

Mindfulness For Interfaith Dialogue: A Proposal For ASEAN Youth

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Abstract. This paper is proposing an application of mindfulness for interfaith dialogue among ASEAN youth. Documentary research was the method used in this study, and the data were collected from related literatures and descriptively analyzed according to the following scopes: the principles of mindfulness practice, the principles of interfaith dialogue, and the proposal for the mindful interfaith dialogue among ASEAN youth. The result showed that awareness and compassion were the core of those principles, mindfulness practice and interfaith dialogue. Meanwhile, the proposal suggested that one should aware of oneself and others at the present without judgments. Awareness would automatically make us realize things as they are and command us what should do to ourselves and others correctly. This might be one of techniques enhancing an open-minded interfaith dialogue which lead to the goal of every faith, peace.

Keywords: mindfulness, interfaith, dialogue, ASEAN, youth

Introduction

Mindfulness is a momentary contemplation of body, feeling, mind and phenomena without judgment and force. These became the four foundations of mindfulness (D.M., 1992). The contemplation of body includes that of breath and all physical activities; of feeling includes that of both happiness and suffering; of mind, namely, that of good or bad thoughts; and of phenomena occur inside and outside the body, feeling, and mind—inner or outer world. In the contemplating state, mind would compose threefold facet: creative energy, awareness and compassion – right concentration, here simply called 'concentration' leading to a state of meditation, and the practitioner as meditator.

There are two kinds of meditation i.e. for either calmness or insight (A.T., 1992). The calm-meditator will become one with the object of contemplation, this might be called 'passive meditation', while the insight-meditator will not only become one with the object of contemplation but also know the state of

becoming, called 'active meditation'. The former can be founded in any tradition but the latter in Buddhism only. The Buddha, founder of Buddhism discovered the latter technique and had shared with the world as a human not a religious estate.

One does not need to be Buddhist to pay attention in this way (insight meditation), any more than one needs to be Italian to enjoy pizza (Saltzman, n.d). Mindfulness then have been applied in various fields as an 'adjective' to be used with any subject such as 'mindful eating' 'mindful nation' 'mindful education' etc. It had gradually made the eating, nation and education full of creative energy, awareness and compassion.

A huge number of researches and academic articles on mindfulness assured us of its experienced possibilities and benefits. At least, 15 syntheses of mindfulness researches and evidences were available: Mindfulness training as clinical intervention: A conceptual and empirical review. American Psychological

Association (Baer, 2003), Mindfulness-based stress reduction and cancer: A meta-analysis (Ledesma & Kumano, 2009), Evidence-based psychological interventions in the treatment of mental disorder: A literature review (Australian Psychological Society, 2010), Practice review: What are the benefits of mindfulness? A practice review of psychotherapy-related research (Davis & Hayes, 2011), The effect of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy for prevention of relapse in recurrent major depressive disorder: A systematic review and meta-analysis (Piet & Hougaard, 2011), Mindfulness-based stress reduction for breast cancer – a systematic review and meta-analysis (Cramer et al., 2012), The effect of mindfulness-based therapy on symptoms of anxiety and depression in adult cancer patients and survivors: A systematic review and meta-analysis (Piet et al., 2012), Mindfulness-based therapy: A comprehensive meta-analysis (Khoury et al., 2013), Mindfulness interventions for psychosis: A meta-analysis (Khoury et al., 2013), Mindfulness-based interventions in schools – a systematic

review and meta-analysis (Zenner et al., 2014), Evidence map of mindfulness (Hempel et al., 2014), Extensions and mechanisms of mindfulness-based cognitive therapy: A review of the evidence (Metcalf & Dimidjian, 2014), Mindfulness interventions with youth: A meta-analysis (Zoogman et al., 2014), The effectiveness of mindfulness-based intervention for people with schizophrenia: A systematic review (Lam & Chien, 2016), Teaching mindfulness to teachers: A systematic review and narrative synthesis (Emerson et al., 2017). Among these literatures, there is no research on mindfulness for interfaith dialogue, is it possible, and how, particularly with ASEAN youth.

