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"The Holocaust: Lesson for a Pluralistic Society". 31 March 1982.

Randy Bramin:

I'm Randy Bramin, director of the Jack P. Eisner Institute for Holocaust Studies. Today's lecture, "The Holocaust: Lessons for a Pluralistic Society," is offered as a public service by the institute, under the auspices of the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. [01:00]. The Institute has been established under a generous grant from the Holocaust Survivors Memorial Foundation. Tonight's lecture is a special one indeed. His Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, National Interreligious Affairs Director of the American Jewish Committee. He has been a pioneering leader, and thinker, in the inter-religious relations and social justice movements during the past thirty years. *Newsweek* magazine has described him as "the American Jewish community's foremost apostle to the gentiles, who has been able to solicit support from all factions of the Jewish community." A poll of American newspapers' religious editors in 1978 [02:00] voted Rabbi Tanenbaum one of the 10 most respected and influential religious leaders in America, and the citation of his [fifties?] honorary degree characterized him as the "human rights rabbi of America." In a cover story entitled "The Ten Most Powerful Rabbis," *New York Magazine* described Rabbi

Tanenbaum as, "the foremost Jewish ecumenical leader in the world today." President Carter invited Rabbi Tanenbaum as the American Jewish leader, among 10 national religious spokesmen, to discuss the state of the nation at Camp David, at a summit meeting in 1979. The Rabbi was also the Jewish spokesman at the January 1980 White House conference on energy and conservation. [03:00] He is presently chairman of the Technical Committee on the Media of the 1981 White House Conference on Aging. He has been a major force in the promotion of social justice and human rights. At the invitation of the International Rescue Committee, he joined delegations of prominent American leaders to carry out fact-finding investigations of the plight of Vietnamese boat people, and Cambodian refugees. He has organized many relief efforts for victims of war, refugees, and the starving. Recently, Rabbi Tanenbaum served as the consultant to the NBC TV nine-hour special *Holocaust* series, and earlier, was consultant to the special *Jesus of Nazareth*. President Carter appointed Marc Tanenbaum to serve on the advisory committee of the President's Commission on the Holocaust. [04:00] Rabbi Tanenbaum was the only rabbi at the Vatican Council II, and he is a founder and co-secretary of the Joint Vatican International Jewish Consultative Committee, as well as, of a similarly liaison body with the World Council of Churches. He also participated in the first official audience of world Jewish

leaders with Pope John Paul II. In March 1979, he was invited to consult with Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, and the German Parliamentary Officials in Bonn, on the abolition of the statute of limitations on Nazi war criminals. He has lectured at major universities, seminaries, religious and educational bodies in the United States, Europe, and Israel, and at numerous national and international conferences. Rabbi Tanenbaum is the author and editor of several published works, and of numerous articles. [05:00] His topic tonight again is, "The Holocaust: Lessons for a Pluralistic Society." Rabbi Tanenbaum.

**Marc Tanenbaum:**

About the only thing that my dear friend and respected mentor, Professor Bramin, forgot to mention, is that I am frequently referred to as "the late Marc Tanenbaum." (laughter) I came here this evening expecting to come here at a quarter to 6:00, and be ready, in an uncharacteristic way, in advance of the lecture, and I found myself [06:00] tied up in my office with a series of emergency calls, the last of which was a call from Dr. Billy Graham, five minutes to 6:00, who was preparing to go to Moscow, and he wanted to talk about the situation of Jews in Russia, and I had to make plans to go to Boston tomorrow, where he'll be meeting with a group of Jewish leaders that I've arranged there, with him, and then, after I finally broke out of the office,

close to 6:00, I raced downstairs and I decided to take a subway to get here, and next to the late Allegheny Airline, *alev shalom*, trying to get here in 10, 15 minutes from 56<sup>th</sup> Street, 53<sup>rd</sup> Street, to 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, ended up getting on an E train, because an F train was nowhere within sight, [07:00] and I ended up on 50<sup>th</sup> Street and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue. I began to understand where the traditional expression was born, [*"Es ist gewinn a finstere Nacht in Brownsville"*?]. It began getting darker by the moment. I regard it as a -- thank you, she's going to make a [calla?] someday, mine -- I regard it as a genuine privilege to be invited to participate in this impressive and distinguished series of lectures [08:00] dealing with the Nazi Holocaust. The fact that the invitation came from Professor Randy Bramin makes it singularly significant for me, because his contribution to the understanding of the magnitude of the tragedy and the trauma, suffered by Hungarian Jewry, and indeed, European Jewry at large, is monumental, and will represent one of the landmark contributions to the understanding of that period of insanity, and barbarism, [09:00] from which few of us have recovered to this day. And it is with a sense of deep appreciation to him and to Jack Eisner, who has made possible the systematic study of this watershed event, and the life of the Jewish people, and as I shall try to suggest, in my subsequent remarks, a profound moral watershed in the history of the human family, and we are

all deeply in the debt of both Professor Bramin, and Jack Eisner, and others as well. The theme, as Professor Bramin has indicated, that I have been asked to talk about this evening, [10:00] is that of the Holocaust: its lessons for a pluralistic society. This is a very difficult theme for many Jews, and I dare say, for some of you in this hall this evening, this is an impossible theme. Because as you look at the series of this lecture series, virtually every speaker has spoken about the Holocaust in all of its amplitude; historically, theologically, sociologically, demonologically, essentially from within the Jewish perspective. There's now a culture within which [11:00] the Nazi Holocaust is faintly glimpsed, grasped at for knowledge and insight within the Jewish community, that has led to a consciousness among Jews, not only here, but in many parts of the world, certainly in Israel, even in the Soviet Union, Europe, and elsewhere, in which the Nazi Holocaust is perceived, understood, as indeed, in its primary level, it must be understood, as uniquely a Jewish issue. And rightly, it needs to be understood in that sense, in its primary meaning, because the Nazi Holocaust, the "Final Solution," [12:00] was proposed uniquely, singularly, as integral to the foreign policy and the domestic policy of Nazi Germany and the German nation, solely for Jews, no other people. Slavs, Gypsies, others, were conceived of, in terms of their murder/massacre/extermination,

