

June 1, 2013, Address to University of Haifa Board of Governors

Alfred I. Tauber

Members of the Board of Governors, I salute you! I pledge that I will commit myself full-heartedly to promote the University of Haifa, and that I will endeavor to bring all of my personal experience and my professional and philanthropic resources to help guide us towards the next phase of this great University. It is a wonderful honor to be chosen to lead this august group. I deeply appreciate your confidence, which has been given in trust. I hope to earn that trust as quickly as possible.

Let me begin by offering my personal gratitude to Manfred Lahnstein, whose generosity and wise counsel has been so important for the University of Haifa for many years. I am delighted that you will remain active in our Board and I welcome the opportunity of working with you in the years to come.

In the next few minutes, allow me to present the Board with a general outline of how I regard our collective opportunity, and privilege, to contribute to an on-going experiment. That experiment is still young and vibrant; it still evokes sparkling excitement; it has yet to fully articulate its promise as a model for Israeli society. The very architecture of the University expresses our aspirations: Those who built Eshkol Tower, I believe, understood that they were erecting a Beacon, a lighted portal to Israel.

*Here* is the University of Haifa; *here* is Haifa; *here* is ha-Aretz. We are now engaged in continuing to build that Beacon, to build it institutionally; to build it socially, and to build it academically.

The university is a kind of utopia, but remember that "utopia" means "no- where." The word was coined by Thomas More at the dawn of the modern period, and the book he authored was both a

critique of his own society, as well as a declaration of reform. The university is, in some sense, the closest we have to a utopia. The dreams of reason and the works of creativity take place in a protected environment. Our faculty are guided by the ideal of improving society in all of its various forms. The ideal is never fully realized, but the point of utopia is that we seek a better world. To achieve that goal, the work of the university must be relevant. It cannot be an isolated haven for dreamers. And here we come to the theme of my remarks: The University of Haifa has fully embraced the challenge of contributing to its larger society. The dreams begun here have filtered into the larger world and benefitted the country-at-large. This is a grand mission and I am proud to be part of it. Let me begin by voicing my full confidence in the administrative leadership of the University. A transition to a new President is always challenging, but Amos Shapira has already demonstrated his multiple capacities to lead the faculty and staff at this critical juncture. Changes are occurring and new initiatives are moving forward rapidly. Fortunately, a resourceful Executive Committee, under the inspiring leadership of Ami Ayalon, provides the necessary sounding board and partner in the dialogue required to lead this great institution. I am so pleased to join them, and I trust that our collective efforts towards realizing a shared vision will be successful. Their vision coincides with my own, and their aspirations are not modest. We are all committed to Big Ideas.

I will not offer a specific list of the University's recent accomplishments nor will I outline the various opportunities on the horizon. That is the substance of the President's message to you. Instead, I want to suggest how we, as a Board, might conceive our own role. So let me briefly outline my vision of the University and why I believe that this is a particularly auspicious time for all of us to

join ranks and to put forth a sustained collective effort to communicate our goals to those whose support we seek.

Most would agree that the University is about research and education. But what do 'research' and 'education' mean? The University is most broadly conceived around two fundamental missions: 1) enriching the economy of ideas, and 2) strengthening moral values, which include civic standards, social ideals, and the values which underlie the use and acquisition of knowledge. In the first case, our faculty produce new ideas and communicate them. They also teach about established ideas within various traditions, both cultural and intellectual. The university thus serves as a nodal point in an intricate network for the transport of ideas: Like an airport or a train station, we become a place where exchanges occur, specifically the movement of ideas. This is a unique kind of social transport. The university, accordingly, serves to educate those who will use these ideas or teach them how to create new ones. On this broad view, research of all kinds, scientific and other, serves a vital part in a larger educational enterprise.