ASEAN, Association of South East Asian Nations composed of ten country members in South East Asia, professed various faiths: Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Taoism, Sikhism, Atheism, Judaism, Baha’ism, Confucianism, Tribalism, Animism, Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, non religion and unknown as presented on Table 1.

Table 1 Population and Faith of SEAC

Country	Population (year)	Faith						
		Muslim	Christian	Buddhist	Hindu	Taoist	Other	No Answer/Unknown
B	423,000 (2014)	78.8%	8.7%	7.8%	-	-	4.7%*1	-
C	15,458,332 (2014)	3.5%	-	96%	-	-	0.5%*2	-
I	237,641,326 (2010)	87.18%	9.87%	0.72%	1.69%	-	0.18*3	-
L	6,541,432 (2012)	0.03%	1.5%	66.8%	-	-	30.92%*4	0.7%
Ma	29,947,000 (2013)	61.3%	9.2%	19.2%	6.3%	-	1.3%*5	1.0%
My	51,419,420 (2014)	4%	4%	89%	-	-	3%*6	-
P	98,734,78 (2010)	5.65%	90%	-	-	-	-	4.28%*7
S	5,470,000 (2014)	14.7%	18.3%	33.3%	5.1%	10.9%	17.7%*8	-
T	65,981,660 (2010)	4.9%	1.2%	93.6%	-	-	0.3%*9	-
V	85,846,997 (2009)	-	6.62%	7.93%	-	-	84%*10	-

Other/Not reported 4.2%; *⁸No religion 17%, Other religions 0.7%; *⁹Other 0.2%, None 0.1; *¹⁰No religion 81.69, Hoa Hao 1.67%, Cao Dai 1.01%, Other 0.22%. Two countries collected religious data in other years of population: Brunei Darussalam 2011, Malaysia 2010. SEAC – South East Asia Countries, B – Brunei Darussalam, C – Cambodia, I – Indonesia, L – Lao PDR, Ma – Malaysia, My – Myanma, P – Philippines, T – Thailand, V – Vietnam, S – Signed, R – Ratifies, A – Acceded,

Source: Human Rights Resource Centre. (n.d.[2015]). pp. 55-56, 101-102, 139, 197, 235, 321, 363, 417, 483, 525.

Youth as the future of human race with right understanding and attitude toward different faith will avoid religious confrontation and violence, and pave the way to peaceful cooperation and coexistence between the faiths. Otherwise, in the name of faith, the future of human race would inevitably be buried. This work is then an attempt to propose one of possibilities for interfaith dialogue among youths in the region of South East Asia.

Object

To study the possibilities in applying mindfulness practice for interfaith dialogue among ASEAN youths.

Framework

The work started from examining the principle of mindfulness practice and interfaith dialogue, then stated the space of interfaith dialogue among ASEAN youths, and lastly brought out the proposal for application of mindfulness intervention in Interfaith dialogue for ASEAN youth, as follows;

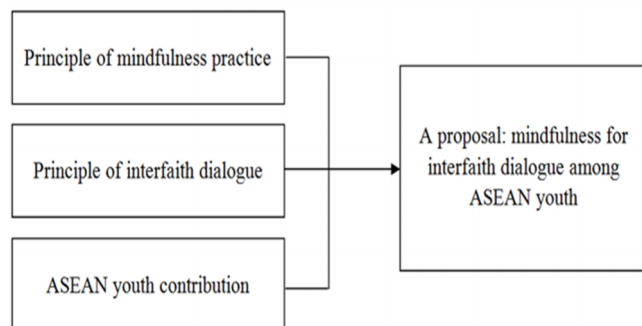


Figure 1. Framework of Study

Method

The study was based on a documentary research. The data were collected from the relevant literatures and descriptively analyzed according to the scope of study.

Result

The Principle of Mindfulness

The dynamism of mindfulness practice as taught by the Buddha in Mahasatipatthana Sutta (D.M., 1992) could be extracted on Figure 2.