as being central to the carrying out of the fundamental purposes, the *raison d'etat* [sic] of Nazi Germany. And that is a fact, even though it must be acknowledged that in the process of carrying out that psychopathic, [13:00] diabolical scheme of the "Final Solution," six million Jewish men, women, and children were put to death, but also thirty-five million other human beings were killed, slaughtered, died, as Simon Wiesenthal insists on reminding us, as a result of World War II. But what will be difficult for Jews to cope with, even, I dare say, many in this room, is the paradoxical reality that if we continue to persist in perceiving and elaborating, exposing the Nazi Holocaust only as a Jewish issue, [14:00] we will in fact have given Hitler the final victory. Because underlying Hitler's notion of his ability to be able to carry out the final solution against the Jews, was the consciousness as we see throughout his table talk, and in much of his public declarations, that because this is solely an issue for Jews, about Jews, affecting Jews, the rest of mankind has no interest, no stake in this, and therefore one can go about massacring Jews as if they were animal, sub-human creatures, and there will be no consequences for Nazi Germany in the rest of the human family. [15:00] During the course of the preparation of the NBC TV series *Holocaust*, about which, as you know, there was much controversy, and about which I had my own concerns in the course of serving as the

consultant to NBC, and to Gerald Greene and others, I knew that with all its deficiencies, and with its inaccuracies, some of which became almost impossible to take hold of during the course of that incredibly complex production, I knew that after watching the first three hours of that production, that *Holocaust*, with its limitations, had to be shown. Not for the sake of the Jews -- Jews did not need the NBC *Holocaust* to remind them of the moral duty of saying *kadish* for the *kadoshim*. It was the fact that among the 220 million American people, [16:00] the vast majority of them knew almost nothing about the facts of the Nazi Holocaust, and those who knew something about it tried to repress the magnitude of that evil in order to evade the questions of their responsibility of where were they, what did they do, and how would they respond, God forbid, if there were other episodes of a diabolical anti-Semitic character against Jews. What persuaded me of the importance that the *Holocaust* program must be shown in America with its deficiencies, was the fact that on the first night of the showing of the first three hours of the rushes of the Holocaust as they came out of the cameras, I brought together a group of 85 of the top Christian leaders in America, at a seminar at NBC, to view those first three hours. There were cardinals, archbishops, bishops, [17:00] president of all the Protestant denominations, heads of the evangelical Christian churches,

Greek Orthodox archbishops, Hispanics, black church leaders, and others. After the first three hours of the program were shown, and we had a dialogue among the Christian and Jewish leaders who were present, the first person who asked for permission to stand up to speak, was an Armenian archbishop, [Torkan Manugian?], who happens to have become a very close and dear friend, here in New York, and Archbishop Manugian stood up, and said, "I want to thank NBC, and the author, and those responsible for this production, and I want to tell you why I, as an Armenian Christian, feel that it is absolutely essential that this production, and the facts of what happened during the Nazi Holocaust, [18:00] be told and retold not just for the Jewish people, but for the millions of American Christians who know nothing about it, or choose to know nothing about it, and he said the reason I feel this way is because if you read the table talk of Adolf Hitler, there is a passage there in which there is a description of the fact that a group of generals, in 1941, came to Adolf Hitler, during the course of a conference where they were planning the "Final Solution," and some of the generals turned to Hitler and said, after the plan was laid out for the systematic extermination of Jews, death camps, crematoria, death marches, some of the generals said, "*Herr Führer*, is it really essential to carry out this kind of massive murder of Jews? Isn't there an easier way of getting rid of



them? Can't we export them to another country -- Uganda, elsewhere, Africa?" [19:00] And Hitler turned to the German generals and silenced them with one expression, as the Armenian archbishop declared, he said to them, "Who remembers what happened to the Armenians?" And then Archbishop Manugian declared, "A world that became indifferent to the massacre and the slaughter of half of the Armenian people in 1915, that developed the psychic numbness to be indifferent to the fate of our people who Christians, massacred by Muslims in the Turkish community, became a world that was prepared to become indifferent to the fate of six million Jewish men, women, and children." [20:00] And then he said, a world that remains indifferent to what happened to six million Jewish men, women, and children, is a world that is psychologically prepared to become indifferent to the slaughter of human beings everywhere in the world." And he said, "We, as Christians, have a stake in the Nazi Holocaust; indeed, it happened on the wreckage of your people in Europe, but out of that wreckage we must all together learn a lesson, otherwise the human family will not survive." It's something about that lesson to which I want to address myself tonight. And the way in which I want to come to try to uncover what, for me, are some of the crucial understandings, of penetrating into the central dynamics; morally, spiritually, humanly, psychologically, [21:00] of what happened in the Nazi

Holocaust and its meaning for humankind, that I want to revert back to the oldest form of Jewish literary method, for telling insights, truths about the human condition, to uncover some illumination about the meaning of human existence, and the value of human life, and that is out of the genius of the Torah, and especially the rabbinic tradition. The rabbis, unlike the Christian philosophers and theologians who succeeded them, did not construct large, systematic theologies, which become abstract and frequently irrelevant to the human condition. Instead, they told the *midrash*. They told a parable, a story, about the human experience, within which one begins to gain some insight about the nature of human existence, [22:00] as it affected the teller of that story, and those involved in it. And I want to share with you this evening, what for me are two modern *midrashim*, two modern parables, which illuminate, at least for me, some of the profoundest insights into the meaning of the Nazi Holocaust, indeed first and foremost for ourselves, the Jewish people, but beyond that, what in fact it must need, now sooner rather than later, for the whole of the human family today. And I am persuaded unless this experience is confronted, fully, profoundly, [23:00] and unless some insight is gained from that which we Jews know in our bones, there is a real danger as to whether the human family will be able to survive beyond the end of the century. My first parable began in

February of 1978. I was sitting in my office in the American Jewish Committee, and one day I received, in early February, a telephone call from a man named Dr. Leo Cherne. He is president of a group called the International Rescue Committee.

