

# **FREEDOM OF SPEECH:** **Theory and Practice from a Personal Experience**

**Source supported by  
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# Issues

- Is freedom of speech a choice in a modern society practising the model of democracy?
- Why must the free citizen practise it in lieu of perceived or obvious resistance from the state?
- How should freedom of speech be practised in a culture of racial and religious sensitivities?

# Messages

- Freedom of speech is NOT a choice but a requirement of free citizens.
- In a democracy the free citizen 'owns' the state apparatus.
- Simple rules of decorum, magnanimity and spiritual detachment must govern the will, the time, and the manner to speak.

# Why I practise freedom of speech?

- As an academic, I have been trained to see the root causes of things while others quarrel over symptoms of problems and issues. Who then is best to speak?
- In a democracy, the country is my responsibility as much as it is supposed to be the responsibility of the Elected Representative and the Civil Servant Institution.
- When the elected Representative and Civil Servant forget their place, the people need to remind them politely and in a determined manner.

## Cont' - Why I practise freedom of speech?

- As a parent, I want only the best things for my children and what must be theirs as a birthright; adequate and clean sustenance, shelter and room to grow physically and intellectually.
- As a Muslim, the Prophet reminds us that each of us will be asked of our responsibilities on this earth in a *Day of Accounting*. The Rich, The Leader and the Academic will be first.
- In truth, we are all somewhat rich, lead somebody and know some things and so ALL are accountable!

# What I Speak and Write About?

- Education: Our primary, secondary and tertiary education, once good and decent, now produce mindless graduates prepped for a slave task and trained to think in a coconut shell. I argue for a more enlightened graduate that is critical, socially malleable, politically conscious and spiritually aware of the concept of the 'Larger Self'.
- Safety of Our Children; Death in National Service, death in buildings, death in a man-made environment, death in traffic mishaps in cities.

## Cont' - What I Speak and Write About?

- Islam: I argue for a progressive, dynamic and inclusive Islam as opposed to the brand that treats others as enemies and 'filthy and stupid unbelievers'. I have read over 20,000 hadiths from Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud, Tirmidhi, Muwatta and Sirah Ibnu Ishak to know what is being practised as 'Islam' is no more than a social, cultural and political identity devoid of the spiritual wealth of the way of the Prophet.
- The religious scholars do not possess the modern thinking tools to adapt the traditional teachings into a nation-state concept. there are bringing a 'village mindset' and a tribal framework onto the global stage of politics, economy and social interaction.

## Cont' - What I Speak and Write About?

- I write about designing new mosques, schools, housing, universities and cities to suit a tropical, democratic, tolerant and harmonious society. Other academics care only about promotion points. Architects and planners treat design as a 'Job' bringing fees for their false lives. Authorities cannot see beyond the rule book which in essence are just guides.

# My Philosophy

- I believe that we are spiritual beings trapped in the world of selfish identities created by the mind and ego interpreting the information and fabrics of truth.
- We must unravel these false identities our minds and ego have created and outargue the falsehood of interpreted information and half-facts collected during our lives.
- This path moulds our soul into breaking the bonds and chains of false humanity into a being of compassion and acceptance. This is the original purpose of what is called 'religion' which have been bastardised into institutions serving selfish and cruel ends.

# Where do I Speak?

- Public talks at universities, Rotary clubs, institutions, and public gatherings
- Social science and architectural seminars
- Political gatherings
- Forum panelists
- Television interviews
- Newspaper columns, opinion, letters, articles
- Book publications by DBP, UTM, Gerakbudaya, Utusan, ITBM, Pearson, Partridge
- Radio - BFM

# Rules of Speaking

- One issue, one message and three points to explain the message.
- One point is weak, two points are watery, three points is 'fact'. Four Points and you risk people not remembering any!
- Do Not make jokes if you do not know how to measure the audience or you are not a 'famous' personality.
- Be Clear, Courteous and Use a Middle-Level Voice. Too Loud and you are an Ass (donkey). Too soft and you are unimportant and not worth listening to.
- Begin with the Message, Remind the Message and End with the Message; that's how 'dumb' the human mind is!