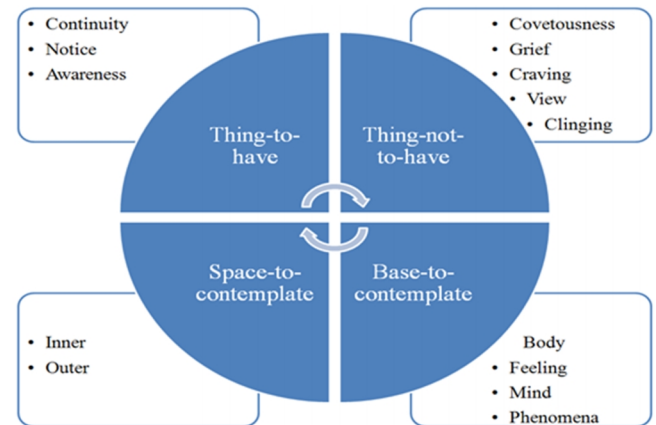


Figure 2 Principle of Mindfulness Practice

There are four factors of mindfulness dynamism: (1) The thing-to-have i.e. continuity, notice and awareness; (2) The thing-not-to-have i.e. covetousness, grief, craving, view and clinging; (3) The base-to-contemplate i.e. body, feeling, mind and phenomena; and the last (4) The space-to-contemplate, inner and outer. The mindfulness practitioner should continuously keep notice and be aware of four bases of mindfulness: body, feeling, mind and phenomena.

He who wants to practice the mindfulness to become mindful person, should tame himself again and again until being full of notice and awareness naturally. This stage might take time at least for 7 days not more than 7 years. Thoughts are always the normal visitors to the practitioners' mind, and followed by their closed friends i.e. covetousness, grief, craving, view and clinging. The practitioner would be just aware of them without any judgment then let them go. Together with letting them go, the loving kindness and compassion to one and other would take place instead.

The Principle of Interfaith Dialogue

Forde (2013: 7) in "A resource for Christian Muslim dialogue" defined interfaith dialogue as "about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect

that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences." The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (i.e. "faiths") at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practice their faith freely.

The United Religious Initiative (URI) (2004: 14, 16, 53, 164-165, 172) presented the grassroots of interfaith for peacebuilders as followed: 1) Bringing diverse groups together, 2) Listening with openness to others, 3) Educating and breaking down stereotypes, 4) Inspiring hope, 5) Building trust for dealing with tough issues, 6) Creating an inclusive sense of community that embraces those who are 'other', 7) Being models of constructive ways of dealing with differences, 8) Supporting a willingness to change unjust systems and structures that cause pain to others. This might be possible through the four layers of its central: (1) Grounding personally and spiritually; (2) Building constructive relationships; (3) Honing our skills to help each other; and (4) Taking effective action together.

The URI articulated the skills for understanding other faiths with 4 practices: (1) Self-awareness (awareness of our values, attitudes, feelings and behaviors), (2) Ability to speak clearly and fully about our religious identity, about our teachings and practices – without fear and without defensiveness or a need to prove to others that we are right, (3) Active and nonjudgmental listening as others speak of their own spiritual journey, identity, beliefs, and practices, (4) Awareness of our attitudes and responses to those who do not share our beliefs, whether in other religious traditions or in our own.

In addition, six conditions and criteria would make an interfaith dialogue effective: (1) Establish certain degree of open communication and trust, (2) Addressing asymmetric power relationships in the group, making sure that the facilitation and group dynamics are based on fair representation and capture the needs of the minority members—not only members of dominant cultures, religions, or political groups, (3) the moderator and participants follow the rule of qualifying statements to avoid generalizations; for example, instead of saying, "Christians think or believe," you can say, "there are certain Christian groups who believe...", (4) focus on specific issues or tasks to accomplish, (5) allow time for intra-faith dialogue, too, (6) at some point aim for actions or joint activities that

provide the group with a concrete outcome for their series of meetings.

