
Speech of Mr. Amos Shapira, President Elect
40th Meeting of the Board of Governors
Opening Plenary Session
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Vice Chairman of the Board of Governors, Professor Manfred Lahnstein; Chairman of the Executive Committee, Mr. Ami Ayalon; President of the University, Professor Aaron Ben-Ze'ev; Rector of the University, Professor David Faraggi; Members of the Board of Governors and the Executive Committee; Members of the University Management; Members of the Academic and Administrative Staff; Students

Dear Guests

First and foremost, I wish to convey my best wishes for a complete recovery to Chairman of the Board of Governors, Mr. Leon Charney. I am sure you all join me in sending this message to Leon.

A few minutes ago you put your trust in me and ratified my appointment as the next president of the University of Haifa. I thank you for your trust.

It is not something I take for granted. Even though I am a University alumnus, I have not grown up in academia. I am aware of the discussions within the walls of the University surrounding my appointment. It seems to me, that more than anything, this conversation – including voices from the opposition, only adds to the value of the University. It proves, above all, that this University is treasured by all members of the administrative and academic staff who deeply care who will be their president. And I am now obligated to prove to those who have entrusted me with the position, especially Mr. Ami Ayalon - Chairman of the Executive Committee, that they have not been mistaken.

In many ways, I feel like I have come home and I am feeling excitement and anticipation at this moment. I am a sixth generation Israeli-born son of settlers from the Galilee who lived in

this region of the country, with a desire to make it bloom and prosper for all those living there. They were people who invested their efforts in developing friendly neighborly relations between Jews and Arabs, who knew how to give respect to all people without consideration of religion, race, or gender.

In a short while, I am about to take upon myself the responsibility of a large and excellent academic institution in this very region of the country – an institution second to none in the entire country in terms of population composition : both students and employees.

About one hundred years ago my ancestors witnessed the realization of their dream. Their unwavering determination and hard work led to paved streets, and the blossoming of industrial and agricultural projects. Today, the vision of Israel is about paving highways of knowledge. One need not be a great strategist to understand that the State of Israel does not have a single advantage besides our brain power, creativity, and motivation. We certainly do not have economies of scale or the advantage of natural resources. We are, however, blessed with our human resources. That is exactly the reason why education in general and academic education and research in particular, are the critical components for guaranteeing the future of the State of Israel and that of our children.

In the past, I was Managing Director of three major companies, each one a leader in its own field. There are certainly qualifications I bring with me to this position but I also hope that I understand well the great difference between managing a company and managing an academic institution. Managing a business organization is motivated by the goal of profitability, subject to legal and ethical limitations. Decisions are taken and priorities are set in line with the stated goal. In a business organization, it is clear who the client is and who sets the goals.

Even though management methods of a business organization can be applied to managing a University, it still must be emphasized that a public research University in an enlightened

country must not be conducted as a “business” and make decisions according to profit and loss considerations. If, heaven forbid, this was the case - I would not take this position upon myself.

Academic freedom is the lifeline of academia, with research taking place within the walls of the University, motivated by curiosity and often without a clear, concrete goal.

Despite this, the academic institution is an organization managed and budgeted with regulatory processes, subject to budget restrictions that necessitate the ordering of priorities - just like any other organization. There is a clash between the magic of creative freedom or curiosity which leads to academic research AND the restrictions of a university organization. This is precisely the managerial challenge before me. We are obligated to confront this conflict and the resulting tension between the academic community and the external community that provides the University budget. We must make every effort to reduce this tension, despite our firm desire to maintain academic freedom.

As I stand here today, I look back on my years as a student at the University of Haifa. I owe great appreciation to those teachers who were here at the University of Haifa thirty-five years ago and imparted the skills I have today. These days, the University of Haifa trains a large portion of employees, managers and commanding officers in the State of Israel. The University has a responsibility to not only produce excellent research but also to produce excellent graduates, to broaden their abilities, develop their skills for independent learning and for analytical and critical thinking. I don't feel uncomfortable saying that we must strive to recruit the most excellent researchers, teachers and students and provide them with the most challenging and stimulating instruction. This is not elitist thinking - it is striving for excellence.

