**The 4 pillars of culture**

*Mahatma Gandhi who is considered to Father of his native country India said he did not want his house to be walled in on all sides and his windows to be stuffed. He wanted the cultures of all lands to blow about his house as freely as possible* *but he refused to be blown off his feet by any.*

This is how the great leader of Indian nationalist movement understood true freedom rooted in culture. Yet culture itself is a complex phenomenon that I personally understand as a large shelter built by the society and upheld by four pillars: language, food, religion and holidays. Still culture can be also compared to a thin but very important veneer that you must be careful not to scratch.
Let us make sure we understand the basics of other cultures, show willingness to learn the differences and at the same time - do not forget who you are and where you come from.

First off all culture is communication, but languages are one of the most important means of communication. Learning foreign languages will open you the whole world. However, learning tour native language should be placed in your must-do list uppermost. We should know our mother tongue very well and only then we can expect people of other nationalities learn and use Latvian. This is my advice how to preserve our language. To become more skilful user of your native language, you should read more books. Reading books helps not only to master the language; our souls are nurtured by reading as much as our bodies are being fed by most delicious food.

Secondly, let us reason about our national cuisine. Food can also be seen as a means of communication; maybe even more ancient as the language. We should not be shy to offer people grey peas with bacon or carrot pies called “sklandarauši”. This way we will give the taste of our country to the strangers and they might also like that kind of food. Try and taste food that you don’t have in your country and make them your favourite dishes. What would Germans do without sausages and beer or Latvians - without rye bread? In a lot of countries people don’t have rye bread. Well, we Latvians have, don’t forget that and don’t forget to give a bite of it to others.

When body is fed, spirit can’t be forgotten. Religion is the most vital factor in any culture because it connects human beings to the sacred mystery. There are many gods and various religions, though they all have common aim. Religion brings you inner peace. If you don’t know anything about religion and religious practice in your country, seek and you will definitely find people willing to tell you more. Do not forget about people’s religious freedom. We should respect every religion which celebrates human dignity

Last but not least, let us talk about holidays. People like celebrating and celebrating together brings more joy. Recently we have adopted many festive days like Halloween or St. Valentine ’s Day, and we enjoy these festivals. Yet, we should not forget about our national celebrations; the most popular of them are midsummer festivals “*Līgo*” and “*Jāņi*”. These are my favourite because I simply love summer and all its treats. I am ready to tell everyone about the four seasons in Latvia and specially - summer. I would also like to tell the people from other countries about our most outstanding festival which is the Song and Dance festival. I’ve not had an opportunity to take part in this festival personally, but I have heard so much good about it from my peers and relatives. Let us not be shy to share our joyful moments and let other people join celebrating our national festivals.

To summarize, I would like to warn you neither to forget your nationality and cultural background nor push other people to accept you and your culture. It might not end well. Just be polite! Better keep your eyes, ears and heart open; listen in to what the people of other nationalities want to tell you about the four pillars of their culture. You will learn so much new and only enrich your life. Be prepared and ready to share the riches of your culture in return. So that living together we can enjoy peace and true freedom.

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