

My Observations: On Dr. Tesfai's Seminars in New York

Amanuel Zerzghi
June 2005

ዝገበርልካ ወይን ግበረሉ ወይ ድማ ንገረሉ፣ ይብሉ ኣቦታት።

Dr. Tesfai is a warrior who knows his enemy very well. He is set out on a long journey to destroy this evil empire that has kept our Eritrean Communities hostage. His theme is simple; respect each other, cooperate, avoid unnecessary squabbles, focus on what is important, educate yourselves, never stop learning, communicate with your family members continually, love your family, be proud of who you are, etc.

His presentation style is unusually unique. He can easily address sensitive issues, such as 'politics'; private matters like sex and sexuality; and, public matters like religion and ethnicity while keeping his audience at ease. His appropriate usage of cultural parables in Tigrigna, Arabic, Tigre, English; quotable quotes from personalities like mother Theresa; and verses from the Bible as well as Quraan add to the depth of his presentation.

I don't think I can thoroughly write on every topic he raised during the seminars, nor will I try. For I know that would be a disservice. I humbly suggest to you, therefore, to read his books and articles which are widely available in most Eritrean websites. In the meantime, allow me to share with you some of his messages based on my personal discussions as well as listening to his seminars. I bear sole responsibility for any unintended misrepresentation of his message on my part.

To the youth:

- Stay in school and make the grades. Education is a proven bridge to your success
- Avoid the wrong crowd. No to drugs; no to teen pregnancy; learn about sex and sexuality; know about HIV/AIDS
- Understand why your parents behave the way they do. Understand the cultural difference – American versus Eritrean
- Know where your parents came from - history and culture. Learn about your family tree.
- When in trouble go to your parents for help
- Be proud of your parents. Even if they don't look cool, even if they drive old cars, even if they don't speak English, or even if they work odd jobs.

To Parents:

- Children should come first. Remember, they learn from you. Let's teach them our good values
- Listen to your children. They are full of ideas – you can learn a lot from them

- The best gift you can give to your child is quality time. Equally important gift is the love you share with your family
- Love your spouse, express it in whatever way suits both of you. To the men, he says, “ don’t buy a bucket of flower and leave it on the table – give it to her”
- Respect every God created individual. No one alone can be better than the rest of us, together. Each one of us has unique qualities. The person you look down today may be your lifesaver tomorrow.
- Continue to educate yourself - don’t stop learning. Minimize language barrier, understand the system

He also mentions staggering statistics affecting the youth in America. Several thousands of teenagers per-day drop out of school, start smoking, commit suicide, etc. Admittedly, Dr. Tesfai says, “ I don’t have the numbers for Eritrean-Americans, but I am sure there are some.” His recommendation is to establish cohesive, tolerant, cooperative, forward-looking community of Eritrean-Americans.

- A community that guarantees transfer of cultural heritage to the next generations
- A community that tolerates culture, ideological, political differences
- A community that encourages cooperation and social growth
- A community that accommodates both Eritrean and American cultures, etc.

At end of the seminars, there was a positive and uplifting feeling among the participants. Some of the feedback I got, include:

“For the first time in years we sat down under one roof. For the first time in years, you the adults planned something meaningful for us.” From the youth

“I have never attended a seminar where I didn’t fall asleep – today was different. This is a group therapy by itself. We need more of this kind of seminars. I hope, his message continues to resonate across our entire community.” From parents.

Dr. Tesfai has scored against his enemy in some cities in North America and Canada and certainly in New York City. Recently, he fought and won similar battles in Europe. The fight continues. Are you ready to join his battalion and do your part in destroying the evil empire?

Thank you again Dr. Tesfai. And thanks to your wife and children for sharing you with the rest of us.