These together built the guidelines for interfaith dialogue with 10 items: (1) Confidentiality: Agree that personal details and disclosures are not discussed outside the group. You may, however, talk about yourself, your learning, and your personal experience of the dialogue. (2) Respect difference: You have the right to be different, as do all members of the group. (3) No interruptions: Give each speaker time to reflect, clarify thoughts, and articulate them. Wait until the other is finished before speaking. (4) Equal time: Take responsibility for how often you speak in the group and for allowing other equal time. (5) No advice: Come to your own decisions and conclusions about what is right and appropriate for you. Speak from your own experience and do not give advice to others (e.g., "If I were you I would..." or "You should..."). (6) Listen: Pay close attention to what each person is actually saying, rather than "hearing" what you wish they would say. (7) Speak in the first person – use "I" statements: Speak directly from your own experience and use "I" or "I feel" rather than "everybody says" or "most people feel." Speak personally, for yourself as an individual, not as a representative of a group or a position. (8) Responsibility: Take responsibility for what you think, do, say, and feel in each session. Take responsibility for what you do not say as well. 9) Disclosure: Say only what you are comfortable with, no matter what others disclose. (10) Pass: Honor each person's right to "pass" if he or she is not ready or willing to speak. In conclusion, the principle of interfaith dialogue might be drawn as Figure 3.

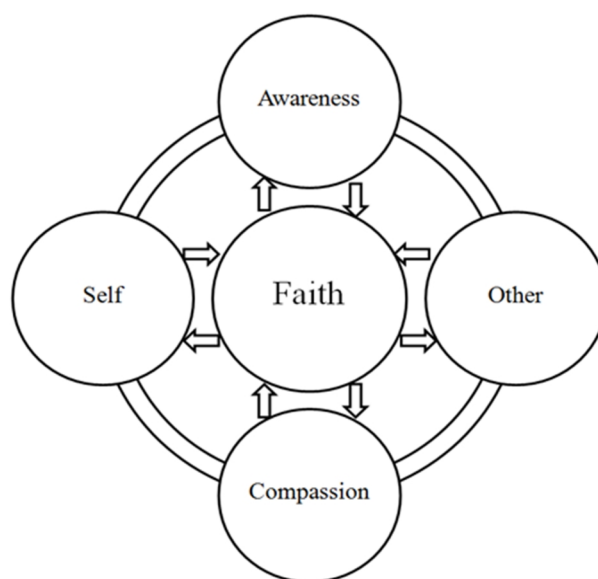


Figure 3 Principle of interfaith dialogue
According to Figure 3, faiths of self and other have to be aware – led to right understanding both me and you. With right understanding-based compassion, peoples from different faiths behave to each other correctly and peacefully. In addition, one should keep in his own mind that ‘lost awareness and compassion’ might happen to both one and other. Sincerely acceptance would bring us back to the right way of forgiveness, then awareness and compassion again.

6.3 A proposal for application of mindfulness intervention in the interfaith dialogue for ASEAN youth.

It shared most similarity between the principle of mindfulness practice and interfaith

dialogue i.e. awareness and compassion as a core portion of those principles. The ‘phenomena’ only differentiate the former from the latter. Meanwhile, the latter might focus on faith only, but the former needed to concentrate on phenomena surrounding faith as well as human being. This is why sometimes; some interfaith dialogue movements had been seen unnecessary to those hungers etc. In addition, a phenomenon which is very important to all faiths is the governmental actions and reactions towards faith. This would enable the interfaith dialogue supporters understand the structure where any faith perceived. Table 2 then provided some information, phenomena of the ASEAN member states towards faiths that youths should be aware.

Table 2 International Instruments relating to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, SEAC

Instrument	B	C	I	L	Ma	My	P	S	T	V
1. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	-	(A)	(A)	(R)	-	-	(R)	-	(A)	(A)
2. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	-	(R)	(A)	(A)	-	-	(R)	-	(A)	(A)
3. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	-	(A)	(A)	(R)	-	-	(R)	-	(A)	(A)
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	(A)	(A)	(R)	(R)	(A)	(A)	(R)	(A)	(A)	(R)
5. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	(A)	(A)	(R)	(A)	(A)	(A)	(R)	(A)	(A)	(R)
6. Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment	-	(A)	(R)	(S)	-	-	(A)	-	(A)	-
7. Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide	-	(A)	-	(A)	(A)	(R)	(R)	(A)	-	(A)
8. International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families	-	(S)	(R)	-	-	-	(R)	-	-	-
9. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees	-	(A)	-	-	-	-	(A)	-	-	-

Note: SEAC – South East Asia Countries, B – Brunei Darussalam, C – Cambodia, I – Indonesia, L – Lao PDR, Ma – Malaysia, My – Myanmar, P – Philippines, T – Thailand, V – Vietnam, S – Signed, R – Ratifies, A – Acceded,

Source: Human Rights Resource Centre. (n.d.[2015]). p.52.

