouraged their kids and wished them success and went back to their hollowed lives in the Ethiopian occupied cities. When asked, “why do you trouble these much?” those mothers always said, “Temesghen, intay Kefiuna n-skum eko ale-khumo” or, “Thank God/Allah we are not the ones suffering; you are our concerns”. These mothers followed every step their kids stepped on. They gave them moral support, comforted them and provided assistance. One must keep in mind that the mothers were visiting hardened fighters that did not want to have emotional attachment with their families once they joined the struggle.

When one has nothing, anything becomes plenty. For Eritreans gratitude is and remains necessary for continuity and success. When the struggle started, Eritreans had nothing. No medicine, clothing, ammunition, tanks, money, supplies, women’s-needs and necessities. They didn’t have regular food supplies, set stations that they can call home. All they had was each other and a vision of a free Eritrea. They scavenged for a lot of their needs. They built the Eritrean army from munitions that they took from the Ethiopian military. When they killed enemy soldiers and stripped their guns and other belongings, it was a sense of accomplishment. When they took away Ethiopia’s armored vehicles and tank, it was a joyous moment and a sign that their ideas and endurance is paying off big. It was a beginning of bigger successes to come.

When Eritreans liberated areas and settled in it; students that use to learn in caves and under trees started to learn in class rooms. Eritreans grew their food and started to implement the programs that are based on the self reliance ideals. The villagers gathered and built roads with bare hands and shovels. Eritrea manufactured her own plastic cups and other plastic products. It manufactured her own shoes “Shida” that is the symbol of the struggle and a reminder of those that passed. They manufactured soaps and other industrial needs within the liberated areas. In other words it was the birth of a nation; a nation that believed; a nation that could not look for others to stand for her and knew that others will not stand for her. This was also the mindset of all Eritreans abroad. They knew no-one will come to the aid of Eritrea. They understood their responsibilities and worked hand and glove and struggled with their brothers and sisters. That was a synergy that served as a foundation for today’s Eritrea.

Eritreans have been thankful and remain thankful for every little achievement because that is a step forward and a departure from the past. It is also the basis that served as a foundation for what Eritrea is today. Most forget that Eritreans believed and worked to be self reliant from the very beginning. The foundation for what Eritrea is today was set decades back. The pharmaceutical industry that is sprouting started in caves during thick war times. The Fred Hollows Hospital in the center of Asmara that is exporting all types of optical products, in a way, started in the fields of Eritrea. The water dams and agricultural infrastructures that Eritrea put in place is an example of a visionary nation that is ahead of all. It is a reason to celebrate and be thankful because people in other countries are rioting for scarcity and price hikes of food and fuel.

It takes a certain characteristics to say thanks and work hard regardless of the times. That is what defines Eritreans. Eritreans have always sacrificed for Eritrea and each other often at great personal price. While most Africans and people from the Middle East focused on themselves; Eritreans focused on their country and each other. Every one that passed through Sudan, Italy and other places knows the generosity of Eritrean mothers. Eritrean mothers abroad cleaned floors to support their families, the struggle and the refugees all at the same time. They gave all they had including their Jewelry in times of needs. This was not a onetime event. It is a way of life for Eritreans everywhere. The signs of Eritrean gratefulness are in every aspect of Eritrean life today. The railroad industry that is attracting worldwide attention is one. After Westerners demanded billions to repair the railroads tracks; Eritrea looked inward and used indigenous talent. Those that revived the railroads and the trains are revered and appreciated for leaving a legacy. They are the true role model for future generations.

**Conclusion**

As we embark on the 20th Anniversary of the independence of Eritrea, it is crucial that we look back as we focus ahead and appreciate what makes Eritrea tick. It is all around us with vivid examples. Those who live a thankless life and failed to be grateful live empty lives that a friend calls a “Black-Hole.” They are missing a lot of good to focus on perceived negatives and as a result distancing themselves further and further. Their thankless nature is the quicksand to their inevitable demise. They forget to site a famous quote, “Those who declared death on Eritrea have died and Eritrea is still there and those who are declaring death on Eritrea will die and Eritrea will always be there!”

Yes, that is true; Eritrea is marching gracefully; more thankful than ever because while the enemies are being sifted as dirt, Eritreans are uplifted and lifted to a new level. That is a result of all the small graces that Eritreans embraced throughout the history of the blessed nation. Eritreans have always known how blessed they are. All the blessings of our parents have come to fruition and graced Eritrea with humble leaders and gracious people that have become the envy of oppressed people in the region and beyond. And every day that goes by, the secret of the people of Eritrea is being exposed to the world. Therefore, in-order to grow what we have, we must all be cognizant and be fully aware of the great blessings that surrounds us. We must appreciate, as we always do, the joy and the blessing that we have on each other and make it blossom to new levels. We must appreciate the efforts of each other, be thankful for any little contribution and make it grow.

Above all, we must give thanks to those who fought for years to bring the joy that is Eritrea.  We must be grateful to those who paid with limbs, eyes ears and mental damages. We must be grateful for those who lead Eritrea to where it is today. Most of all, we must not forget those who perished to sustain Eritrea with their blood. Because the greatest payoff for them is Eritrea’s success and continued gratitude for their life. As we approach the 20the Anniversary of Eritrea’s Independence, let us remind ourselves to be grateful and keep in mind how lucky we are as we celebrate in honor of the martyrs.

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