

COMMENT

Books open windows of the mind

RECEIVED WISDOM:

Printed words are like soulmates of the intellect that enrich our minds

HORACE Mann wrote, "A house without books is like a house without windows". A house with windows allows for sights of various kinds. Books provide us all kinds of insights and open various kinds of windows of the mind.

The various windows of the mind fling open breadth and depths of understanding and nurture intellectual character, as well as the virtues of heart and soul.

With the mastery of basic literacy, a person is enabled to have access to the received wisdom of mankind. The received wisdom from authors are the cumulative acumen of what all that man knows and understands about reality.

Humankind's treasure of trivial and significant questions across the ages are visited and revisited.

Lessons learned provide guidance on how to live and how not to make mistakes because of ignorance.

The capacities of understanding are expanded and deepened through the habit of reading books worthy of reading. Those interested in literature may want, for instance, to read the works of the Nobel Laureates for literature, 111 of them, from 1901 to 2014. Editors and the professoriate regularly identify the 100 or 1,000 books worth reading. And, of course, there are the well-promoted best books' guide list.

People buy books, borrow books from libraries or friends, inherit books from family members across the generations, start their own book collections or receive books as gifts. People also give books as gifts to share and enjoy knowledge and build a kind of knowledge and insight community, looking at the world and its beauty and challenges from different lenses, portals and windows of the mind and heart.

There is a bonding between the

giver and receiver of books. When we receive books as gifts, there is moral and courtesy duty to enjoy the gift, to read and not just display such gifts.

The focused reading of such books, opening new windows of the mind may lead to immediate or longer-term changes in intellectual character, behaviour and even personality. At the very least, reading of such selected gifts hones, sharpens, sensitises cognitive and affective capacities.

I have been fortunate to receive many books as gifts from teachers, friends and family. A random selection of several of the book gifts include the following: Ahmad Othman Bajunid (1960) gave me *A Malay-English-Arabic Dictionary* which he compiled, and a book he wrote, entitled *The Moral Shield*, besides other books while Siti Rukiah Ibrahim (2004) gave me Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie* and Adibah Amin (1980), *As I Was Passing*.

The following friends gave me their own works: Wilson Bishai

(1988), *Humanities in the Arabic-Islamic World*; Ranjit Singh and Robert Reasoner (2000), *Enhancing Personal Quality*; Dzulkifli Abdul Razak (2011), *Voicing Concern*; Arshad Ayub (2008), *A Second Chance — Life and Mission of Arshad Ayub* — Anwar Ridhwan (2013), *Tercipta dari Tanya*; Fenwick English and Rosemary Papa, *Educational Leadership at 2050*; Nancy Jay (1992), *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity*; John L. Esposito (1994), *The Islamic Threat — Myth or Reality?*; Arfah Salleh and Aziuddin Ahmad (2008), *Human Governance*; Hussein Ahmad (2012) *The Mission of Public Education in Malaysia*; Peter Ribbins (1993), *Greenfield on Educational Administration — Towards a Humane Science*; Philip Hallinger (2005) *Handbook of Educational Administration*; S. Singaravelu (2013) *Thirukkural* and Zaini Ujang (2012) *Akademia Baru*.

Others have given books they enjoyed and wanted to share: Isahak Haron gave *Muhammad Yunus — Creating a World Without Poverty* (2007); Howard Jones (1997) *Jerome Bruner — The Culture of Education*; Kamal Khir (2007) gave Syed Muhammad Naquib Al-Attas and Wan Mohd Nor Wan Daud's

The ICLIF Leadership Competency Model (LCM) — An Islamic Alternative. Robert Jay (2012) gave *Daniel Siegel's Interpersonal Neurobiology — An Integrative Handbook of the Mind*.

Each of the books takes one on an intellectual journey, exploring ideas, realities and solutions to problems identified and newly-emerging issues in the profession, in society and in life.

Without friends whose interests are so diverse and who are generous in their sharing, there are windows of the mind, which may not see the light of day or the beauty of nights, with the moon, meteors, stars and planets and galaxies.

As the world enters into the era of distraction and confusion, there is a critical need to find clarity in values and reasoning. Such clarity, with the accompanying breath of refreshing insights from opening the various windows of the mind, can be achieved by having soulmates who are authors as gurus.

One action forward is to mindfully develop a personal culture of selecting and sharing books, which could help others to think, feel, and live better, more meaningfully.

labaiw@yahoo.com



Datuk Dr Ibrahim Ahmad Bajunid is deputy vice-chancellor of INTI Laureate International University