

CD-1103 Transcription

Funeral of Sadie Tanenbaum with a eulogy by Marc H. Tanenbaum.

2 March 1980.

[fumbling around, some background voices and tapes being played
-- little is audible]

Rabbi:

Oh, Lord, who shall dwell in your sanctuary, who shall abide
[01:00] in your holy mountain? He who lives with integrity, does
what is right, and speaketh the truth in his heart, who hath no
slander upon his tongue, nor doeth evil to his fellow man, who
does not reproach his neighbor, takes an oath, even to his own
harm, and does not change. Whoever does these things shall stand
firm forever.

We have come together sharing our sorrow to bid farewell to
Sadie Tanenbaum. We recall the blessing of her life; we thank
God for all that was true and good in her life, [02:00] and for
the precious memories that shall endure. Eternal God, creator,
merciful father of all, the children, bowed in grief, seek light
to dispel the dark gloom which threatens to overwhelm them.

Be gracious to those who mourn, for they are in distress. Bless them with your compassion, ease their burden of sorrow. Send them light and peace, for it is written, "Fear not, as I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will sustain you with my power." And let us say amen.

The finger of destiny, the [03:00] *Hashgochah Protis*, the divine providence. I see fit to bid the earthly life of Sadie Tanenbaum farewell on the day of Purim. The message of Purim is one of victory, the victory over death and destruction, the victory over persecution and annihilation. Of the victory of a people. And indeed, it is the spirit of the people like Sadie Tanenbaum who reflect the heroic traditions of Israel, who are the true heroines of our [04:00] faith. And indeed, it is in this spirit of victory that our gathering this morning to bid her farewell runs through our hearts and our thoughts.

Her death is real, the passing of one leaves a vacuum. There is a personality that will be sorely missed, but indeed, in the passing of one of the qualities of character of a Sadie Tanenbaum, there is a sense as well. The victory of immortality, those ideals which she espoused, those traditions which she cherished, the life which she lived, which remains everlasting.

[05:00] This remains with us through all eternity, and represents that which is ultimate in our faith, and in our belief.

I feel humble this morning, standing in the presence of the distinguished family of Sadie Tanenbaum, who raised children, and have become renowned within the Jewish community. And in the deep sense of humility, I have the honor to call upon the son of Sadie Tanenbaum, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, who will pay tribute to his beloved mother. [06:00]

Marc Tanenbaum:

[reads Hebrew passage] [07:00] [08:00]

A good wife who can find her worth is far above rubies, the heart of her husband's trust in her, and nothing shall he lack, she renders in good, and not evil, all the days [09:00] of her life. She opens her hand to the poor, she is robed in strength and dignity, and cheerfully faces whatever may come. She opens her mouth with wisdom, her tongue is guided by kindness. She tends to the affairs of her household, and eats not the bread of idleness.

Her children come forward and bless her, her husband too, he praises her. Many women have done superbly, but you, Mama,

surpass them all. Charm is deceitful, [10:00] and beauty is vain. But a God-revering woman is much to be praised. Place before her the fruits of her hands, wherever people gather, her deeds speak her praise. (pause)

Last Tuesday, two days before the passing of our mother, who was one of the most authentic [11:00] of the [*Eshet Chayil?*], whom the author of that magnificent proverb could have envisioned. The embodiment of all of those virtues and temperaments, sat up in her bed in the hospital, attended by our magnificent, loving, devoted sister, [Sima?], whose sustained her life.

And our mother, in her characteristic way, surrounded by pipes, and tubes, looked up at Sima, as she had looked up at my beloved brother, [12:00] Sima, and myself a week before, when she was first brought into the hospital. And her incredible indomitable way, knowing full well that the end was not far distant, she began to sing in her joyous exuberant affirmation of life, [*Hebrew passage*].

That was some [*Gabin?*] that we were blessed to have with our mother. [13:00] And her earthly physical self is now [*yishto?*]. But everything else that she was in our lives, is [*doh?*], in such abundance, such abundance, and such reality, such presence,

and that will never leave us, Mama. That's your immortality, it will never leave us.

We spoke with my dear uncle Max, who [14:00] was, for many of us, for all of us, in addition to my mother and father, of blessed memory, he was, in many ways for us, a surrogate father, cut from the same powerful, sturdy, value-blessed stock as my mother. An inspiration in our lives, he said to me, when we talked this weekend, in his typical honest way, "You know, your mother did not have a good life, an easy life, she had a hard life. But her children were her life. [15:00] They kept her going." They kept her going, and she kept us going, and she will keep us going forever.