Besides sponsoring new scientific research like the marine center and the bioinformatics center, Haifa has another important role as a unique generator of civic and political ideas, ideas that present a progressive model for Israeli society. This brings me to the second great mission of the university, namely, its transmission of moral values. The university has always been a place where values are debated and where the exercise of ways of thinking about values are enacted. Teaching about the parameters of truth and objectivity, for instance, is fundamental to everything social: respecting various opinions as a value is the basis of academic freedom, and of freedom more broadly



understood. The notions of exercising free speech and of respecting that of others is the basis of any discourse taught in the classroom. Precisely because of Haifa's unique population of students and faculty, it provides a social and institutional framework for exploring the values that underlie any vital democracy and thus sustains its successful functioning. You see where I am going: Israel needs more of what I will call, "liberal education." Upon that platform, the University of Haifa has a special calling. We are in a position to proclaim a clear agenda and to project our mission not only as important, but also as critical for our historical moment. Our University is strategically placed to make its core mission the education of *all* citizens. This is education in the full sense already outlined as the transmission of ideas and values. To achieve these larger goals, we must be *excellent*. But what does *excellence* mean? How is it measured? What standards are applied? These are pressing questions, because the University has limited resources and must allocate them strategically. Prioritization is an on-going process of measurement and deliberation. Indeed, much of the work of the President, Rector and Deans is devoted to deciding how to build the university; where to invest; where to expand; where to reform. It is not my place to enter that discussion, but I do offer the following observation:

Excellence is a *value*. It is the orientation, which guides all of our aspirations for the University, and as Governors we are vitally interested that our goals are not only attained, but that they are worthy of our efforts. While we will be measured in comparison to other institutions, and rightly so, we also have our own notions of how the University of Haifa might best contribute to Israeli society. In this regard, excellence for us must, at least in part, be self-defined and executed with the particular

needs of our students and the city in which we live upper-most in our collective mind. As we make difficult choices, we are guided by the mandate of active leadership. Simple, the University has a significant social responsibility.

The University of Haifa has enormous potential for nationwide civic leadership because of its unique ethnic and religious composition. This particular demography offers our faculty an important cultural and political resource for achieving a more fully integrated Israel. I think the University must capitalize on this opportunity by emphasizing its past accomplishments in this regard and its hopes for the future. In the coming months, we will develop a clear message about the University's impact on the betterment of Israeli social and political life. We will work with the Administration on how to effectively convey that message, which may be summarized as follows:

We have an integrated academic faculty and student body, one which fosters an environment of cooperation, mutual respect, and social progress. This is a noteworthy accomplishment. We can present our university as an incubator of the best in Israeli society. Obviously Israelis take great pride in being the start-up nation, but important innovations are more than just technological. Israel also has a vibrant social economy as well, one in which we are guided by the value of diversity and by the commitment to providing opportunity for all. That message is the foundation of our effort to present the University as the matrix for new ideas and for new ways of thinking about Israel in terms of values that all its citizens might embrace.

The 18,000 persons enrolled here comprise the most diversified student population in the nation. A disproportionate number are drawn from Israel's lower economic strata. The academic

excellence of the University has developed in part in response to the needs of its constituents. We have a deep commitment to social justice and to the goal of making our democratic ideals a reality for those who have not as yet benefitted from the opportunities that advanced education bestows. Upon this long-standing tradition, the University must launch anew its message of social justice and educational advancement. It can thereby serve as a model institution for Israeli democratic ideals. This commitment does not divide right and left, for all of us realize that our future depends on finding ways that all segments of our own people might live together in prosperity.

Is this just abstract posturing? No! I am speaking of the core values of the University of Haifa.

When you ask for donations, it is you who truly have something powerful to offer. When you yourself contribute, your gift has tremendous meaning and impact. We are part of something important. We need a Board committed to the ideals that we see embodied in this institution; we need Governors who feel an abiding dedication to the University's goals, and to its innovative programs, which can have such a positive influence on Israeli society. We celebrate the University's democratic values, which join together all ethnic and religious groups and which emphasize the profound benefits of civic integration. In short, we are privileged to represent the University of Haifa, which not only has many strengths in research and in education, but which also, socially and politically, stands as a Beacon upon the Hill. When people lift their eyes to view the Haifa sky, it is our Tower they see. It is a tower of opportunity, of social justice, and of community. This Board has the privilege to strengthen this vision and to communicate it to others. I enjoy you to take great pride in your affiliation and to renew your own commitments to strengthening this institution.

I appreciate your attention and I look forward to getting to know each of you as we exchange ideas and explore new opportunities together. Such dialogues are very important, for they refresh each of us as we seek to contribute to this vast and vital project of innovation and renewal. From strength to strength we enter the next phase. I hope that you share my excitement. Thank you for the opportunity to serve in this joint enterprise.