International Rescue Committee was established in 1938. Its primary purpose was that of trying to save Jewish DPs as the madness of Nazism began to unfold [24:00]. And subsequently, it has become involved in providing medical care, and refugee relief service, for refugees in many other parts of the world.

On this day, Leo Cherne called me and said, "Rabbi Tanenbaum, we have been asked, as a semi-official government mission, to send a group of 14 American leaders to Southeast Asia, with a view toward carrying out a detailed study on the plight of the Vietnamese boat people, Cambodian refugees, Laotians, ethnic Chinese, Hmong tribesman." I'd heard about Leo Cherne, I'd heard about the International Rescue Committee, and I had read in the newspapers, fleetingly as all of us had, about this incredible story of people coming out of Vietnam, getting into boats, setting sail out into sea, and I suppose, as many of you, it was another one of those daily horror stories, [25:00] which somehow never penetrated beneath the level of consciousness to become part of one's self-understanding, one's sense of responsibility. And I said to Cherne, in all honesty, "Look Dr. Cherne, it seems to me this is an important task, but frankly, I'm busy, I've got

commitments over the next two to three weeks, if it's possible for this mission to leave in another several weeks, I'd be glad to try to go with you." And then Cherne declared, with an edge to his voice, "Listen, Rabbi, you don't understand what I'm talking about. There are fifteen thousand people leaving Vietnam every month, and the flow is increasing as oppression from the North Vietnamese grows greater. Sixty percent of the people leaving Vietnam in these boats across the South China Sea are drowning, before the eyes of the world. [26:00] They cannot wait for your schedule to conform to their needs; they're drowning now, this minute." And as he talked, I said, "OK Leo, let's go." The following week, 14 of us set sail for Southeast Asia. It was a delegation that consisted of James Michener, the novelist; Ambassador William Casey, who's now head of the CIA -- he and I became very friendly during this tour, we shared rooms next to each other in Singapore, and Hong Kong, and elsewhere, and I told him subsequently if I had ever had any idea that he was going to become head of the CIA, I'd have locked my door every night; Ambassador Cecil Lyon, the former American ambassador to Chile and Sri Lanka; Bayard Rustin, the great black civil rights activist, who's present to every Jewish concern, and every human concern; A bishop from the Roman Catholic Church; a Protestant minister representing [27:00] the National Council of Churches; John Richardson, a former Assistant Secretary of State; among

others. We went to every country in Southeast Asia -- Hong Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines -- and to every refugee camp, to carry out a fact-finding mission, and to bring back a report to the president of the United States, then Jimmy Carter, the Secretary of State, to Brzezinski, and to the leaders of both congressional parties. My parable begins on this February day, as our mission was in Jakarta, Indonesia. It was a broiling hot day, that February. I came out to a rotten wharf in the center of the city of Jakarta, and there, at the bottom of that wharf, [28:00] there lay a skiff, a battered, exhausted boat, at the head of which there stood a short man, brown-skinned man, named [Yen Tong?], together with his wife, his children, sisters. I jumped off this wharf onto that skiff, and I came over to Yen Tong, and I introduced myself to him, I told him I was Rabbi Tanenbaum of the American Jewish Committee, I'm here on this mission, representing the American government in this unofficial capacity, to carry out this fact-finding mission; I wanted to know his story. And Yen Tong proceeded to tell me this account: He was sitting with his family one evening, in their home in Saigon. The door broke open, and a group of North Vietnamese soldiers literally broke into his house, confronted them, and said, "The government of North Vietnam has determined that you are to be re-educated, [29:00] and the collective farm program, for creating the 'new man' of

the 'new society.'" And Yen Tong began to object, and he said, "You have no ground for objections; those are the orders of the government, there's no appeal. Be ready tomorrow morning for you, your wife and children, to leave, to go out to this collective re-education farm." Then Yen Tong said that that night, they took council together, and they determined there was no future for them and their children. They felt their dignity as human beings was being taken away from them. No choice about the nature of their lives they had lived as urban-dwellers for centuries, his family in Saigon, now there to become automatically farmers at the will of the state. And so they took all of their possessions, and they fled, through the night, through the forest, where they rendezvoused with brothers, and brothers-in-law, on the coast of Vietnam, [30:00], and there they took all of their possessions, and they bought this battered skiff from a fisherman, they call climbed into it, they had nothing but a 10-cent compass to guide them, and they set sail across the South China Sea. And Yen Tong looked at me and he said, "Rabbi, we set sail, we went over a period of four weeks, we stopped off at the coast of the Philippines, they sent us back. We stopped off at Hong Kong, they sent us back. All of these great, liberated, third-world nations, with their ideology of self-determination and liberation, wanted none of the refugees and began pushing them all back into the sea. Then Yen