Ernie, Sima, and I came together this past Friday night, Shabbat, in Sima's house, together with Sima's marvelous husband, Herb, and beautiful, beautiful children, Abbey and Adam. And we began to reminisce, to think about *[Hebrew]*, what our mother meant for us, what she did for us, what she left us, [16:00] and we went late into the night. And then, almost all of Saturday, we sat reminiscing, recalling stories, images, episodes, events, saying, songs, poems.

And last night, my brother took out a cassette of my mother singing in the midst of her pain, her illness, her suffering. Sitting in a car with my brother and Sima, Adam, Herb, singing Russian songs, Yiddish songs, reciting poems, as if nothing in the world bothered her. This incredible, indomitable [17:00] will of hers, her affirmation of life in the midst of pain, her affirmation of a zest to live, despite anything that's contrary to that.

It simply is the greatest consolation we have, but will sustain us through these difficult moments into the indefinite future, is the sheer reality that this incredible [*Eshet Chayil?*] lived a life so rich, despite the hardship, so full, so meaningful, so serving, so giving, so sacrificing, [18:00] that she has left us a legacy of memories, and values, and ideals to sustain us come what may.

There is a statement about one of the greatest architects in contemporary history, the late Sir Christopher Wren. And at the time of his passing, people came to the House of Lords to try to memorialize him. And one of the peers stood up and said about his great architect, who had built the most formidable monuments throughout the whole of London and England, "If you wish to know him, [19:00] look about you. His monuments are everywhere." Our

mother may not have built monuments of granite, she built more permanent, lasting monuments that are enshrined in the lives of Ernie, and Sima, myself, and Herb, and her grandchildren, her family, in the Jewish community of Baltimore, and indeed, even in the lives of humble Christians with whom she lived, when we were together at 1850 Light Street.

There is a very important insight which [20:00] helps sustain us, written by an anthropologist, whose name is Ernest Becker, in a classic study called "The Denial of Death." Becker says that, the obvious, "All human beings ultimately must face the existential reality of death, that our lives come to an end at some point." And, he says, "There is a terror about facing death, but it is not the terror of facing the fact of our mortality that terrifies us, there is a far greater terror. It is the terror that we may have lived [21:00] in this world, passed through this life, and lived a life without significance, without meaning, without leaving a trace in the world that makes a difference. And that, in fact, one's life ends up being that of a subsistence level, an animal existence, which makes no difference in the lives of one's family, one's neighbors. One simply endures the world, and then ends with death, and that terror is the worst of all. And so, all of our lives," Becker says, "All of our lives are nothing other than a pursuit of

immortality. Everything we do seeks to be an effort to make a statement in the world while we live here and pass through. That we have been [22:00] here, that we have done something of meaning and significance, that our lives have made a difference in the lives of people about us, and in the society, and in the world. All art, all culture, all religion, ultimately comes down to that enormous human determination to achieve that kind of immortality, which is to say, meaning and significance through our lifetime, which leaves a permanent change as our true monuments." That's our greatest consolation.

Our mother, without any question for us, has, in fact, achieved [Hebrew], has achieved immortality, in great abundance. Enormous abundance [23:00] several times over. And that achievement is not only remarkable, it is incredible. In fact, that achievement of that life of meaning and significance is little short of a miracle, because everything in the facts of her life, from the very beginning argued against any conventional normal person, making any achievement of significance whatsoever. Lesser people would have resigned in apathy, resignation would have capitulated to what Whitehead called "The brute force of history which overwhelmed him."

The facts of her life born in [Alico?], [Valinski?], [Gabernius?], some 80 years ago, her older brother Harry (inaudible), her younger brother Max, raised in poverty, [24:00] walking her early life through the blotches of Alico, struggling for a piece of bread, [Foreign]. Her mother had to sell, to sustain a family living in the midst of oppressive anti-Semitism, pogroms. And at 14, as our uncle Max reminds us, she turned to her father [Ravtiam?], who her mother herself, an extraordinary [Eshet Chayil?] [Haya Sorel?], and in the midst of her brothers, 14 years old, she says determinably, "I am going across the ocean, to golden America, the golden [Medina?]."

And she left, she [25:00] came across in steerage. The courage, risk, came to New York a child, a teenager, began working in sweatshops, and while working in sweatshops for nothing, she began going to night school to learn English. She had two great passions in life, from childhood on, it became clear. One, was good health, as we were to learn, which meant nobody is ever to skip a meal. And to her, that meant that the plumper we are, the healthier we were. And God forbid, we should become lean and thin, we were becoming sick.