In every position I held in the past, as the leader of complex organizations, I faced significant challenges – and each one required revision at some point.

I am aware of the great responsibility placed on the head of an organization. It means duty, obligation, and without any privileges. I never believed I had greater knowledge than those who worked with me and I certainly don't believe so today. The role of a leader is not to produce solutions – his role is to build a staff and create a culture which encourages members of the organization to learn how to reach the best possible solutions. I am here for all of you, to be a part of you, to assist and support, to hear your advice and from time to time to ask those tough questions which are not always pleasant to ask.

The University of Haifa is facing significant challenges in a competitive environment where there is fierce competition for resources, for excellent researchers and for students. Sometimes, there is a tendency to look for magical solutions - for a breakthrough in dealing with the competition: A single activity which will bring about a dramatic change in the competitive environment. I am sorry to tell you that this type of phenomenon is extremely rare in the management world of the 21st century, an era in which information is accessible to all competitors. From a managerial standpoint, the name of the game is to run faster than the others and to develop the advantages of being smaller. In most circumstances, organizations that race ahead are those organizations which understand that relative advantage does not come about miraculously or from one idea or another. The relative advantage comes from hard work, greater motivation, teamwork and more effective work and management processes. It is commonly known as the “we just try harder” strategy.

But hard and effective work is not enough. An exciting story is needed which can link the internal and external environments to us. And the University of Haifa has such a story.

The University of Haifa has management, administrative and academic staffs with enormous potential for excellence in the areas of research and teaching. We have a wonderful and exciting story of a center of knowledge and research, here on Mount Carmel.

Our student population, more than any other academic institution, represents the Israeli society with all of its diversity: It truly is The Israeli Mosaic. This unique makeup is our great

asset for the purpose of training future employees and managers to succeed in the global, multi-cultural world we live in. The University of Haifa should not only reflect the Israeli multicultural and ethnic diversity but also take an active role in shaping the future of the Israeli society. I will embrace this mission, together with you, proudly every day, also on difficult days.

I would like to share with you the dream I have today. My dream is that, in the coming years, more and more excellent researchers from around the world will consider the University of Haifa as a place where groundbreaking research is taking place. They will join the University of Haifa family with its unique atmosphere of academic, moral, and cultural tolerance for all members of the diverse Israeli society. We will increasingly hear excellent employers and managers proudly say that they are University of Haifa graduates.

I will do everything possible, together with each and every one of you, to realize this dream and I hope not to disappoint you. It is clear to me that everything we will achieve together is very much due to the contributions and activities of my predecessors in the position, especially the efforts of the current president of the University, Professor Aaron Ben-Ze'ev.

I wish to conclude in three languages: English, Hebrew and Arabic, with a message I strongly believe in:

We have a wonderful country with superb people, and every day I feel blessed to be part of it. Let us ensure that our children and grandchildren will live in an even better country and society. This is also in our hands, and we, the University of Haifa, have an important role in achieving this mission.

יש לנו מדינה נהדרת ואנשים נפלאים, ומדי יום אני מברך על כי נפלה בידי הזכות להיות חלק ממנה. בואו נבטיח כי ילדינו ונכדינו יחיו במדינה ובחברה טובות עוד יותר. זה גם בידינו, ולנו, לאוניברסיטת חיפה, תפקיד חשוב בהגשמת משימה זאת.



In Arabic:

لدينا بلاد / دوله رائعه, ولدينا أناس ممتازون
وكل يوم أشعر أنني بوركنت لكوني جزءاً منها
تعالوا نعمل على أن يحيى أولادنا في بلاد ومجتمع حتى أفضل من هذا
هذا أيضاً بأيدينا, ولنا, نحن في جامعة حيفا, دورٌ هامٌ في إنجاز هذه المهمه

Thank you.