

## Rabbi David Ellenson's Eulogy for Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk

In the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides writes of the respect that marks the relationship and the feelings that bind the student to his rabbi, and he instructs the student on the actions he must take and the emotions he will suffer upon the death of his *rav*. In *Hilchot Talmud Torah*, he states, ““*V’ein l’kha kavod gadol michvoid harav v’lo mora mei-mora harav – Amru hachamim mora harav k’mora shamyim* – There is no greater honor you possess and can display than the honor you possess and display for your rabbi, and there is no reverence that you can possess and display than the reverence you possess and display towards your rabbi. As our Sages have said, ‘The respect and awe you display towards your rabbi is identical to that which you must display towards Heaven.’” No wonder that Maimonides therefore observes, “*U’khe’she-yamut rabo, kore’a kol b’gadav ‘ad she-hu m’ga’leh et libo ...* – And when his rabbi dies, the student tears his clothes until he reveals his heart, and the tear remains forever.”

For me, and for thousands of others, no rabbi commanded greater respect and awe than *mori v’rabi*, my teacher and my Rabbi, *moreinu v’rabeinu* – our Teacher and our Rabbi -- Alfred Gottschalk, and his death leaves us bereft and forlorn. His life was a remarkable one, and his accomplishments legendary.

As has been said, this man – chased cruelly as a child from Nazi Germany – took refuge with his mother on these shores and through the inspiration and guidance of his congregational rabbi and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise came to enroll in the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Upon his ordination by Rabbi Nelson Glueck in Cincinnati in 1957, Dr. Gottschalk was assigned by Dr. Glueck to move to Los Angeles where he became the Dean of the still-fledgling Los Angeles campus of HUC-JIR. Charged by Dr. Glueck to make this campus grow, the Los Angeles school flourished and ultimately moved from its small campus in the hills of Los Angeles on Appian Way to the campus of the University of Southern California (USC). There Dr. Gottschalk received his doctorate in Religion for a work on *Ahad Haam*, the great cultural Zionist. This man was to remain a focal point of intellectual interest and spiritual guidance for him all his life, and he managed to continue his researches in this area even as he maintained an active administrative and public career as the architect of HUC and as a leader of the Jewish people.

Under his guidance, HUC-JIR in Los Angeles forged an unparalleled relationship with USC and provided Judaic Studies for the students of that secular university. Today more than 650 students every year study in the courses provided by the faculty of the College-Institute. In addition, a course of rabbinical study was initiated there while he was Dean, and the Rhea Hirsch School of Education and the School of Jewish Communal Service were created to provide educational and communal leadership for both the Reform Movement and in accord with his vision of commitment to *Klal Yisrael* for the larger Jewish world.

These accomplishments led to his appointment as President of HUC-JIR upon the passing of his mentor Rabbi Nelson Glueck, and it was here in Cincinnati, where he moved after his years as Dean of the Los Angeles school, that the greatest deeds of his life unfolded. As President of HUC-JIR, Rabbi Gottschalk, over not inconsiderable protest, ordained the first woman – Sally Priesand – as rabbi among the Jewish people and it was here during his Administration that the Graduate School, in which he took such pride, thrived as a center of advanced academic study for Jewish and Christian students alike. Dr. Gottschalk was a builder, and the scope of his vision, caused him to work with men such as his colleague Rabbi Paul Steinberg and Board Chair Jules Bachman to move the New York campus from its building on West 68<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan to our current quarters on West 4<sup>th</sup> Street adjacent to New York University. And his breadth of concern and commitment caused him to turn his gaze to his beloved Jerusalem, where, building upon the work of his teacher and predecessor Nelson Glueck and with the partnership of Chairmen of the Board such as Richard Scheuer and Stanley Gold, Dr. Gottschalk dramatically expanded the buildings and programs of our Israel campus. It was he who ordained the first Israeli Reform Rabbi on Israeli soil in 1980. In 1992, 20 years after he had ordained Rabbi Priesand here on this *bimah* where I stand at this moment, that Dr. Gottschalk ordained the first woman as a rabbi on Israeli soil as well.

These facts about his Presidency at HUC-JIR, a presidency that lasted a quarter century, do not even begin to describe the influence he exerted and the devotion he commanded from the more than 1000 men and women he ordained as rabbi -- while looking at each of us with his piercing blue eyes and asking us at the moment of ordination whether we were prepared to serve God and the Jewish people -- and the thousands of others he taught and guided through the programs provided by this school on its four campuses during those years. His reach and influence were legion, and he was the friend and confidant of countless political and religious leaders of all faiths and persuasions both here in Cincinnati and throughout the world. As a member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council and as President of the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City, a post he assumed while serving as Chancellor of the College-Institute after his retirement as President of HUC-JIR, he affected the lives of thousands of individuals.

