

## **Eulogy for Dr. Alfred Gottschalk**

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I first met Dr. Alfred Gottschalk nearly thirty years ago. As a twenty year old rabbinic student, I was nervous, for he was already a towering figure with an international reputation. But even in those first moments, I was struck by three physical characteristics. Through the years, as he became my teacher, and then my friend, I came to realize that those three characteristics were in fact, a physical mirror of his character and indeed, of his soul.

The first trait I noticed was the commanding presence that was Dr. Alfred Gottschalk. We marveled at his unmatched ability as an orator, who spoke with deep substance on so many topics, and without a note. It was always a joy in watching his great mind at work, at his capacity to tell a story, to teach, to inspire, to inform, to challenge, all with a powerful oratory. But through the years, I came to the deeper understanding that with Fred Gottschalk, the man and the message were one, true extensions of one another. There was genuineness to what we heard in his words, and saw in his deeds. Fred's commanding presence could also be seen in his high expectations. He could be demanding of others, just as he was of himself, but he was always good to his word, and did not let people down. Those who worked closely with him through the years remained devoted to him. And Fred's commanding presence also revealed a clear sense of strength. It was not only the physical strength demonstrated in his youth when he played football, and it was not only his towering physical stature. Beneath that physical strength was an indomitable strength of will, the same strength that enabled him to weather all of life's challenges and even its tragedies, as well as to feel such gratitude for life's blessings. But for Fred, even in loss, we all saw his driving sense of purpose, a strength that prevented him from succumbing to resignation or self pity. His tenacious strength of will always drew him to purposeful living, as he created, he shaped, he built, he renewed, and he enriched the causes and the people that mattered to him. When most people retire, Fred devoted himself to causes and institutions and to the community. And so he built a great institution, and devoted himself to meaningful interfaith work in Cincinnati, New York, Germany and throughout the world. He demonstrated passion for the community in which he lived, as with his dedication to the Freedom Center here in Cincinnati. Even after months of a devastating automobile accident that would have felled most people, Fred's strength defied every medical probability, as he would valiantly battle the odds, and work to rebuild his life yet again. Just three weeks ago, he and I talked about the book he wanted to write. His commanding presence could be felt even then. It was inspiring.

The second characteristic that I noticed in my first conversation with him that his commanding presence was paired with a wide and embracing smile that was shaped by warmth and caring. That smile revealed his heart, and it was that heart, and that neshama, the genuineness of soul, that drew people to him. Nothing was foreign to Alfred Gottschalk. He was raised in the old world, but he was always a man of modernity. He consulted with presidents and prime ministers, religious leaders of every

faith, and yet he was consistently the same person with the great leaders of our time, as we was with staff members, with family or with friends. There was never pretense with Fred, for he was a man truly at home with all people, because he was always comfortable and at home with himself. And even for a busy leader, even for a man who dealt with great issues and concerns each day, the smile told us of the fullness of the heart, of his deep capacity to care. When that smile widened into laughter, with his keen wit and sense of humor, he reminded us that even a seriousness of purpose was never justification for taking oneself too seriously. It also taught us of his joy for life, his ability to smile at life's unfairness and its limitations, because there was always even more for which to feel grateful. That is the way in which he lived.

And the third characteristics that immediately captured my interest in that first conversation thirty years ago was Fred Gottschalk's eyes. We can all see them. They were deep blue in color, piercing and clear. Through the years, I came to see that that was not only a genetic inheritance, but windows to the legacy he would leave for us. For Alfred Gottschalk saw the future with vision, with clarity of imagination and of purpose. It is in part, what contributed to his confident leadership, for he saw the future so clearly, that physical vision for him was synonymous with determined focus and resolve. He led the College-Institute at a time when the Jewish world was undergoing unimaginable transformation, and yet Fred could always see into that distant horizon that others could not fathom, and then lead people to new horizons. But more than with ideas and institutions, Fred also saw deeply and confidently into the future with people and with relationships. The clarity of his vision was also revealed in his great gift of seeing potential in students, in young scholars, and in colleagues. Then he would foster that potential with a rare combination of genuine support and honesty. Yes, he built an international institution with four campuses, but he also shaped a world-class faculty, and two generations of students and colleagues by identifying potential and believing in people. So many of us owe a debt of gratitude to Fred for his confidence in us at the beginning, even perhaps before we merited it.

Through the years I learned that what I first observed in his commanding presence, that engaging smile, and those piercing eyes were not just physical attributes, but windows to a soul, and mileposts of a legacy. Alfred Gottschalk was called to a life of purpose and a destiny of meaning at an early age. But for the many of us whose lives he enriched along the way, we found blessing not only in what he did, but in what he taught us. May that blessing continue to imbue our lives with meaning, and help to shape Fred's enduring legacy.

I conclude with our thanks to you, his family. I marvel at the devotion of his family, of Marc and Debbie, of Atara, Dania, and Sara, of Rachel, J B, Nathan and Evan, of Charley and Amy, Andrew and Dawn, of Sam, Avery, Teddy and Lydia. You brought not only your consistent physical presence to Fred though the miles and through these last months, but you were his greatest source of hope and joy. You should each feel a great sense of purpose in what you did for your father, grandfather, and step father. You gave him joy when the potential for hope and joy would have been diminished in most people and most families. All of us are grateful to you not only for this, but for

sharing him with so many of us in the Jewish and general communities through the years. And so all of us here, and so many around the world mourn with you today and offer our comfort to you. And we feel blessed that his legacy of greatness and of goodness will sustain you, as it will for all of us. Fred's life, his strength, his heart and his vision, were a blessing for us all. His vision will help to steady our own, and his strength will bring us strength. We pray his memory will continue to be a source of blessing for his family, and for our community, Zichrono Livrach. Amen