

February 17, 1947.

Mr. Maurice Wertheim
120 Broadway
New York 5, N.Y.

Dear Maurice,

Let me thank you for your letter of February the 6th enclosing Mr. Finkel's letter to you of February the 5th. This came yesterday. I hope ^{you} and Cec had a good Cuban vacation.

The question before the Board can be put in simple terms : Does the Board wish me to continue in office in the University ? This question would, I hope, be answered solely from the point of view of the University's good, and not because of any personal feeling for or against me.

If I am to continue in some official position, that position must be a dignified one and it must be so described in the proposed Constitution. That is necessary not just for my sake, but primarily for the sake of the University itself. It would not do for any university with self-respect to think of or do less.

The wording which I propose is simple enough. It follows the procedure of British Universities. I think it necessary to follow this procedure rather than that of American institutions, because Palestine is in a British mandated territory.

It is on this account that the term President creates confusion both in America and in Great Britain. In America the President is the all-powerful executive of a University. That is what I was during those years when the University was being established and built up. In 1935 I gave up this position voluntarily and accepted an office, which was more or less titular and without any executive powers whatsoever. It was a misnomer to call it President. This should now, so I think, be corrected, and the term Chancellor should be substituted.

The wording of the Constitution which I propose is as follows : -

1. The Chancellor : A Chancellor shall be appointed by the Board of Governors for such period and under such conditions as the Board may decide.
2. His functions : He shall be titular Head of the University, and shall have precedence on ceremonial occasions, and he shall preside at the annual opening ceremony of the University, and distribute degrees, and he may also assume such other functions as the Board of Governors or the Executive Council or the Senate may from time to time request him to perform and he may be willing to undertake.
3. He shall represent the University on ceremonial occasions, and at such other times as the Board of Governors or the Executive Council or the Senate may determine and as may be agreed to by him.

I have had correspondence on this subject with Mr. Horowitz, Chairman of the Drafting Committee. He is, I think, in accord with paragraphs 1 and 2.

Paragraph 3 is a compromise which, I think, should be acceptable.

After giving the matter further thought I am not willing that the office I hold be called President Emeritus. The term President is open to the same objections as I have outlined above, and I do not think I have reached the stage where I should permit myself to be tagged as elderly.

17.II.47.

Mr. Maurice Wertheim.

I have on more than one occasion proposed, and this has met with considerable approval here, that the Chancellor be chosen not only by the Board of Governors, but by the full teaching staff of the University and its alumni. This is also somewhat in accord with English University practice. Inasmuch as the Chancellor is a public man standing for certain ideas and views, it is but fair that those, who are the actual workers at the University and carry out its daily tasks and really bear its burdens, should be given the privilege of expressing themselves as to who the titular Head of the University should be. I am inclined to think that some of those who charge me publicly and privately with not being a good enough Zionist would probably be surprised at the very large vote of confidence, which the people who are in Jerusalem and who are doing the work of the University and who are in contact with me and know me, would, I think, give me. Why not try it out once and for all? Moreover, I cannot resist noting that those who talk about my lack of true Zionism do not seem to hesitate about accepting non-Zionist support for the University.

The late Mr. Ussishkin, with whom I had many political differences, but for whom I had very great affection, once said at a meeting: "They can put Magnes out of the University, but Magnes cannot put the University out of his heart". That is true, and I have indicated in my first letter to you what I am expecting to do in connection with the University, whether in office or out.

If all this, or any of this, give rise to serious controversy, I should prefer to have the whole thing dropped and to hold no office at all. My life has been sufficiently full of combat on many fronts; but I determined many years ago that I would not wage war within the Hebrew University. It is too near and dear to me. It is indeed my own child.

I shall be glad to answer any further questions or give any further information you may desire, and I wish once again to thank you for your readiness to act as my proxy.

Please extend my good wishes to all of those attending the Meeting. May it make for the deepening of the University's foundations and for the enlargement of its opportunities for good.

I am,

Sincerely yours,

Judah Magnes

P.S.

I am sending you a copy of a letter which I have addressed to the Rector concerning the question of honorary degrees in the University.

I have no objection to your showing my letter to you of January 15 and my present letter, as also my letter to the Rector, to those who are to participate in the meeting of the Board of Governors and to the members of the American Friends, or to anyone else you may want to. It is likely that I shall be showing this correspondence to members of the Senate here.

February 17, 1947.

Professor M. Fekete
Rector of the Hebrew University
Jerusalem.

Dear Professor Fekete,

Let me thank you for having come to me yesterday and asking if I would be ready to accept the honorary doctor's degree of the Hebrew University.

I told you then that I did not think that the Hebrew University should embark upon this course. I know it is usual among universities, but it seems to me like playing with ribbons and medals, and I have constantly refused the kind offers of other universities to confer a honorary degree upon me. This calling of men to a platform and reading citations does not strike me as serious. The Hebrew University, situated as we are, not far from the desert both physical and spiritual, has a deadly serious work to do, and I should regret to see it playing with baubles for the sake of propoganda.

Had the suggestion of an honorary degree come from the Senate here rather than from the exigencies of propoganda in America, I should have been more inclined to treat the proposal seriously.

Yet, if the University is to embark upon this course, I was impressed by your argument that an honorary degree to me from the Hebrew University was quite different from that offered by any other institution ; and moreover it might not be understood, particularly in America, if my name were not included.

The conclusion I have come to therefore is :

First, to try to prevail upon the Board of Governors not to confer honorary degrees.

Second, that if they are conferred, they must have the approval of the Senate.

Third, that if this procedure be nevertheless adopted, I am ready to have my name included for the reasons given above.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Mr. Wertheim, who is to act as my proxy at the meeting of the Board.

I am,

Sincerely yours,

J.L. Magnes

PS

I am enclosing copies of two letters to Mr. Maurice Wertheim, and I would ask that you be kind enough to bring them, as also this letter to you, to the attention of the Senate.