Tong said, "As we were sailing the third week across the South China Sea, we began to run out of food and water, and my children began developing temperatures; [31:00] their bodies were flaring with fever. They began screaming in terror at night, they could not sleep. So crazed were they by hunger, and by thirst, they began drinking sea water and eating seaweed." And then he looked at me and he said, "Rabbi, do you know what it means, literally to see your wife and your children to begin to die before your very eyes?" And then he looked up at me, with a passion in his face, that seized his whole body, he was trembling as he spoke, and he said, "Rabbi, you know, it was unbelievable, the pain, the anguish, of seeing your family starve before your eyes, but there was even something worse than that, worse than hunger and starvation. As we were sailing the third and fourth week, [32:00] we were passed by by 23 cargo ships, all of them filled with cargo going to Singapore, which is the economic nexus of Southeast Asia. We waved at them with a white flag with an undershirt, to stop. First we thought they would stop and pull us out of the water," and he said, "not a single ship stopped to pick up. None of them stopped to give us water, a bag of rice. Yes," he said, "there were three ships that slowed down, the crews came up, and they began laughing, we were their entertainment, breaking the boredom of their sailing at sea." And then he turned to me and he said, in exactly these

words, "You know, Rabbi, I was a high school teacher, in a Catholic high school in Saigon. And during my training, my teachers used to talk about World War II, and some of the teachers referred to the experience of the Jews in Nazi Germany [33:00] in 1930. Now we didn't hear too much about it, just a few things, some Jews were killed." He said, "I now know what it means to have been a Jew in Nazi Germany in the 1930s and the 1940s. There is something worse than hunger and starvation. The knowledge that you are abandoned by the world, the notion that your life, and the life of your children, and your wife, is absolutely meaningless...the awareness that human life has become worthless, that it is like the flotsam in this water, and that the world can send cameras and there can be stories about you, and it means nothing. That you were abandoned to die before the eyes of the world." And as he said that, and I have to tell you exactly as that experience happened to me, I'm not sure how it happened or why it happened, I don't know whether it was the broiling heat of 101, 102 degrees in Indonesia, [34:00] or whether it was the exhaustion of our traveling day and night through these camps, we were working 12, 14 hours a day to cover all of that territory, but as he was talking to me, almost like a television flashback, something began flooding into my head, as he began talking about being a Jew in Nazi Germany, suddenly the figures "Nineteen thirty-nine. Nineteen thirty-nine.



Nineteen thirty-nine." And in my head, suddenly there was a connection with *St. Louis, St. Louis, St. Louis*...they were the first boat people of this generation. The Jews of Germany who got out of Hamburg, who, anticipating all of this madness in Vietnam, took everything they had, went to the American consul general, were received by an official delegate of the Cuban government, who sold them for their final possessions, [35:00] landing immigration certificates for Cuba, with the assurance that if they made it across the sea, onto *St. Louis*, that they would come to Havana, they would be received, and their lives would be saved. And so 938 Jewish men, women, and children, having given up virtually all of their possessions to buy the landing immigration certificates, some 700 of them, keener in their understanding of human nature and the kind of world in which they were living, did not trust the landing immigration certificates of Cuba alone, and they went to the American Consul General and obtained visas, quota numbers, so that God forbid should something go wrong in Cuba, they would be received in the United States. And they set sail, not across the turbulent South China Sea, [36:00] but across the tumultuous North Atlantic Ocean, in March of 1939. They came to Cuba, they landed in the harbor of Havana, the captain of the ship was a Dutch Christian; a man of conscience, and when they landed, and the delegation came from the Cuban government, the Dutch Christian captain went

down to them with a parcel of all of the landing immigration quota numbers, and said, "I have the honor of presenting to you these landing immigration quota numbers for the people on my ship." And the Cubans turned to the Dutch Christian captain and they said, "Sorry, they're invalid." And the Dutch Christian captain said, "What do you mean, they're invalid? They paid for them! They have certificates of having paid two, three, five, thousand dollars for these quotas from your government." And they said, "They cannot land. We have a message from our President, Dr. Federico Bru, that if these Jews are to land in Havana, [37:00] you must turn to the Jews of New York to raise \$1 million, and we want it by tomorrow morning, in 24 hours, otherwise we send them back." And as an aside, the Cuban delegate said to the Dutch Christian captain, "We know the Jews of New York can do that, they can raise a \$1 million, they do it all the time. They can do it if they really care about these Jews here." The Dutch Christian captain went back to the ship, radioed the joint distribution committee, the JDC, [Hayas?], told them what the conditions were, and they flew a crew into Havana, and they began negotiating with the president of Cuba, Federico Bru, "Please, take them in. Give us time. Give us 48 hours, 72 hours, and we will have the money." And Federico Bru turned to them and said, "I want the money tomorrow, on this table, or they go back." The JDC and the Hayas counseled

together, [38:00] they sent back to New York to try to raise the money, they said, "Get us time, we will try to raise the million dollars, try to buy time." They then send cables to every government in Latin America, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Uruguay, Paraguay, "Take them in, take a few of them, a few hundred of them, give them time, and if you do not receive them, you will send them surely back to their certain death in Nazi Germany." Most of the governments of Latin America did not even bother to answer the cable gram. The few who did respond answered in a modern-day version of that lovely New Testament phrase, "Sorry, there is no room at the inn." And so, the great Christian government of Cuba pushed the ship out to sea, and this boatload of 938 Jewish boat people, the first of this generation, came out of Cuba. The Dutch Christian captain took them to the harbor of Miami, [39:00] he had at least 700 quota numbers, maybe they could be saved. The boat landed outside of Miami; it anchored outside that incredible scenario of Jews there, desperate, wondering whether if they were going to live or die, and listening to the music coming from the Hotel Fountain Blue, and other hotels on Collins Road. They contacted the Immigration/Naturalization Service, they contacted Cordell Hull, Cordell Hull consulted that other great American, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a great man in many other ways, but that great humanitarian FDR and Cordell Hull determined that they were not