# Cont'- Rules of Speaking

- Always expand the issue and never get trapped by a single framework.
- Make a clear stand but emphasise the framework of thought.
- Don't bother with people who stigmatise you with the label 'controversial' when they don't like your statement and they cannot find any effective argument against it.
- End the speech with a different way of describing the issue and message.
- Provide a question mark to be answered in the future to leave the issue alive and ready for your next Invitation! A bait! No one issue can be resolved in a single speech.

# Example 1

- Question: Prof, do you think that the vernacular and religious schools will destroy this nation's basic principle of harmonious living?
- Answer: First of all, I think that both vernacular schools and religious schools in Malaysia have historically given many contributions to the country in terms of producing good people of strong values. However, when we formed Malaysia, there is a need to integrate education so that we could know each other better. I think the national school is an important vehicle for unity but it needs to address many more issues that each different faith and culture are concerned with.

# Analysis

- avoid agreeing to the statement although you agree on much to it.
- rephrase the statement within the question of education and unity.
- praise the historical importance and roles of the vernacular and religious schools.
- ultimately mention that we need one stream of school but with a much-improved curriculum related to culture, language and religion.

# Example 2

- Question: Prof, do you think it was fair that the 5 student activists be disciplined by the UM administration?
- Answer: Well, I do not know what you meant by the phrase 'student activists' but I view that one of the most important aspects of university education is awareness of politics, economy and issues affecting society. I consider students who are aware of these developments in society as future leaders that we should nurture. There are ways in which students could engage society on these issues that would serve UM well as a traditional bastion of education producing leaders of this nation. Being critical of issues is part of a good educational culture or else we would only have engineers, architects and doctors who are no more than robots or tools and not thinking human beings.

# Analysis

- the answer is in agreement that UM was unfair to discipline the students.
- avoid being trapped by the term 'activists' or else authorities will say you are a radical.
- opening up the issue of students with a critical mind are the future leaders.
- reminding the whole purpose of education is to train graduates to think critically and creatively...not just toe the line like lambs to a slaughterhouse.

# Example 3

- Question: Research has been criticised by civil groups to be self-serving and elitist in Malaysia. So, Prof, how do you respond to such criticism?
- Answer: In traditional terms, the research seeks ultimately the betterment of society through tedious and hardworking efforts by academics working quietly in the background of society. I think the public universities were responsible to deliver much that was demanded of the nation in the last 50 years. The concern of civil society is important as it shows that though much research was done, hardly any seem to be publicised to the general public. I think the issue is in public communication rather than questionable academic practices.

# Analysis

- the comment was basically in agreement with the civil groups' position.
- the way to criticise is to NOT look like criticism by opening up first the responsibility of academia to the public interest.
- by praising public universities for their vast contribution, it is now safe to criticise academics for ignoring to publicise their research to society and just do research for their own self-interest.

# Exercising Silence

- Freedom of Speech also involves the crucial knowledge and attitude of when to be silent.
- When you gauge that any statement will further deteriorate the situation, refrain from speaking.
- When there are obvious threats that would lead to physical and social harm to you or your supporters, do not speak.
- When criticising one group of people, look first before leaping. Who is supporting this group and what is their strength? If they are too strong, then live to speak another day.
- In a tit for tat situation decide when to stop speaking.
- When what you say is part of a bigger force in your favour, it is time to be spiritually silent. Do not let the ego have a field day.

# Cont'

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# Summary

- Freedom of speech is NEVER a choice, but a responsibility of the free citizen. When to speak and when to exercise silence is a tactical choice.
- If you are in a repressive regime, don't speak in public but exercise speaking in secret.
- Be generous, magnanimous, courteous and repetitive in a special way when making your statement.
- Open up the issue, make one statement only but explain clearly the framework of the statement.
- No need to be forceful. Let the audience decide themselves.
- In Islam, our role is just to speak clearly, we are not asked to know how much we have influenced people as that is a matter for God to decide.