

What to do with all this knowledge and power?

by Mark Pavilons

?'Nam et ipsa scientia potestas est.'

This phrase, 'knowledge itself is power,' was first penned by Francis Bacon in 1597.

And, boy, have we come to know just how true that it is. Sure, in the 'right' hands, knowledge and power can do a lot of good. But in the 'wrong' hands, watch out!

What this means is that with sufficient knowledge as a tool, we can accomplish anything. The flip side is the more knowledge people and bureaucracies acquire, the more they can exert power over the humble serfs.

I daydream about what to do with lottery proceeds and what I could accomplish with superhuman powers. I'dream of dashing off into the far reaches of the galaxy, to explore, make contact.

The human mind is capable of a great many things. Dreaming is one of them. Nothing tastes as good as boundless imagination and fostering talent.

Nothing reads as well as a personal, non-fiction tale written with heart and soul.

Knowledge is a tricky substance. How would you define it?

Is it book smarts, taking mountains of facts, figures, diagrams, mathematical formulas and applying them to real world situations? Is it innate instinct contained in our very DNA, passed on from our ancestors? Is it a gut feeling or intuition? Is it wisdom gained through living life, encountering hurdles, challenges and life-altering circumstances?

It's likely all of the above.

It's relatively easy to point to thousands of objects, devices and tools that were invented and created to make life easier and better. All of these gizmos required scientific knowledge, even complex math formulas.

Knowledge of history makes us aware of our troubled past, and how we evolved and trudged along through the millennia of mud. It's supposed to teach us valuable lessons, things we dare not repeat lest we be judged.

And yet, conflict, petty grievances, land disputes and economic disparity are as common today as they were thousands of years ago.

Is no one reading history texts anymore? How are these lessons escaping our grasp?

Mathematics is pretty straightforward, unless you want to discuss and debate quantum physics, quarks, black holes and string theory.

Our competency in economics gives us the power and strength to make sound financial decisions. Ideally, governments and institutions use this economic prowess to contribute to individual and collective economic prosperity and economic growth.

I haven't looked at the latest debt or deficit figures, but I'm sure red ink abounds across the board. The pandemic laid waste to many financial projections.

The pandemic has kicked almost every country on the planet in the gut. Some say it will be many years before we fully recover, or

bounce back to pre-pandemic levels.

With a basic knowledge of math and economics, I can balance the books on the home front. I can keep track of mortgage payments, credit card bills and utility charges. I can manage, more or less.

Would profound economic knowledge make me a genius and a financial success? Would I be magically transformed into an investment guru? Unlikely.

In his sermon on March 20, 1925, Frederick Donaldson told the audience at Westminster Abbey that one of the social sins includes 'knowledge without character.'

We do have the ability to grow and once we 'know better' we can do better.

Socrates said he really can't teach anyone anything, but he can make them think.

Does it rest upon us then, to give others something new to think about?

Neil deGrasse Tyson said he strives to know more today than he did yesterday. And he also said knowledge should be used to lessen the suffering of others.

Smart man.

Today more than ever before we have access to facts, figures and endless information via the internet. We're bombarded by it and, as John Naisbitt observed, even though we're 'drowning' in information, we're 'starved for knowledge.'

Is it possible that we all this at our fingertips and yet we're actually getting dumber? Ruben Blades hints that we risk being the 'best informed society that has ever died of ignorance.'

It's almost like Wile E Coyote, who never seems to be able to catch the Roadrunner, no matter what he has at his disposal.

The best laid plans ...

Most of us love those trivia-based TV shows and marvel at the experts as they belt out tons of facts about this, that and the other. Many believe simply spouting off facts has little value, unless of course you're winning money on a game show!

But again, this isn't really 'knowledge' in the true sense. Maybe game shows should have hands-on experiments, forcing contestants to make a spewing volcano or create a solar-powered robot.

I understand that the world we created revolves around success, money, power and prestige.

Hopefully, before we wipe out the planet, we can come full circle, taking our abundant knowledge and using it for good, not evil.

Maybe some day, part of all job descriptions and our daily routines include provisions to 'make things better.'

What will you do with your knowledge today?