going to interfere in the internal affairs of Nazi Germany. And the quota numbers, given them as valid American documents, were rescinded. Now some of you know, four elderly Jews on that ship, who had had all they could take of the humanity of Western Christian civilization, jumped overboard and committed suicide. [40:00] They could not tolerate the notion of living in that kind of world. The *St. Louis* was sent back to Europe. France took a couple hundred, the Netherlands took a couple hundred, England took a couple hundred, and then the Nazis made their sweep into the lowlands, and all of them in Europe, together we have the six million, ended up in the death camps, and the crematoria. As Elie Wiesel wrote, [41:00] "The sky became their cemetery, as the smoke of their bodies ascended into heaven." I was a much younger person then, and I remember attending a rally for the *St. Louis* boat people, in Madison Square Garden. All of our great Jewish leaders were there: Steven [Weisz?], Abba Hillel Silver, Nahum Goldman, and they made great, impassioned speeches, the sum total of which was "[*Ratover, ratover, ratover?*!]! Save them before they are sent back to their certain death in Europe!" And the eloquence was magnificent. Moving to tears. But in that place, packed only with Jews, eighteen thousand Jews in Madison Square Garden, [42:00] I felt the impotency, the impotency of that kind of rhetoric alone, and something happened to me, as a *yeshiva bocher*, a child out of

Jewish Hebrew schools. As I began to walk away, something began to churn in me, and I began hearing a phrase in my head from the Book of Leviticus, Chapter 19, paraphrase, it became in my head. If there is one lesson to be learned from that *St. Louis* boat people episode of 938 Jews who perished, most of them, "You shall not stand idly by while the blood of your brothers and sisters cry out to you from the earth." And I wasn't clear about what it all meant, but I was determined, somewhere in my conscience, but somehow, some way, if it were ever given to me, [43:00] to have the capacity and the power to stand against this callousness to human suffering, this indifference to the value of human life, that I would be prepared to turn myself inside out, to go to the ends of the earth, out of the depths of Jewish tradition and conviction, in order to try and break this cycle of dehumanization. That's why I went to Southeast Asia four times in the past three years. We came back with recommendations to the president of the United States, one of which included a recommendation that the first thing he do is to send the ships of the Seventh Fleet, that were steaming off the Philippines and Manila, doing nothing but showing the flag, into the South China Sea, with instructions that nobody should be allowed to drown [44:00] with the Seventh Fleet present. And the president turned to us when we came back and said, "My God, why didn't I think of that? It's the most obvious thing in the world," and then our

presidency called in an executive aide and dictated an order to the commander of the Seventh Fleet, that "within this week, I want ships to go in, and helicopters with instructions that nobody is to be allowed to drown in the South China Sea; if people are hungry, they're to be given food; if their boats are without petrol, you're to give them petrol." Literally within three weeks, no one drowned as a result of neglect. And then it became radical chic, because America began doing it, suddenly Italy began sending in ships, and France began sending in ships, with instructions to save people. No one drowns from accident in the South China Sea today. If it happens, it is a freak event of a monsoon or something where no one can get to them, but it is now the policy of the civilized community that they do not stand by while human beings die before the eyes of the world. [45:00] That's a lesson I learned as a child born in the shadow of the Nazi Holocaust. I became aware of the fact that there is an ecology in the world, that does not have to do simply with plants and trees; there is a moral ecology in the universe, that a world which becomes conformed to the possibility that the norm for human existence is callousness, indifference, spectatorship, will create an international climate in which Jews will be able to perish, and millions of other human beings. The lesson which Jews have to testify out of the Holocaust is that that central instruction which emerges out of the depths of the exodus and

Sinai, [46:00] the teaching which changed the consciousness of the human condition, namely that every human life is sacred; in Biblical language, that every human life is created in the sacred image of God, that no human being is expendable, that no human life can be sacrificed for anyone else's program or project, or revolution, or violence, or terrorism. That every human life is of infinite preciousness, that every human being is an end in himself or herself, and can never be allowed to become an end, a means to anyone else's end. That teaching today is more relevant than at any time over the past two thousand years. There is today in the world, and I am persuaded it is because the world has refused to face, [47:00] civilized nations and churches have refused to understand, the magnitude of the challenge of the Nazi Holocaust, not only for the Jews, but for Western Christian civilization, and humankind itself. The Nazi Holocaust took place not in a primitive desert, not in a place of animists, pagans, Bedouins, it took place in a country of Ancient Christian civilization. It took place in Germany, which is the country of Goethe and Beethoven, of the finest minds, the flowering of Christianity, and of Western Christian culture. It took place in a society which had the most advanced science and technology, it took place in a country which mobilized all of its PhDs. It was PhDs who ran out Auschwitz and Birkenau, and Bergen-Belsen, they were not mad men, [48:00] marginal people,

psychopaths. They were doctors of the most advanced surgical training who carried out experiments on pregnant Jewish young women and others. Look around the world today. The refusal to face the fact of the capacity of the most advanced Western Christian society, and the whole of the European continent, the country where in Aachen the seat of the Holy Roman Empire sat. The country where Martin Luther brought about the Protestant Reformation, to bring about a pure brand of Christian life and morals. Refusal to face the capacity of how that kind of barbarism took place, I am persuaded, is part of the causal chain, which has led to a human condition today where there is a Cambodia. [49:00] Cambodia did not take place 40 years ago, it took place over the past five, six years; in 1974, there were eight million Cambodian people, they are people of incredible sensitivity and culture and delicacy. You simply have to go into Cambodia as I did, last year, February, to see the kind of madness which is the Nazi legacy of the human family, which has refused to cope with that. Under the Pol Pot regime, a country of eight million people that created the great religious monuments of Angkor Wat and elsewhere, that society, where Pol Pot, who held up Adolf Hitler as his model, who created statues of Hitler in Phnom Penh, whose whole ideology was based on the Nazi ideology -- Hitler believed in de-Aryanization [sic] for the purification of the German race; Pol Pot created de-



