

18/10/2003

`Science, spiritual truth walk together'

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IN one of his last public appearances as Prime Minister, Datul Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad made it quite clear that he believed in, and drew strength and inspiration from, divine intelligence.

He regretted that there were sections of the Muslim community who feared to lose their faith in God by pursuing higher levels of science and technology. "The opposite is the case. Science does actually reinforce our faith in Allah," he told a gathering of scientists and captains of industry attending the official launch of InventQjaya last Saturday.

IQJ is a world-class laboratory in Cyberjaya established by Reveo of US in a joint venture with the Malaysian Government. Its mission? To bring the spirit of Thomas Edison to Cyberjaya by motivating Malaysians to become world-class inventors.

Dr Mahathir believes science and spiritual truth are walking hand in hand, rapidly approaching that point where the visible becomes the invisible. That God is working through us. "Some scientists," he said, "want to play God. But when they are asked to explain the real reason for their success, they attribute it to nature. What is nature? No answer."

Although he was trained as a scientist, Dr. Mahathir stressed that he had not lost faith in God. "In fact," he added, "my training has helped to strengthen my belief in Allah. If you appreciate the vastness of the Universe, you will know how little and insignificant we all are. This alone should make us a little more humble in the eyes of the Almighty."

The sceptics would argue that mystical expressions are ineffable, meaning that they cannot be expressed. But wait a minute. What about Michelangelo's mystical experience in the Sistine Chapel ceiling? What about Albert Einstein's expression of the divine mind through the theory of relativity?

Then, what about Helen Keller? She was deaf and dumb. But that did not stop her from becoming an internationally recognised writer.

What's intriguing is that one does not have to be a top scientist before coming up with innovative ideas. Thomas Edison whose spirit IQJ is striving to permeate Cyberjaya with, spent only three months in a public school. At the age of 12, he became a railroad newsboy. At 15, he worked by day as a telegraph operator - always studying and inventing in his spare time.

In 1868, at the age of 21, he patented his electrical vote recorder. He developed the old gramophone and the electric light bulb. When he died in 1931 at the age of 84, Edison had a total of 1,033 patents to his name. Amazing for someone who had little formal education.

History is filled with stories of ordinary people who had an idea and then applied their resources to make the idea a reality. British merchant Peter Durand made a huge stride in food preservation by developing the tin can in 1810. So grateful were the hungry soldiers in the frontline, and explorers, that no one really complained of the sweat and toil required to open the can!

As they say, necessity is the mother of invention. Ezra J. Warner of Waterbury, Connecticut, patented the first can opener. This was an intimidating combination of bayonet and sickle. Warner's invention was, nevertheless, adopted by the military during the Civil War. William Lyman's user-friendly model was introduced in 1870.

Actually, great ideas start with unique beginnings. For instance:

* Leo Gerstenzang thought of cotton buds when he saw his wife trying to clean their baby's ears with a toothpick and cotton.

* Oft Diffenbach came up with the cellophane soda straw when he twisted the wrapper from a cigarette pack and saw he had created a tube.

* Ole Evinrude got angry when the icecream in his rowboat melted before he got to his island picnic spot. So he invented his famous outboard motor.

* Ralph Schneider decided to form Diners Club one night after he had lost his wallet.

* Charles Strite was fuming at the burnt toast in the factory lunchroom where he worked - and thought up the automatic toaster

* Ira Hayes, former head of advertising at the National Cash Register suggests that everybody should possess an "idea-of-the-week" book. The movers and shakers of tomorrow, says Hayes, "will be those who have the resolve to write down an idea, despite its source and to keep trying it, despite any resistance".

Actually, ideas are more than information; they consist of information with legs attached. Doing something with your ideas is critical. An idea without legs is an exercise in futility.

That great motivational speaker, the late Norman Vincent Peale, was approached by a young man who wanted to start his own business, but lamented that he had no money. Peale told him: "Empty pockets never held anyone back. Only empty heads and empty hearts can do that."

History teaches us that ideas that have influenced our lives have sprung from people who were not concerned with what they lacked, but people who focused their attention and persistence on making their idea a success. Many of them believed in divine assistance.

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