



TUFTS UNIVERSITY

Office of the President

August 22, 1994

Mr. Stephen M. Stern
2018 Baltimore Road #J41
Rockville, MD 20851

Dear Mr. Stern:

I am pleased to report that we have (at long last) tracked down a copy of Elie Wiesel's 1986 Commencement address. As you noted, it is quite an inspirational speech, and I am happy to be able to provide you with a copy.

Thank you for your patience and persistence.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Cooke Ryan
Executive Assistant
to the President

KCR/pmb

Enclosure

TUFTS COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

- BY ELIE WIESEL -

(5/13/86)

MAY I TELL YOU HOW DEEPLY GRATEFUL I AM TO YOU, PRESIDENT MAYER, AND TO YOUR DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUES ON THE FACULTY, FOR BESTOWING THIS HONOR UPON ME TODAY? AND TO YOU, GRADUATING STUDENTS, FOR ALLOWING ME TO TAKE PART IN YOUR JOY AND PRIDE?

ARE YOU GOING TO MISS YOUR FRIENDS AND YOUR TEACHERS? THEY WILL MISS YOU. AS A TEACHER, I KNOW HOW ATTACHED ONE CAN BECOME TO HIS OR HER PUPILS. THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP, WHEN IT REALLY EXISTS, IS OF A SINGULAR CHARACTER. I KNOW--BECAUSE I AM ALSO A STUDENT. NOW YOU CAN IMAGINE MY RELATIONSHIP TO MYSELF...

A JEWELER, IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FRANKFURT, GAVE THE FOLLOWING PROFESSIONAL ADVICE TO HIS SUCCESSORS: WHO IS A GOOD BUSINESSMAN? SOMEONE WHO OWNS A JEWEL AND SELLS IT TO SOMEONE WHO WANTS IT? THAT IS NO BIG ACHIEVEMENT. SELL A JEWEL THAT YOU DO NOT OWN TO SOMEONE WHO DOES NOT WANT IT--THEN YOU ARE A BUSINESSMAN.

WELL--THIS MAY BE TRUE IN BUSINESS, BUT NOT IN THE FIELD OF STUDY. TEACHERS MUST POSSESS KNOWLEDGE AND THEIR STUDENTS MUST BE EAGER TO ACQUIRE IT. CLEARLY, THIS WAS--AND REMAINS--THE SITUATION HERE, AT THIS REMARKABLE AND RENOWNED INSTITUTION FOR HIGHER LEARNING. YOU HAVE RECEIVED MUCH FROM YOUR TEACHERS; WHAT COULD I POSSIBLY ADD TO THEIR OFFERINGS?

MAY I SHARE WITH YOU--BRIEFLY--SOME OF THE THINGS I HAVE LEARNED? FIRSTLY, I LEARNED THAT KNOWLEDGE LIKE EXPERIENCE MUST BE SHARED.

MAY 18 HAPPENS TO BE AN IMPORTANT DATE IN MY LIFE. ON THAT DAY--ON THAT NIGHT--THE LAST JEWS OF MY TOWN HAD ARRIVED INTO A NOCTURNAL KINGDOM OF MALEDICTION. I WAS YOUNG--YOUNGER THAN YOU ARE NOW. IT WAS MY FIRST JOURNEY ABROAD. MY FIRST SEPARATION. MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE ANGEL OF DEATH. I SAW THE PROCESSIONS, I SAW THE FLAMES. I COULD NOT UNDERSTAND: WHAT WAS THE MEANING OF ALL THAT? I STILL DON'T UNDERSTAND. I THINK I NEVER WILL. ALL THE QUESTIONS I CONFRONTED THEN REMAINED OPEN--OPEN LIKE BURNING SCARS. THE CALCULATED BRUTALITY OF THE KILLER, THE HUMANITY OF THE VICTIM. THE SILENCE OF THE WORLD SURROUNDING THE WORLD OF SILENCE. THE INDIFFERENCE OF SO MANY, IN SO MANY HIGH PLACES.

I REMEMBER THE FIRST NIGHT. I SAW THOUSANDS AND THOUSANDS OF JEWS, YOUNG AND OLD, PIOUS AND SECULAR, SPEAKING ALL TONGUES, MARCHING QUIETLY, DESPAIRINGLY, TOWARDS THE FIERY HORIZON--AND A STRANGE FEAR INVADED ME: WAS IT THE END OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE? LATER I UNDERSTOOD: IT WAS THE END OF THE WORLD--OF A WORLD.

AND YET, ON ITS RUINS WE TRIED TO BUILD NEW HOPES. IT IS A PARADOX, BUT IN 1945 WE WERE HOPEFUL. I WAS. I WAS BOTH DESPERATE AND HOPEFUL. I WAS CONVINCED THAT AFTER WHAT HAPPENED HUMANKIND WOULD KNOW THE WAY TO REDEMPTION. NO MORE WAR. NO MORE TORTURE. NO MORE HUMILIATION. NO MORE RACISM, FANATICISM, ANTISEMITISM, NO MORE ETHNIC OR RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION.