Westernization, Year Zero, [50:00] and anyone associated with Western culture or civilization was shot on the street. More than half of the population of Cambodia was destroyed before the eyes of the world. Three to four million people. And the reaction to them was the reaction almost identical to the reaction to what happened to the Jews in Nazi Germany. Go to the United Nations and see, ever since 1975, whether a single word was said that now, after the Nazi Holocaust, we have learned something. You don't stand by while human beings are massacred like sheep. Not a single word at the United Nations about the massacre of half of Cambodia. Go to Uganda, where under President Idi Amin for life, this man, who, with 5% of the Muslim population, oppressed 85% of the population, which was Christian, half Roman Catholic, half Protestant, whose palace guard, not incidentally, were the PLO. [51:00] Idi Amin, who created an Adolf Hitler Park in the center of Kampala, who attacked Christian ministers for singing Jewish psalms on Sunday, because they refer to the peace of Zion, this Idi Amin massacred five hundred thousand black Christians, estimated, five hundred thousand black Christians, good Roman Catholics and Protestants. Not only was a word not said by almost anyone in the international community, but in fact, Idi Amin, as you remember, was invited to come to the United Nations, that last forum of peace and justice in the world, was treated as a

conquering hero, and so imperious was his majesty president for life, that he sat on a throne in the United Nations, not deigning to want to read his own speech, but had an aide read his speech for him. And he preached the sermon about how the American people must loosen themselves from Jewish power, [52:00] the Jewish lobby, and how the blacks must carry out the revolution in accordance with his model. This Idi Amin massacre, and the epidemic of dehumanization goes on. I do want to go through the whole litany of destruction. Ireland, you know, not Africa, Ireland, day in and day out, day in and day out, Catholics kill Protestants, Protestants massacre (inaudible). Now, only now, are American Irish Catholics and Protestants beginning to raise the question about what is happening to their people in Ireland, or beginning to ask the American government to do something, and you can hardly hear it. As if for 12 years, the massacre of Christians in Ireland, Catholics and Protestants, meant nothing to them, as if that were their old-age home. It is the country from which they got their language, their culture, their faith. Everything they are in terms of their identity. They close the key on the old-age home, they threw it away, it has nothing to do with them. [53:00] So rampant becomes the callousness to human suffering in so many parts of the world, and now Afghanistan, thousands upon thousands of people, day in and day out. Lebanon, fifty thousand

Muslims, Christians, massacred. You see people marching in the streets of New York, the United Nations, about Lebanon, and (inaudible) to get worse. I met this afternoon with a Lebanese Christian, comes to a Jewish organization begging for help. His father was massacred by the PLO, he was formerly a supporter of the PLO, now, he's learned something. What I'm trying to say, my friends, is that that which Robert J. Lifton has called after Hiroshima and Nagasaki "psychic numbing," the anesthetization of human conscience, which could have been dealt with, had people faced the ultimate meaning of the Nazi Holocaust, not simply as a Jewish obsession, as some Christians say, [54:00] "Why do the Jews keep observing this? Why can't they forget?" I once said to a Christian who said that to me, "The Jews will begin to forgive, never forget...the Jews will begin to forgive when you begin to remember." I want to tell you one more story and close with this, and then draw its final conclusions in terms of a pluralist world today. In December 1978, when the flow of refugees out of Vietnam increased from fifteen thousand earlier in February, to sixty thousand, seventy thousand, and people were dying like flies, and hardly a nation had lifted a finger, [55:00] our mission went over the International Rescue Committee, the same delegation, a second time in December of 1978, and then we broke up into small groups, each of us going off to different islands. And on a particular Sunday in December

of 1978, I went alone with a young Swede, a young, very handsome, cool Swede, who was the representative of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. We were in Malaysia -- Malaysia, not incidentally, refused to allow me to come in the first time, because they said I was a Zionist rabbi, Zionist agent. And our whole delegation, before I even came down to breakfast to sit with them, decided, the Christians decided, that they will never go to Malaysia unless they allow a Jew to come in as equal citizens with them. And after their election was over, the foreign minister of Malaysia literally begged me to come to show that they were not anti-Semitic. In December 1978, I went with this young High Commissioner for Refugees, [56:00] Hansen, up the east coast of Terengganu Province in Malaysia. Malaysia's a country that is roughly divided; probably 60% are Muslims, 40% are ethnic Chinese, there's an uneven, uneasy relationship between them. And on this particular Sunday, Hansen and I were going up the east coast of Malaysia to the northernmost province, called Terengganu Province. Terengganu Province is known as the seat of the most conservative, fundamentalist Muslims. And on the Sunday as we were coming up to Terengganu Province, we suddenly saw a boat, a boatload of people, some 275, Hansen estimated, those commissioner refugee people are good at those estimates of body counts. As the boat came around, over there was an island, some 15 miles away called