And her other great passion in life was Torah, learning, education. [26:00] Her reverence -- her reverence for Torah, her

reverence for learning, her reverence for education was incomparable. She came to Baltimore with my father; they had small grocery stores, ma-and-pa stores. The first stores were disasters, and then they open up the store in 1850 Light Street, in which we had our growth and maturation, as my brother Ernie has written, 1850 Light Street was hardly a garden spot of America.

We lived through the Depression years together, and just some sense of what this woman endured, and how she still prevailed on a Friday afternoon, my father, *alav ha-shalom* said to me, "[*Heinka?*], go into the store and bring in the money, whatever money [27:00] came in today." And I walked over to the register and opened it up, the day's income, \$0.75. And I panicked, I literally panicked at the age of 13. I suddenly saw starvation at the door, I wondered whether there would be a challah for Shabbes.

And somehow, some way, by the force of her indomitable will, the strength of her character, the bedrock values of love, and caring, and sacrifice, and duty, that she embodied from her Yiddishkeit, which was as real, and live, and present to her as the air she breathed, would sustain her. It was her inner flame, [28:00] and her incredible sense of devotion to her husband, to

her children, above all, her children. She transformed what was, in fact for us, a barren tenement, lit by kerosene lamps, heated by kerosene oven. No one today would think of doing that, we would go on social welfare instead. But she made that tenement into a warm, loving, nurturing home. It was a place of refuge, a place of happiness, and play, and joy, and learning. It was a home in, often, a bleak and hostile world.

Images, images. Six o'clock every morning, this woman, whom we saw lying on her back this past week, [29:00] that's not the image we carry with us. Not that white death mask we saw a week ago, these are the images that are with us, that as real now, as they were then. Every morning, at Light Street, six o'clock in the morning on the coldest days, in that kerosene building, she would walk and open the store with my father.

By seven o'clock in the morning, at the bedside of Ernie, and myself, and my sister, there was always -- you could count on it, like you could count on the rising of the sun, every morning, a glass of fresh squeezed orange juice brought upstairs, so that we would have the day start right. And when we came downstairs, and enormous breakfast for all of us. And meanwhile, she's running the store, and feeding us, and nurturing us. Five-course breakfast, six-course breakfast.

[30:00] Our health was paramount, she had -- she always, as one of her cultural emblems, she had to fix us up. We were always being fixed up by Mama.

And then the salami sandwiches that we took for lunch. And during the entire day, during the entire day, she took care of a store, a business, an ailing husband, and during the course of the day when she worked at that business, she was a mathematical wizard. She would count columns faster than a computer, and began to develop an enormous inferiority. In fact, I became bad in math because of that. She was overwhelming in her gift.

And she became an extraordinary diplomat with our Christian customers. Whenever there were any problems, my mother found the way of bringing the customers back to the store. And an image that probably affected my life, even though I've never been conscious of it, one of Christmas evening, this orthodox Jewish woman, [31:00] observant with Shabbat, and *yontif*, and *Pesach*, standing on the eve of Christmas in that barren store, stands there putting together Christmas baskets with canned goods and food.

I come into the store, "Mama, what are you doing?" "I have just learned that our customers Mrs. Kirby, Mrs. Wingate have no food

for their Christmas dinner. How terrible it would be for people to have to go through their holiday hungry." And she puts together Christmas baskets, and wraps them in green and red, and this [Hebrew] walking through the streets of South Baltimore feeding Christians so they don't go hungry on Christmas!

And we would come home in the evening, after a full day of school, and there was always a hot dinner there. And incredibly, after the dinner, she would sit down with each one of us [32:00] and do our homework, and would not leave us until every single one of us had completed our homework. Always the basket of fruit there.

We were the apple of her eye, there's no question about that. But we also know that whatever sense of self-worth we have, what sense of self-esteem, whatever achievement we had, it's because above all, we counted to Mama. She made us feel there was something precious, something special for us to do.

And with all of that, with all of that, she found time for one of the great inspirations and joys of her life, the parochial school, the Jewish parochial school in Eastside, [33:00] in East Baltimore. It was one of her great passions, it was the expression, the living out of all of her feelings. Always,

around the house, she would be singing songs, [*Hebrew passages*]. And she wasn't just going to sing, and she was going to make sure that it would become a living reality in our lives, and in the lives of children. And I remember living in that, going to school in that east parochial school on East Baltimore Street. In any other time, it would've been condemned as a fire trap, it was that, there was no money.

And whenever Rabbi [Samson?] *alav ha-shalom* would call up and say, "Mrs. Tanenbaum, there's no money, Mrs. Tanenbaum, there is no money for tuition, we cannot pay our teachers. There'll be no food for Shabbas." [34:00] She would turn to my father say, "Take care of the store." She would take off her apron, and she would walk around with a pushke to every Jewish merchant in South Baltimore, or she would join Mrs. Siegel, and Mrs. Rosenthal, and they would go around, and in a day, two days, collect enough money to keep the rabbis and the teaching faculty of that school from being hungry that weekend.

