



JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY SINGAPORE

**GRADUATION ADDRESS
30 JULY 2016**

***“I HAVE NO FEAR OF DEPTHS AND A GREAT FEAR OF
SHALLOW LIVING”***

**PHILIP GREEN
AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER**

CHANCELLOR

VICE CHANCELLOR

GRADUATES

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN

IT IS ALWAYS A PLEASURE TO ATTEND CEREMONIES ASSOCIATED WITH THE JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY. I HAVE DONE SO ON MANY OCCASIONS DURING MY TIME IN SINGAPORE; AND MY ENGAGEMENTS WITH THIS UNIVERSITY HAVE, WITHOUT EXCEPTION, BEEN HAPPY AND ENRICHING.

TODAY IS DIFFERENT, HOWEVER.

ON THIS OCCASION, I FIND MYSELF HONOURED IN A VERY SPECIAL WAY. THIS DAY AND THIS HONOUR WILL SURELY HAVE THE MOST ENDURING AND WARM PLACE IN MY MEMORIES.

I THANK THE CHANCELLOR, THE VICE CHANCELLOR AND THE COUNCIL OF THE UNIVERSITY.

IT IS TRULY A PRIVILEGE TO BE NAMED AS AN HONORARY DOCTOR OF YOUR GREAT INSTITUTION.

IT IS ALSO A PRIVILEGE TO BE ABLE TO DELIVER A GRADUATION ADDRESS, A PRIVILEGE QUICKENED BY THE MANY YOUNG AND LIVELY MINDS AMONG US TODAY, WHO HAVE JUST RECEIVED THEIR OWN DEGREES.

I HOPE, IN WHAT I AM ABOUT TO SAY, THIS MUCH OLDER NEW GRADUATE HAS SOMETHING TO OFFER TO THOSE WHO ARE JUST AS RECENTLY GRADUATED, BUT WHOSE MINDS ARE YOUNGER AND NIMBLER.

I HAVE LIVED IN SINGAPORE FOR FOUR YEARS NOW. THERE ARE MANY THINGS THAT I HAVE ENJOYED IN THAT TIME. VERY MANY.

SOME THAT I WAS EXPECTING - LIKE GREAT FOOD, A STIMULATING URBAN ENVIRONMENT, AND A DEPTH OF EXPERTISE IN THE AFFAIRS OF ASIA.

AND SOME PLEASURES THAT WERE A BIT UNEXPECTED. ONE OF THE MORE UNEXPECTED JOYS HAS BEEN THE VIBRANT ARTS SCENE IN SINGAPORE. I HAVE RECEIVED GREAT NOURISHMENT FROM SINGAPORE'S NATIONAL GALLERY, ITS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA, AND ITS VIBRANT LITERARY SCENE.

LAST MONTH, I VISITED THE SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM FOR AN EXHIBITION ENTITLED "*ODYSSEY: NAVIGATING NAMELESS SEAS*".

IT IS AN EXHIBITION FOCUSSED ON THE OCEANS – WITH WORKS RELATING TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE SEAS, JOURNEYS ACROSS OCEANS, AND HOW SEAS BOTH SEPARATE AND CONNECT US.

ON ONE WALL OF THE EXHIBITION, THERE IS A QUOTATION BY THE FRENCH-AMERICAN WRITER ANAIS NIN. AS YOU MAY KNOW, ANAIS NIN WAS A PASSIONATE PERSON, AND A PATH-BREAKING AUTHOR, WHOSE BOOKS AND ESSAYS CONTINUE TO BE VALUED HALF A CENTURY AFTER THEY WERE FIRST PUBLISHED.

THE QUOTATION READS “I HAVE NO FEAR OF DEPTHS AND A GREAT FEAR OF SHALLOW LIVING”.

THE SINGAPORE ART MUSEUM IS MAKING A CONNECTION WITH THE DEPTHS OF THE OCEAN OF COURSE, BUT THE QUOTATION HAS A SIGNIFICANCE BEYOND THAT.

“I HAVE NO FEAR OF DEPTHS AND A GREAT FEAR OF SHALLOW LIVING.”..

THE QUOTATION SET ME THINKING ABOUT THE PLACE OF DEPTH IN OUR LIVES.

- WHAT ARE WE TO MAKE OF THE CONCEPT OF “SHALLOW LIVING”?
- WHAT VALUE SHOULD WE CONFER ON DEPTH?
- AND, IS DEPTH BECOMING HARDER TO SECURE AND MAINTAIN IN OUR FAST-PACED WORLD?

TO TAKE “SHALLOW LIVING” FIRST, WHAT ARE THE ASSOCIATIONS OF THIS PHRASE?

A PREOCCUPATION WITH EPHEMERA PERHAPS, AN ADDICTION TO SPEED, A PROPENSITY TO BE DISTRACTED BY THE SUPERFLUOUS OR THE SUPERFICIAL. A LACK OF COMMITMENT TO PROJECTS, TASKS AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF RESULTS.