Pulau Bidong. [57:00] Pulau Bidong was an island so beautiful that one time, it had eucalyptus trees, palm trees so beautiful that they shot the background for *South Pacific* movie there, it was now packed with sixty thousand people, four toilets, almost no water supply. And this boatload of people that came around Pulau Bidong could not land on that island, so they came in to beach their boat on the shore of Terengganu Province. As this boatload of some 275 people came in, most of them were ethnic Chinese, a good number of them Vietnamese, Thais. As they came in and beached their boat on the shore of Terengganu Province, suddenly a commotion broke out, and a whole village of people broke out from a village, a *kampung*, it was called, ultra-conservative fundamentalist Muslims. And it came racing down to the shore where the boat had beached, [58:00] they were carrying sticks and rocks and machetes, and they became screaming in Malaysian at the Chinese. I turned to Hansen, "What are they saying?" "They're calling them infidels, heretics, pork-eaters." Muslims don't eat pork, as traditional Jews don't eat pork; ethnic Chinese eat pork, it's a staple of their diet. And they descended on this boat, and they began pushing the boat back into the water. As the boat had begun coming around Pulau Bidong Island, and I saw them coming, looking at the faces, you could see the hope, the expectation, the people had probably been sailing three, four, five weeks in the South China Sea, probably

pushed back for many shores, now finally saw a place to land. And one face in particular caught my eye; it was an elderly Chinese woman, whose face reminded me of my mother's face, *aleah ha'shalom*, broad face, white hair, and you could see the hope in her eyes, finally a haven, safety. And as the Muslims moved down and pushed the boat out, [59:00] the boat cracked open, the people began to sink into the water, I grabbed the hand of Hansen, I said, "My God, let's do something!" We ran, we began pulling people out, babies, infants, teenagers, and I went after this *alte bubbe*, and pulled her out by her hands, and took her out to the shore. And we moved them down the shore to get them away from the Muslims. "Hansen," I said, after this was over, "the rest of them drowned." We just saw them sinking like stones, before our eyes. And the Muslims were standing there screaming as if a great victory for Allah, *inshallah*, God's will. That was my preview of Ayatollah Khomeini. That was my preview of that kind of fanatic Islamic tradition, in which it becomes the will of God to destroy somebody who does not share your own tradition, your own culture, your own values. I turned to Hansen and I said, "My God, what is this?" And he says, "Listen, Rabbi," very cool, this Swede, he says, "that goes on every day, every weekend. Can't do anything about it."

[01:00:00] So I ran and called the American ambassador in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, with whom we had had dinner the night before.

I told him what I had heard, and he, in turn, called the Department of the Interior, and later that day they sent a militia to guard the coast so that would not happen again. What became very clear to me is that I began to experience there two things, which were central in my consciousness as a Jew, facing them in the Nazi Holocaust, which, because the human family refused to face that, continued to perceive the Nazi Holocaust as a Jewish problem, of no concern to them, failed to develop the insight and the moral will to deal with these critical issues, which is at the background, I am persuaded of most of the massacres, which are taking place in much of the rest of the world. [01:01:00] In the case of conflict between groups that challenge each other's collective narcissism, this very challenge arouses intense hostility in each of them. The narcissistic image of one's own group is raised to the highest point, while the devaluation of the opposing group sinks to the lowest. One's own group becomes a defender of human dignity, decency, morality, and right, and devilish qualities are ascribed to the other group. It is treacherous, ruthless, cruel, and basically inhuman, and therefore subject to destruction. Group narcissism, [Frum?] declares, is one of the most important sources of human aggression. The degree of group narcissism is commensurate with a lack of real satisfaction in life; though social classes, which enjoy life more, are less fanatical,

fanaticism is a characteristic quality of group narcissism, and those, which like the lower middle class, [01:02:00] suffer from scarcity in all material and cultural areas, and lead a life of unmitigated boredom. Intense narcissism in itself is a semi-pathological phenomenon. I saw that group narcissism lived out not only between the Muslims and the ethnic Chinese there, but I saw it between the Vietnamese and the Thais, I saw it in Africa, with the Biafrans, the Christian Ebos who were massacred by Muslims from the North of Nigeria. Group narcissism which places oneself at the center of the universe, elevates oneself as being the source of ultimate veneration, adoration, and holds the other in contempt as being sub-human, is one of the key dynamics which one experiences in much of this group conflict, religious, racial, ethnic, throughout the world. The other reality which emerges from that, [01:03:00] and which is a central, a central threat, to human survival in much of the world today, is the absence of any doctrine, ideology or theology, of religious, racial, ethnic pluralism. You will find, if you look into the theology of Muslim extremists today, there simply is no conception of that which is the genius of America; namely, religious, racial, ethnic pluralism, where every group comes to the American table by right to be itself in its own terms, as first class citizens, without apology, providing for the welfare of its own members in the context of concern for the common



welfare. You will find if you look into every religious, racial, ethnic conflict in the world today, there is virtually no conception of religious pluralism in the world. Ayatollah Khomeini has only one exception - you can only be saved through Shi'ite Islam, [01:04:00] and he happens to be the latest incarnation of the [Khalafali?], and therefore Ba'hais are now in the process of being exterminated in Iran, and Christians are being killed every day, and Jews are being executed, because none of them are subject to salvation or redemption, and that worldview. And you'll find that in Uganda, you'll find that in the Sudan, where nearly a million Christians were murdered by the Arab Muslims; the world doesn't talk about that. In a conversation with the State Department not too long ago, I was told by an Assistant Secretary of State that next to the problem of Soviet Expansionism in the world, the second most serious problem that the American government faces, is that of the spread of Islamic fanaticism or other forms of fanaticism in the world. What simply will undermine the possibility of coexistence between various religious, racial, ethnic groups, and so that lesson of religious/ethnic pluralism [01:05:00] is one of the most important exports America has to give to the world, more important than computer technology. Finally, the lesson that we have learned is that if you look into every situation in which this kind of destruction takes place, and if the world had paid

attention what began, not only in Nazi Germany, but in Western Christian Europe for the past nineteen hundred years, it would have begun to have gotten some clue to their process of dehumanization which has taken place, which ultimately led to Auschwitz. On a microcosmic level, a study was done by Professor Gordon Allport of Harvard University called "The Study of Prejudice." In the early 1920s, there were a series of lynchings of blacks in the South, and fieldworkers from Harvard went into the communities to see how that took place, how are blacks lynched? What went on? And they found that in every instance where there was massive lynching of blacks, it was always proceeded by what Gordon Allport called [01:06:00] "verbal violence." In every one of those Southern communities, it always began with a campaign on the part of the Ku Klux Klan or that mentality, to begin talking about blacks not as human beings -- "niggers," "coons," "night riders." And for a period of weeks, they began making caricatures of blacks, emptying them of their humanity. Making them into caricatures empty of humanity, and therefore not fit objects for human compassion. And caring, and human response. And Allport said that once you empty a human being of his humanity, it is a very small thing for that caricature to be hung and swung from a tree, and not to call for any kind of sympathy or human response. If that is what led to the lynching of blacks in that tragic episode, that stain on

