

SPEECH AT THE FINAL YEAR LAW STUDENTS' (I.I.U.M.) ANNUAL DINNER

Hotel Sunway Lagoon Resort, Petaling Jaya
13 October 2003

I thank you all very much for inviting me and my wife to this dinner. It gives us great pleasure to be with you all on this happy and historic occasion.

You have just completed one phase of your life and are embarking on to another phase which I call "the real life." You will find it very different from your student life. You will find, among other things, that things you never thought were important, are important. You will find that, at times, you will have to be pragmatic rather than idealistic. You will find that, most of the time, you do not have the right to choose your boss but you will have to put up with him. You will find that knowing the law is not enough if you do not have the clients. You will find that, most of the time, you will be dealing with people, all kinds of people, including crooked ones, and not the law. In short, you should be prepared for some "cultural shocks" and adjust yourselves in order to fit yourselves into the system because, as you will discover, you cannot change the world. So, you have to learn to live with it.

We all miss Allah Yarham Tan Sri Harun Hashim dearly. I worked very closely with him for seven years when I was Deputy Registrar of High Court Malaya in late 70's and early 80's. One day, a new officer reported for duty. I could see that he had just returned from England. He was wearing a three-piece suit and "very English". I advised him to pay curtesy call on the Judges. On the following day, I happened to go and see Allah Yarham Tan Sri Harun Hashim over something. With a smile, he said to me, "So you have a new officer?" He paused for a while and then said: "We'll take the snow out of him!".

One of the first things you will learn when you start working is that you will know what you don't know. But, there is nothing unusual about it. On the other hand, what is dangerous is to be "ignorantly confident". In legal practice, no matter how long you have been at the job, whether as an advocate and solicitor, a legal adviser, a prosecutor or a judge, you will always come across things that you don't know. It is a continuous learning process. Especially when you are new, do not be ashamed to learn from anybody, no matter how low his position is in the office. There are a lot of things that are not to be found in the books that they, through experience, know.

We all remember Allah Yarham Prof. Tan Sri Ahmad Ibrahim as a very simple and humble person. Let me tell you about one incident. He taught me Revenue Law at the University of Singapore. Many years later, I met him at a function. He asked me: "Where are you now?" I replied: "At the Department of Inland

Revenue.” He said: “Good.” Then I said: “Prof., sorry, in spite of you I still don’t understand tax law”. He replied: “Don’t worry. I don’t understand it myself!”

In working life, there are times when you are required to do something by a certain dateline that you think is impossible to do. Under such circumstance, you have no choice but to somehow do it. Often, it will be done. Once, when I was a Deputy Registrar, at about 9.00 a.m. I was called by His Royal Highness Raja Azlan Shah, then Chief Justice, Malaya. He wanted me to draft a speech for him and he wanted it by 1.00 p.m. the same day. I asked him whether he could give me until 4.00 p.m. because I had about 20 chamber matters fixed before me that morning. He replied: “If you have no time, make time”. Somehow I did it and he was very pleased with the speech. Of course, I got more “assignments” after that.

One advice that Allah Yarham Tun Suffian gave me which I try my best to follow until today is this. He said: “If you have a choice between a bombastic word and a simple word, choose the simple word. If you have a choice between a long sentence and a short sentence, choose the short sentence. If you have some doubts, delete. No matter how long or how well you write, if people cannot understand you, it serves no purpose.”

You may wonder why I am quoting so many people who have passed away. Well, I think I should pass their wisdom to you while I am still around, because you would not find them in the books and I am sure you professors and lecturers too do not know them.

I was Chairman of the Advocates and Solicitors Disciplinary Board for two years. I found that, on the average, two complaints against lawyers were made every day, including Sundays and public holidays. Of course, some are without merits. But, what worried me was the number of complaints involving dishonesty, especially concerning client’s money. They can be classified into two categories. One, involving big amounts and more senior lawyers. The other involving small amounts and junior lawyers. The first category is motivated by greed. The second, by desperation.

One lawyer, on the day of his admission to the bar, was heard to say: “I’ll be a millionaire in two years.” Well, I do not know whether he did become a millionaire in two years. But, I know for sure that he was suspended within two years!

I remember reading one of the books written by Lord Denning and he said something like this: “During my early years at the bar, an advocate should be happy if in the first two years he could earn enough to buy two hot meals a day.” But, I do not think it is that bad here, partly because of the joint profession. You are both an advocate and a solicitor. So, even if nobody retains you to argue a case in court, you can still prepare tenancy agreements, send out notices of

demands and so on and, here, for about RM5.00 you can easily have *nasi campur* and teh tarik.

If you decide to practise, after you are called to the bar, I suggest that you work as an assistant in an established firm first and get some experience before you go on your own. There is too much risk if you go on your own without any experience in practice. Furthermore, do not be too easily tempted to accept offer of partnership, especially by a one-man firm unless you know that the firm's accounts are in order. As Chairman of the Disciplinary Board, I came across cases where, on admission to the bar, those fresh Bumiputra lawyers were offered partnerships by one-man firms. Of course they were happy to accept the offers. So, they became partners. But, except for the name, the firm continued to be run by the existing lawyer. Finance was handled by the "senior partner". The "junior partner" had no say at all in the running of the firm. Since the accounts were not properly kept, the firm could not produce an audited account at the end of the year. As a result, the innocent new partner could not renew his practising certificate. If money is missing from the clients' accounts, as a partner, he is liable too.

Let me not worry you all too much on this happy occasion. Challenges and problems there will be in whatever you do. Face them as they come. Be honest, but not naïve and work hard. There is no short cut to success. From my experience, I can say with confidence that, in the long run, it pays to be honest and to work hard.

I wish you all success in whatever you choose to do.

Thank you.