

NSTleader: Knowledge by degrees



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THEY must have told you this: do not teach grandmothers to suck eggs. This wisdom of old is no longer true. Because they do not make grandmothers or eggs like they used to. The former needs teaching, the latter learning about. Oh, what a wonder-filled world we live in! Education has become timeless.

And the great thing about education is this: with a generous amount of it, we can age gracefully. Forget the Botox! Go get a good education. See ma, no wrinkles. Ask Tun Daim Zainuddin. Yesterday, he received his PhD from the premier ivory tower around the corner, UniversitiMalaya. At all of 81.

Education does goodly great things to you, besides arresting wrinkles. But be warned: it may cause greying of hair. Or worse, cause baldness. But then again it may be due to someone telling you jokes that make the hair drop. You get the drift. To return where we started, we need to trace our path back to the universities where we read for our first degree. Or elsewhere. Go to China if you must, if there is where knowledge resides. But just go.

Any degree will do, but we have a bias for philosophy. There are three reasons for this. One, at this age, you are old enough to handle deep questions. Be warned. Philosophy does push you to ask some really hard questions. Two, as some soul puts it, philosophy awakens the restlessness of reason. And it can be troubling.

Three, philosophy is arguably the only subject that animates debate. The NST, being itself a 24/7 forum, puts such deep and hard questions at the heart of the national debate. Our NST Insight will bear this out. Now you know why we lean towards philosophy. But we must do more than read philosophy.

We must do it. Like the ancient Greeks — from Socrates downwards— did.

But without a great teacher, philosophy will lie buried between the pages of discoloured books. The world perhaps has a few, but one stands out. Michael Sandel's philosophy course at Harvard — Justice — is said to have inspired millions around the world. Thanks to YouTube.

These days you do not have to go to Harvard; it comes to you. In his philosophy class, Sandel helps us ask some really important questions that should concern us. One of which is: should there be things that money can't buy?

Today, the reach of the market is terrifying. Want a baby? Just get a surrogate mother from India to carry a pregnancy at US\$6,250 (RM26,187). Want the right to contribute to global warming? Just pay US\$18 (RM75) for a tonne of carbon under the European Union carbon emission market in 2012 prices.

Want a place in Ivy League university for your less than stellar child? Just show the money. The list goes on. The free market capitalists have left a mark, and not a good one at that. But it is for you, as students of philosophy, to argue the moral limits of the market.

Our view is clear: there are things that should not be for sale. The market should have listened to The Beatles' Can't Buy Me Love. It didn't listen then. And it is not listening now.