SHALLOWNESS THEN, AS WE KNOW, IS SOMETHING TO BE AVOIDED, SOMETHING NEGATIVE.

THE ASSOCIATIONS OF DEPTH, BY CONTRAST, ARE MOSTLY POSITIVE:

- WE SPEAK OF BEING A ‘DEEP THINKER’.
- BEING ‘DEEP IN A SUBJECT’.

- UNDERSTANDING SOME ASPECT OF OUR WORLD ‘AT A DEEP LEVEL’.

THESE ARE POSITIVE VALUES, VIRTUES.

AND, PEELING AWAY ONE OR TWO LAYERS FROM THESE ASSOCIATIONS REVEALS DIFFERENT SORTS OF DEPTH. THE WAY I FIGURE IT, THERE ARE AT LEAST THREE:

- FIRST, DEPTH CAN BE SEEN IN THE ACCUMULATION OF KNOWLEDGE. SOMEONE WHO IS A DEEP IN A SUBJECT MIGHT POSSESS LARGE QUANTITIES OF INFORMATION, OF DATA, OR KNOW HOW.
- BUT DEPTH IS, I THINK, JUST AS MUCH EVIDENT IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF INSIGHT. THIS SORT OF DEPTH COULD BE SEEN AS THE PRODUCT OF CRITICAL THINKING, THE CHALLENGING OF ASSUMPTIONS AND THE STRIVING TO UNDERSTAND THINGS AT A FUNDAMENTAL LEVEL. THAT ACHIEVEMENT OF INSIGHT COULD BE A SECOND SORT OF DEPTH.
- AND PERHAPS THERE IS A THIRD FACET TO DEPTH. DEPTH MIGHT ALSO BE PERCEIVED IN AN APPROACH TO LIFE. ONE THAT IS BASED ON COMMITMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY. DEPTH COULD BE SEEN IN THE AMBITION TO BE PART OF CREATING A BETTER WORLD, IN CONTRIBUTING TO SOMETHING GREATER, AND IN REFUSING THE SIREN CALLS OF CYNICISM AND COMPLACENCY.

IF NOW WE HAVE MADE A START TO UNDERSTANDING WHAT DEPTH MAY BE, AND WHAT DIFFERENT SORTS OF DEPTHS WE COULD DEFINE, AND HOW THEY OPPOSE THEMSELVES TO SHALLOWNESS, WHAT VALUE ARE WE TO PUT ON DEPTH?

FIRST I WOULD SUGGEST THAT DEPTH WOULD TEND TO BRING ENRICHMENT TO OUR LIVES.

THE SATISFACTION THAT COMES FROM GETTING TO THE BOTTOM OF THINGS, FROM BECOMING EXPERT, FROM

MASTERY OF A SUBJECT, PERHAPS EVEN FROM ADDING IN SOME SMALL WAY TO THE STORE OF HUMAN KNOWLEDGE.

AT A MORE MUNDANE LEVEL, DEPTH MAY ALSO BE VALUABLE IN OUR PROFESSIONAL LIVES. BECOMING DEEP IN OUR CHOSEN FIELD IS LIKELY TO MAKE US MORE APPRECIATED BY OUR INSTITUTIONS, OUR COLLEAGUES AND OUR CLIENTS.

PERHAPS DEPTH MIGHT EVEN MAKE US LESS VULNERABLE TO THE UNCERTAINTIES OF THE WORLD OF WORK THAT WE ALL NOW INHABIT. A WORLD OF WORK THAT IS MADE MORE FRAGILE BY THE ENDLESS INCREMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS OF AUTOMATION AND ALGORITHMS – WHICH TOGETHER THREATEN THE WAY WE HAVE COME TO KNOW WORK FOR CENTURIES.

BUT IT WOULD BE LIMITING, I THINK, TO CONSIDER DEPTH AS A VALUE FOR OUR PROFESSIONAL LIVES ONLY. HERE IN SINGAPORE, WE DO NOT NEED TO LOOK FAR TO FIND SOMEONE WHO HAS FOUND TIME FOR DEPTH OUTSIDE OF WORK, NOTWITHSTANDING THE HEAVIEST PROFESSIONAL SCHEDULE.

AS HAS BECOME WELL KNOWN, PRIME MINISTER LEE HSIEN LOONG FINDS TIME FOR EXTRAORDINARY DEPTH IN HIS CHOSEN INTEREST IN COMPUTING. SO MUCH SO THAT, ASIDE FROM GOVERNING THE WORLD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL CITY-STATE, HE IS ABLE TO SOLVE SUDOKU AND OTHER PUZZLES IN HIS PREFERRED CODING LANGUAGE – C++.

AND PERHAPS THE SEARCH FOR DEPTH IS APPLICABLE TO OUR EMOTIONAL LIVES AS WELL. IS THERE NOT A VALUE IN PRIORITISING THOSE RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE TRULY IMPORTANT TO US? DEEPENING THE BONDS WITH THOSE WHO ARE MOST CLOSE TO US. INTENSIFYING THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE WHO ARE MOST DEAR.