American history, can you imagine what has happened to the Jewish people across the past 1,900 years? [01:07:00] It begins with the image of the Jews, and that verbal violence, which began in ancient Palestine and spread throughout the whole of the diaspora. The Jews as Judas; the Jews as the betrayer of God and of mankind, who would sell God himself, in the Christian version, for 30 pieces of silver. And then the image of Jews as Judas, and the Pharisees as legalists, which became the dominant conception of the Jews religiously in Western Christian civilization for nineteen hundred years, then became secularized -- Shylock, Fagin, and then if you look at the Nazi literature, and we have at our library in the American Jewish Committee, the most extensive collection of Nazi propaganda against the Jews, including all of the [Straffer?] cartoons, all of the toys the Nazis produced for children, [01:08:00] to play with Jews on the checkerboard, kill six Jews, make three moves forward. Jews were so dehumanized, emptied of their humanity, that they became the image of the devil and Satan himself. And so as one looks at this reality, beginning with verbal violence, its implications today for what is happening with Israel at the United Nations, when Zionism is racism, that's the beginning of the campaign of the dehumanization of Israel. The de-legitimization of Israel. Verbal violence, to empty Israel of its humanity; to make it into a caricature, filled with diabolic content, an object of

hatred, rather than respect. And if you look at the absence of pluralism in so much of the rest of the world; in Africa, Asia, Latin America, my friends, we all have a stake in this, precisely because of the Nazi Holocaust. [01:09:00] We live at a moment in human history where even if we wanted the luxury of isolating ourselves from the rest of the human family, to say this is our own problem, we will deal with this ourselves, the fact that we live in an age of nuclear proliferation, where there is now the capacity of the United States and the Soviet Union alone, if they do not create another single ICBN, the United States alone, today, has the capacity, with our own ICBNs and our Trident Submarines, to destroy the human family fifteen times over. And the Soviet Union now has even a greater capacity. At the heart of the stirring that is taking place today in the world, is an effort to recover this fundamental assertion which began with our people and our tradition, at exodus at Sinai, namely an effort to reverse the cycle of dehumanization, [01:10:00] depersonalization, to assert again in powerful ways, that (inaudible), that every human being is created with sanctity, is infinitely precious, is not expendable to geo-global strategies. If governments don't have the capacity to understand that, the people themselves must assert themselves to take that in hand. And what we are saying out of our presence, and in our memorializing the six million as we will on

April 20<sup>th</sup>, is indeed, we come down to the memory of our dead, but we're also coming to raise the consciousness of the whole human family; that what we memorialize, they had best not take for granted, because that stake in what we are honoring, [01:11:00] and upholding the memory and the dignity of their lives, and asserting the responsibility that every Jew has for one another, *kol Yisrael arevim zeh bazeh*, is a model or paradigm for how every member of the human family must begin to behave toward one another, and unless that lesson is learned, potential for human disaster is great. And therefore, when we observe *Yom Ha'Shoah* this year, we are, in fact, more than we care to acknowledge, behaving in the tradition of Isaiah, who commanded that Israel must remain *or la'goyim*, a light unto the nations; not in terms of arrogance, not in terms of special privilege, but the sense of service of bringing humanity back to its senses while there's still time. Thank you. [01:12:00]

BRAMIN: So, let's start the questions because we have limited time.

M1: Rabbi Tanenbaum, what can we do to help in time? When you hear about all these atrocities, it's always too late. When we hear that people are starving in Ethiopia, it's always too late (inaudible). Also about *Genocide*, I thought they could have added another 10 minutes to some of what you

said, that people will see what happened, and then be aware that today, the same things are happening all over the world, [01:13:00] and something should be done about it.

BRAMIN: OK, let's ask another one. OK, Marsha?

F1: I would vouch that every one of us on that beach would have run into the water and pulled out those we could help. I'm sure if legislation were available to save the people of Afghanistan from the yellow rain, most of us would sign. But the compassion to absorb what is going on around us is beyond even the Jewish (inaudible). And there are political realities that go beyond being human, we cannot invade all of the countries where the Muslims are rampaging. There is a history of a geopolitical situation, over which we have no control. As human as we may be, as human as the competition's going to be.

TANENBAUM: Did you want to take another?

BRAMIN: [01:14:00] One on one.

TANENBAUM: Let's begin with the question of what, in fact, is your asking, an early warning system for dealing with these great human tragedies, and you also referred to the film *Genocide*. I had occasion with my fiancé, Dr. Georgette Bennett, to preview *Genocide*, I guess about two weeks ago. After the film was over, Simon Wiesenthal, whom I have known for many years, who together with my dear friend, Dr.

Charles Kramer, we've engaged in some common activity in chasing some Nazis together, Archbishop [Trefe?] among others. Dr. Charles Kramer's done heroic work as an associate with Simon Wiesenthal. Simon Wiesenthal came over to me afterward, and in what was a very moving moment for me, came over and embraced me, quite spontaneously, after that film, [01:15:00] and then he turned to me and said, "Marc, I want your help." That house was packed that night, for the preview of *Genocide*, I dare say that 95-98% of the people there to see it were Jews. And he said to me, as others have said to me after the showing of the NBC *Holocaust*, "It's important that Jews see this."

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