I have no question that that faith, that zeal, that devotion, that [*Hebrew*] of my mother and these other few women like her, literally sustained that beautiful academy. It exists today because of that incredible devotion, and of their keeping it from going over the brink, and to closing down.

What more is there to say? After Dad's terrible death, [35:00] his illness, Mom, who sacrificed herself to try to bring him some relief, some [mathasrua?], herself, exhausted, we closed her down in that store, we closed that store down and took her out to Hilton Road, and then she developed, with her irrepressible energy, with her irrepressible search for life, she began going to Shul every day across the street. Bethel [Hebrew]. She read all of the Yiddish papers. And then, she began writing letters to Dr. [Clarman?]. And when she became concerned about the fate of Israel, she began writing letters to the President of the United States, organizing petitions, moving in political campaigns.

She wrote letters to Golda Meir, telling her not to be faint of heart that she was supporting Israel. [36:00] She loved to perform, her favorite line was -- I want to give you a poem, we went this past week to Hurwitz House, the place where she found some comfort during her last days of illness. We talked to people in the house, her friends. Mrs. Hill, the director of the house, a very marvelous person, who, in her classic way, said to us, "You know, your mother Tanenbaum, [37:00] she made friends with everybody here." And then, the small lady, I think her name was Mrs. Feldman, came over and said, "We miss your mother, she

was so lively, so much fun, so interesting, so entertaining.
It's so quiet here without her."

And then she said, "Your mother used to give us a poem, it was marvelous." She gave us this poem. "It's Up To You," it is called. Mama knew it by heart. She said it over and over again. "Did you make [38:00] someone happy, or make someone sad? What have you done with the day that you have had? God gave it to you, to do just as you would. Did you do what was mean, or do what was good? Did you lighten some load, or some progress impede? Did you look for a rose, or just gather a weed? Did you hand out a smile, or just give them a frown? Did you lift someone up or push someone down? What have you done with your beautiful day," Mama said. "God gave it to you. Did you throw it away?" [39:00]

My brother, Ernie, wrote in one of his last letters to our dear beloved Mama, these words, with which I close. It's a note that I could've written about him, or anyone else would've written about Sima, it happened that he, after chiding Mama about taking her medicine and not eating salty foods, wrote the following. "I spoke with Marc last night, he just returned from Rome, where he met with the new Pope. Tonight, he flies out to California for a few days, after which, he flies to Germany to meet with the head

of the German government, Helmut Schmidt. [40:00] You and Dad sure must have done something right on Light Street to have raised a boy who rubs elbows with presidents and popes. It just proves that it is not the neighborhood that matters, it's the home. Despite all the sores of our childhood, we all turned out pretty good, Mama. And best of all -- best of all, we love each other, and most of all, we love you."

Rabbi:

[*Hebrew passage*] [41:00] Oh, God, exalted and full of compassion bring perfect peace in your sheltering presence of the holy and the pure, to the soul of [*Hebrew*], who has gone on to eternity. Lord of mercy, bring her under the cover of thy wings. May her soul be bound up in the bundle of eternal life as our possession, and may her repose be everlasting peace. And let us say amen. You may be seated.

[42:00] I want to acknowledge the presence of Rabbi Albert Pattashnick, the Executive Vice President of the Talmudical Academy, the parochial school, to which Rabbi Tanenbaum so eloquently alluded. Note that the presence of Rabbi Pattashnick is exceedingly meaningful to the family, and through him, expresses the sense of loss to the family on behalf of this great school of learning in our community.

The family, after internment services, will return to 6605 Pimlico Road, where Shiva will be observed. Services will take place through Tuesday evening at 7:15 in the morning in [Hebrew] at 5:30 in the evening. I know that we will want to be present to pay our respects to this great woman. Amen. [43:00]

(pause)

[phone ringing]

M:

Will the pall bearers please go to the back of the chapel as your names are called. Mr. Benish, Mr. Barry Benish, Mr. Herbert Scher, Mr. Adam Scher, Mr. Leonard [Sieger?], Mr. Bernard Kauffman, [44:00] Mr. Maurice [Sieger?], Mr. Samuel Rudy, and Mr. Harold Smullian. Will everyone please rise.

[inaudible voice far in background]

M:

Please be seated. As you leave the chapel, please use the side exits to your left. [45:00] All those going to the cemetery, please go directly to your cars, thank you.

[unrelated audio playing]

[46:00]

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