Apart from Table 2, the state of ASEAN member countries’ constitutional provisions relating to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion should never been neglected (Human Rights Resource Centre, (n.d.[2015]): 48-51) as followed. Brunei, Article 3 (1) regulated that “the official religion of Brunei Darussalam shall be the Islamic religion... all other religions may be

practiced in peace and harmony by the persons professing them”.

Cambodia, Article 43 “Buddhism shall be the state religion.” “Khmer citizens of either sex shall have the right to freedom of belief. Freedom of religious belief and worship shall be guaranteed by the State on the condition that such freedom does not affect other religious beliefs or violate public order and security.” Article 31 “Every Khmer citizen shall be equal before the law, enjoying the same rights, freedoms and fulfilling the same obligations regardless of ... religious belief ...”.

Indonesia, Constitution does not declare Indonesia as a secular state or based on a

particular religion, but declares in Article 29 (1) that: "The State shall be based upon the belief in the One and Only God". Article 29 (2), "The state guarantees all persons the freedom of worship, each according to his/her own religion or belief." Article 28 E "(1) Every person shall be free to worship and to practice the religion of his/her choice... (2) Every person shall have the right to the freedom to believe in his/her faith (kepercayaan), and to express his/her thoughts, in accordance with his/her conscience (3) Every person shall have the right to the freedom to associate, to assemble, and to express opinions." Article 28I (1) "The rights to ... freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of religion ... are all human rights that cannot be limited under any circumstances." Article 28I (2) "Every person shall have the right to be free from discriminative treatment based upon any grounds whatsoever." Article 28I (3) "The cultural identity and rights of traditional society shall be respected in harmony with the development of the age and civilization."

Lao PDR, No declared relationship between state and religion. Article 43 "Lao citizens have the right and freedom to believe or not to believe in religions." Article 6 "The State protects the freedom and democratic rights of the people which cannot be violated by anyone." Article 9 "The State respects and protects all lawful activities of Buddhists and of followers of other religions, [and] mobilizes and encourages Buddhist monks and novices as well as the priests of other religions to participate in activities that are beneficial to the country and people."

Malaysia, Article 3 (1) "Islam is the religion of the Federation, but other religions may be practiced in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation." Article 11 (1) "Every person has the right to profess and practice his religion, and ... to propagate it." Article 11 (3) "Every religious group has the right (a) to manage its own religious affairs; (b) to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and (c) to acquire and own property ..." Article 12 (3) "No person shall be required to receive instruction in or take part in any ceremony or act of worship of a religion other than his own." Article 8 (2) "... there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the ground only of religion ..." Article 12 (1) "There shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the grounds only of religion ... (a) in the administration of any educational institution maintained by a public authority ... (b) in providing ... financial aid for the maintenance or education of pupils ..."

Myanmar, No state religion. Section 361 (2008 Constitution) "The Union recognizes the special position of Buddhism as the faith professed by the great majority of citizens of the Union". Section 34 "Every citizen is equally entitled to freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess and practice religion subject to public order, morality or health and to the other provisions of this Constitution." Section 362 "The Union also recognizes Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Animism as the religions existing in the Union." Section 354 "Every citizen shall be at liberty in the exercise of the following rights, if not contrary to the laws, enacted for Union security, prevalence of law and order, community peace and tranquility or public order and morality: (a) to express and publish freely their convictions and opinions; (c) to form associations and organizations; (d) to develop their language, literature, culture they cherish, religion they profess, and customs without prejudice to the relations between one national race and another or among national races and to other faiths." Section 364 "The abuse of religion for political purposes is forbidden. Moreover any act which is intended or is likely to provoke feelings of hatred, enmity or discord between racial or religious communities or sects is contrary to this Constitution." Section 348 "The Union shall not discriminate any citizen ... based on ... religion..."

