

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

The first time I arrived in this country was in 1980 when I was a young man, 18 years old, with obviously lesser gray hair and wrinkles than now. Trust me, I was far more good-looking then...or maybe not.

As a foreign student who didn't understand a single German word except 'Guten Tag', who had no money to sustain for more than a few months, who had almost no acquaintance in this place, and who had never travelled to a foreign land before, my initial days were filled with the miserable feeling of helplessness, uncertainty, isolation and desperation.

But, this didn't last long. I unknowingly began to act in line with what George Bernard Shaw said, **'The people who get on in this world are the people who get up and look for the circumstances they want and if they can't find them, make them.'** I started to explore the surroundings, learn language, talk to people, acquaint myself with the system and immerse into the culture here. And yes, it was true, **only when one opens to the world does the world open to him.** Today, I will tell you little bit of the story of my life and the lessons I have learnt so far.

When I came to Austria, I had a core mission of being a medical doctor and someday serve the people of my country, where healthcare was still a luxury and suffering a regular part of life. However, I was still not fully aware of what lay ahead of me. As I met countless people, of every kind, and explored in awe the history, art and civilization of this place, I constantly pondered: how did I belong to this place? Over ensuing years, as I found myself intimately engaged with the community here, I started to realize that **the thread of love, empathy and humanity is what binds our hearts and souls no matter who we are; no matter where we come from.** Once we connect at this level, boundaries disappear, and differences dissolve. It is the fuel of civilization. It is the reason for success. It is the essence of genius.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart famously said, **'It is the heart that ennobles man.'** And if Mozart said, it must be true, definitely in Salzburg. It was the reason, a small group of my friends, mentors and other well-wishers decided to join hands with me in the quest to establish a hospital with the vision of 'Quality health service to the poor' in my hometown Dhulikhel.

The journey we chose to take was far more difficult than we had initially imagined. Difficulties, doubt and discouragement were very common, at every step. But, what mattered was not how many people didn't believe us. What mattered was how many people believed in us, including ourselves. We slowly learned that when the vision is clear and mission is pure, the only additional thing one needed was perseverance. I cannot say it better than Paulo Coelho, **'When you want something, all the universe conspires in helping you to achieve it.'** A small hospital in a desolate hill, started almost 21 years back, now stands as the beacon of hope, symbol of life, and an epitome of comfort for a population of almost 2.3 million rural, mostly impoverished Nepalese. Kathmandu University, another institution, founded with the principle of providing 'Quality education for leadership' trains thousands of people, including health professionals who continue to permeate and transform the whole fabric of development in our country.

You might think: I must feel relaxed, proud and satisfied with what I have been able to do with my team. The answer, my dear friends, is 'No'. While I feel proud and incredibly happy about what we have achieved, every day we see newer challenges ahead. I am now beginning to realize that in ambitious pursuits like these, we slowly understand that the pleasure is in the journey, not in reaching the destination. Because there is no final destination. It is a process where we constantly

evolve and find ourselves in positions where we can make bigger impacts than yesterday. In this endeavor, we reach to a stage where our best periods of rest are the moments when we bring comfort in the lives of others. And our best rewards are nothing but the smiles in the faces of strangers.

Young graduates from this esteemed university, as you set feet into the new phase of your life, I would like to shed lights on the following three ideas.

First, dare to dream different and challenge the convention. When Beethoven produced his symphony 3, which thoroughly defied the traditional rules, critics tried to destroy him. He held back for a while and did his fourth symphony as per the conventional principles. His heart didn't agree and he then dared to produce symphony number 5 with his own ideas, challenging the tradition. What followed is the history. His symphony number 3 is now considered the turning point of musical history and his symphony number 5 is one of the most frequently played symphonies.

My dear graduates, when you walk tomorrow, the challenges and the opportunities that lie in front of you might be very different than what you had been trained for. Hence, look into the world with very open mind, and do not hesitate to take the 'road less travelled'. Identify the challenges that will require you to unleash your full potential. Get yourself out of the box and out of your comfort zone. Great achievements demand greater risks. History is created by those who have the courage to be different. Try to create history, and not just be the spectators.

Second, never forget that perseverance is the key to success. There is no shortcut to success and no fast track to accomplishments. One must endure failures, disappointments and discouragements along the path, but what determines the final outcome is nothing else than perseverance. I like to compare this with nature. Whatever calamity happens, nature rises again. Lands inundated with flood will slowly become green. Areas devastated by volcanoes will ultimately develop into beautiful mountains and valleys. Rivers that are stopped by landslides will slowly swell up and gush through the rocks with greater strengths than before. Nature never stops. Let us remember this in times of despair, in times when we question ourselves.

Third, do not set boundaries to the possibilities of future. One thing I am reminded of constantly by the patients we treat and by the people we train is that the ocean of opportunities that lies in front of us should not be restrained by the dams of complacency. We can never know fully what lies ahead of us. Hence, let us not stop ourselves or others to set the barriers for future. March to the place you can reach, and let your fellows conquer beyond what you have managed to achieve.

My dear graduates, as I congratulate you, your families, friends and mentors at this moment of glory, an event of celebration, I want to remind you again that if a poor boy from one of the least developed countries in the world could one day stand at this esteemed podium to address this august gathering of scholars, in a language he never learnt until his adulthood, just imagine the magnitude of the possibilities you have in your lives.

Thank you.