I could go on in this vein for hours, and I could still never exhaust the public record and accomplishments that were those of my teacher, our teacher. His is a life that will be worthy of articles, dissertations, and books. However, in reflecting upon Dr. Gottschalk and his life on this occasion, I would attempt to speak for a few moments about the man and what those qualities were that marked his career of public leadership. As I walked into his office last week in New York, and gazed upon the numerous pictures that were on his walls, I could not help but observe that among the pictures that hung there – pictures of Dr. Gottschalk with Cardinals and Popes, pictures of him with Presidents Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton – that the most prominent pictures of public figures that adorned his study were those of the founders and Prime Ministers of the State of Israel, as well as pictures of those men whom he most admired, Ahad Haam and Martin Buber. These pictures bespeak his values and his deepest commitments –

commitments to humanity, the Jewish people, the State of Israel, the life of the mind and the depth of the human spirit.

What events prompted these commitments, the fierce devotion he possessed to these values – commitments and devotions that led him to be our leader, our teacher, our mentor, our guide? In my mind, there are two stories I would now relate that provide a key to our understanding and appreciation, our own devotion and attachment to this man. Both tales relate to his childhood in Nazi Germany.

One is a story I heard him relate twenty years ago in Augsburg, Germany. The occasion was a conference convened on German soil by our revered teacher Jacob Petuchowski and several German Protestant and Catholic theologians on the theme of “*Versöhnung* – Atonement and Reconciliation.” The papers delivered at that conference by more than a dozen scholars were learned and erudite, as befits such occasions. However, it was the culminating speech that Dr. Gottschalk delivered at the end of the conference that remains blazed in my mind forever. It revealed a side of him, a burning essence to his being that I had never before observed. After a speaker just a moment before had taken the opportunity to offer a savage and uncalled for critique of the State of Israel, Dr. Gottschalk arose. Speaking in German, he began by saying that he felt that he perhaps he needed to apologize to the audience. After all, he was a Professor of Bible and Jewish Intellectual History, the President of the oldest and most venerable rabbinical seminary in North America. He said that his German should be sophisticated and fluent. And yet, he spoke a German, he said, that was more appropriate to a child, a German that you would have heard from a nine year old boy. He then paused, and dramatically declared that he would not apologize, and he told all of us in the audience, in a voice deep with emotion, a voice marked by the pent up sadness, humiliation, and fury of fifty years, of the day when he, as a nine year old boy, was sitting in his elementary school classroom and a Nazi policeman entered the room and declared, “All Jewish children – *raus!*” And he then repeated that word three times, each time in ascending volume – “**RAUS!!**”, “**Raus!!!**,” “**RAUS!!!!**” The room became silent, for Dr. Gottschalk had stated these words in a way that I can only describe as a primal scream. Hearing my teacher filled with such emotion and pain left me feeling shaken to the very core of my being. At the same time, it filled me with respect and understanding, and I knew that so much of his life’s work on behalf of the Jewish people and humanity was motivated and had its source in this incident. This speech and the unbridled pain he displayed frightened me. It also evoked love and admiration.

The other story I would relate is one that I know is familiar to many, because he told it to each of us whom he ordained as rabbi each year as a class on the day before our ordination. It has been reported in newspapers often these past two days, but it bears repetition at this moment because this story provides the primary trope for understanding the shape and direction of his life. The story took place right after November 9-10, 1938 -- Kristallnacht, the night of broken glass when Nazi hoodlums looted and destroyed Jewish buildings, stores, and synagogues throughout Germany and Austria. Dr. Gottschalk was then a young boy eight years of age. He told us how these Nazi thugs destroyed and ripped apart the precious scrolls of Torah that rested in the ark of his

synagogue and tossed them into the river. And he told us how in the morning after this this obscene destruction, he along with his grandfather fished the wet and torn parchments of these holy scrolls from the river and how he was told by his grandfather that it was his obligation to preserve and protect those pieces of parchments and sew them back together. Indeed, this story provides the metaphor for comprehending his life. It was the narrative that would provide the framework for his being, for his would ever after be a career of repair and preservation for the Jewish people and humanity.

We have all been blessed to have had known Alfred Gottschalk. It is an honor bestowed upon us that we have the privilege to remember him here and to say farewell to his physical presence.

In II Samuel, Chapter 1, we read that when David learned of the death of Saul and Jonathan, he said, “Your glory, O Israel, lies dead on your heights. How the mighty have fallen. They were swifter than eagles, stronger than lions.” And when, two chapters later, David learned of the death of Abner, he proclaimed to his soldiers and all of Israel, “You well know that a prince, a great man in Israel, has died this day.”

All of us know that Alfred Gottschalk was “swifter than an eagle, stronger than a lion” in life. He was a prince in Israel. Our hearts are torn, and they will remain so. We will not see his like again anytime soon. And yet we give thanks even at this moment of pain for the legacy that is his and for the privilege we had to know him.

*Tzaddikim b'mitatom hayyim heim* – the righteous even in death live on in their words and deeds. *Y'hi zichro baruch* – may the memory of my teacher Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk continue to shine out beyond the grave and bless us all.