AND IF NECESSARY DOING THAT BY SPENDING LESS TIME ON ASSOCIATIONS THAT ARE CASUAL OR PASSING.

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LIKE MUCH THAT IS VALUABLE IN LIFE, DEPTH DOES NOT COME EASILY.

IT REQUIRES EFFORT, PERSISTENCE, EVEN DETERMINATION.

IT IS EASIER TO DEAL WITH THE QUICK OR THE INSUBSTANTIAL THAN IT IS TO ACHIEVE DEEP KNOWLEDGE OR INSIGHT.

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IT IS A COMMONPLACE THAT WE LIVE IN AN AGE OF SPEED AND SUPERFICIALITY, AND IT IS HARD TO ESCAPE THE CONCLUSION THAT DISTRACTIONS OF THE SHALLOW ARE MORE PREVALENT IN THIS ERA THAN IN THE PAST.

I DON'T DOUBT THAT OURS IS AN AGE OF QUICK STIMULUS – A 24 HOUR NEWS CYCLE, A WORLD OF ADVERTISING THAT SEEKS TO GRAB OUR ATTENTION EVEN IF ONLY FOR SECONDS, AN ON-LINE WORLD ON WHOSE SURFACE WE CAN FLIT EASILY, BARELY RESTING ON ANYTHING OF SUBSTANCE.

I GUESS IT WOULD BE PREDICTABLE FOR ME TO SAY THAT WHAT IT TAKES TO FIND DEPTH IN OUR LIVES IS SQUEEZED OUT BY WHAT IS IMMEDIATE, SUPERFICIAL OR EPHEMERAL

BUT I THINK THERE IS ANOTHER REALITY THAT IS EQUALLY VALID. WHILE THE DIGITAL WORLD HAS MUCH THAT IS RAPID AND, DARE I SAY IT, SHALLOW, IT IS ALSO A VERY POWERFUL VECTOR FOR DEPTH.

WITH SO MUCH INFORMATION, SO MANY PERSPECTIVES, AND SO MUCH THAT IS PROFOUND WITHIN THE EASY REACH OF THE INTERNET AND ITS DERIVATIVES, THE OPPORTUNITY FOR DEEP STUDY AND THOUGHT ABOUT A COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF SUBJECTS HAS NEVER IN HISTORY BEEN SO ACCESSIBLE.

THERE IS NOTHING DETERMINED, THEN, ABOUT TECHNOLOGY'S EFFECT ON US. IT IS ENTIRELY UP TO US WHETHER WE USE ITS POWER TO EASE INTO SHALLOWS OR TO PURSUE DEPTH.

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FINALLY, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, A CONSIDERATION OF DEPTH SEEMS PARTICULARLY APPROPRIATE IN THE SETTING THAT WE FIND OURSELVES GATHERED TODAY.

FOR TEN CENTURIES, UNIVERSITIES HAVE BEEN CITADELS OF DEPTH. PLACES WHERE KNOWLEDGE IS ACCUMULATED, INSIGHT IS ATTAINED AND A CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY IS VALORISED.

EACH OF THE PROFESSORS ON THIS STAGE IS DEEP IN THEIR OWN SPECIALITY, EACH WITH THEIR OWN STORY OF COMMITMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT.

AS SCHOLARS, THEY PERSONIFY DEPTH, AND WE THANK THEM FOR WHAT THEY HAVE DONE TO DEEPEN THOSE WHO HAVE GRADUATED AT THIS CEREMONY.

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WITH THESE FEW THOUGHTS LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, MAY I CLOSE BY CONGRATULATING THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN AWARDED DEGREES HERE TODAY.

THE TESTAMURS YOU HOLD IN YOUR HANDS AND THE LETTERS THAT NOW MAY BE WRITTEN AFTER YOUR NAMES ARE PROOF OF YOUR CAPABILITY, COMMITMENT AND ACHIEVEMENT.

YOU SHOULD DISPLAY THEM PROUDLY, AND CELEBRATE YOUR GREAT MILESTONE WELL.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE IN YOUR ACHIEVEMENT. FOR EACH OF YOU, THERE IS A NETWORK OF FAMILY, FRIENDS AND OTHERS WHO HAVE SUPPORTED YOU IN YOUR JOURNEY TO TODAY.

MANY OF THOSE SUPPORTERS ARE HERE AS WELL, AND I HOPE EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM ALSO TAKES TIME TO REFLECT ON WHAT HAS BEEN DONE BY THE GRADUATE IN THEIR LIFE.

EACH OF YOU HAS ACHIEVED TODAY, AND EACH OF YOU SHOULD TAKE TIME TO SAVOUR THAT – JOYFULLY, CONSCIOUSLY, AND IF I MAY SAY IT, DEEPLY.