I WAS NAIVE. LOOK AROUND YOU. TWENTY-FIVE MILLION PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED IN WAR SINCE 1945. TERRORISM HAS BECOME A UNIVERSAL THREAT. TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN DIE OF HUNGER IN AFRICA AND ASIA. EXTREMISTS GAIN GROUND ON THE RIGHT AND ON THE LEFT. THE SHAME OF APARTHEID IS CONTINUING. IN AUSTRIA, 49 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION VOTED FOR A MAN WHO SOUGHT REFUGE IN OBLIVION. THREE MILLION FRENCH-

MEN VOTED FOR A GROUP THAT IS CLOSE TO PSEUDO-FASCISM. IN GERMANY, A MAYOR OF A SMALL CITY SAID: LET US KILL A FEW RICH JEWS AND BALANCE THE BUDGET. AND THEN, THERE IS THE NUCLEAR MENACE. JUST THINK OF THE CHALLENGER HERE, AND OF CHERNOBYL IN THE UKRAINE. ACCIDENTS ARE POSSIBLE. WILL THEY BE PREVENTED FOREVER?

AND YET, AND YET. THERE ARE REASONS TO LOSE COURAGE. BUT WE MUST NOT LOSE COURAGE. THERE ARE REASONS TO DESPAIR. BUT WE MUST INVENT HOPE. THAT TOO IS SOMETHING WE HAVE LEARNED--TOGETHER.

WE HAVE LEARNED THE IMPORTANCE OF INVOLVEMENT AND COMMITMENT. INDIVIDUALS DO HAVE AN EFFECT ON HISTORY. SMALL GESTURES DO MATTER. DURING THE WAR, IT WAS ENOUGH FOR SIMPLE MEN OR WOMEN TO OPEN A DOOR, TO OFFER A PIECE OF BREAD, TO HAVE THE COURAGE TO CARE, AND HUMAN LIVES WERE SAVED. WE MAY NOT BE ABLE TO ALTER THE COURSE OF DESTINY, BUT WE CAN CHANGE THE LIFE OF A PERSON.

WE HAVE ALSO LEARNED THAT NEUTRALITY IS A SIN. IT NEVER HELPS THE VICTIM, IT ONLY HELPS THE VICTIMIZER.

WE HAVE LEARNED THAT INDIFFERENCE TO EVIL IS EVIL. TO BE INDIFFERENT TO ONE INJUSTICE IS TO BE INDIFFERENT TO ALL INJUSTICES. REMEMBER: THE OPPOSITE OF LOVE IS NOT HATE BUT INDIFFERENCE. THE OPPOSITE OF ART IS NOT UGLINESS BUT INDIFFERENCE. THE OPPOSITE OF FAITH IS NOT ARROGANCE BUT INDIFFERENCE. THE OPPOSITE OF LIFE IS NOT DEATH BUT INDIFFERENCE TO BOTH LIFE AND DEATH.

WHATEVER WE HAVE LEARNED WAS MEANT TO BE A COMBAT AGAINST INDIFFERENCE. AGAINST INSENSITIVITY. AND WE WERE GIVEN TO ENJOY SOME MEASURE OF VICTORY. WERE IT NOT FOR OUR PROTEST, SOVIET JEWS WOULD HAVE BEEN ABANDONED. WERE IT NOT FOR OUR OUTCRIES, MANY POLITICAL PRISONERS WOULD STILL BE IN THEIR PRISONS.

AND SO, IN CONCLUSION, BEFORE CONGRATULATING YOU FOR YOUR ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, MAY I TELL YOU ONE MORE STORY? IT HAS BEEN MY FAVORITE FOR SOME TIME.

AN EMPEROR SENT FOR A CELEBRATED TALMUDIC SAGE AND TOLD HIM: I HAVE HEARD MUCH ABOUT YOU. I AM TOLD THAT YOU ARE A GREAT SCHOLAR, AN EXPERT IN MANY FIELDS, A TEACHER OF MANY STUDENTS. I AM TO BELIEVE THAT YOU ARE ENDOWED WITH SECRET POWERS THAT ENABLE YOU TO READ OTHER PEOPLE'S MINDS. PROVE IT. TELL ME WHETHER THE BIRD IN MY HANDS, BEHIND MY BACK, IS ALIVE OR NOT. AFRAID THAT BECAUSE OF A WORD HE MIGHT SAY, THE BIRD, IF ALIVE, MIGHT DIE, THE OLD SAGE KEPT SILENT FOR A LONG MOMENT. THEN HE TURNED TO THE EMPEROR, LOOKED HIM STRAIGHT IN THE EYES, SMILED AND SAID: MAJESTY, THE ANSWER IS IN YOUR HANDS. *Midrash Genesis Rabbah*

WELL--THAT GOES FOR ALL OF US. THE ANSWER IS IN OUR HANDS.