Philippines, Article II, Section 6 "The separation of Church and State shall be inviolable." Article III, Section 5 "No law shall be made respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The free exercise and enjoyment of religious profession and worship, without discrimination or preference, shall forever be allowed. No religious test shall be required for the exercise of civil or political rights."

Singapore, No declared relationship, but secularism widely used. Article 15 (1) "Every person has the right to profess and practice his religion and to propagate it." Article 15 (3) "Every religious group has the right (a) to manage its own religious affairs; (b) to establish and maintain institutions for religious or charitable purposes; and (c) to and acquire and own property and hold and administer it in accordance with the law." Article 12 (2) "... there shall be no discrimination against citizens of Singapore on the ground only of religion ..."

Thailand, No state religion (2007 Constitution). Section 79 "The State shall patronize and protect Buddhism as the religion observed by most Thais for a long period of time and other religions, promote good understanding

and harmony among followers of all religions as well as encourage the application of religious principles to create virtue and develop the quality of life." Section 37 "A person shall enjoy full liberty to profess religion, religious sect and creed, and observe religious precept or exercise a form of worship in accordance with his or her belief; provided that it is not contrary to his or her civic duties, public order or good morals." Section 30 "Unjust discrimination against a person on grounds of ... religious belief ... shall not be permitted."

Vietnam, The Constitution does not declare Vietnam as a secular state or based on any particular religion. Article 24 "(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of belief and of religion, and has the right to follow any religion or follow no religion. All religions are equal before the law. (2) The State shall respect and protect the freedom of belief and religion. (3) No one may violate the freedom of belief and religion, nor may anyone take advantage of a belief or religion in order to violate the law." "... All religions are equal before the law."

These rule of law told us the attitude of ASEAN member states toward the faiths. The proposal for an application of mindfulness intervention in interfaith dialogue for ASEAN youths, thus could be formulated as Figure 4.

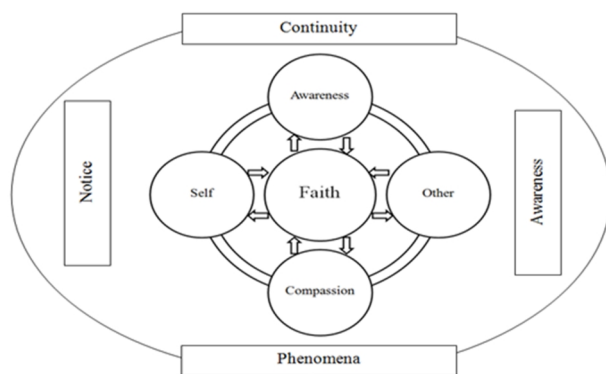


Figure 4 Proposal for mindful interfaith dialogue with ASEAN youth.

The proposal implied that an interfaith dialogue when started, has to continuously conducted at least for 7 days not more than 7 years on a particular object, some prospective result would experienced. The dialogue would come true through notice, awareness and compassion. Awareness is needed for knowing what happening and also knowing that being known. In sum, mindfulness would gradually cultivate an active meditation for wisdom that insures the interfaith dialogue fruitful and peaceful. Faith of both one and other, and its surroundings needed to be aware and realized as

they are without judgment, then chose the right thing and did it on the right way.

Conclusion

There are many possibilities for interfaith dialogue, the paper proposed one of those. In the proposal awareness is needed in all stages to both inner and outer world i.e. faith and its circumstance. The inner was the first thing shall be aware. Awareness would led to the right understanding. By clear understanding of self, one would be able to deal with other correctly and peacefully. However, awareness without compassion would never make the world peaceful. The twofold condition of peace i.e. awareness and compassion, should be then initiated not only to youths, but also for all through mindfulness practice.

Suggestion

Because of the limitation of time, this proposal was based on the scarce resources. It welcomed the critiques from all readers. Therefore, please enjoy expressing an opinion on the proposal as an arena for interfaith dialogue and do it mindful.

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