

MS-603, Box 112, Folder 14 Transcription

New York Board of Rabbis award to Marc H. Tanenbaum. Acceptance  
remarks by Georgette Bennett. 29 April 1992.

M1:

-- since this morning of our dear friend and colleague, our guest of honor, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, who could not be with us this morning. But (inaudible) have some assessments made [in some occasion?] that he's [making?], and with such a nature that simply, after begun today, and this being the time of [svira?], we know the importance of the [count?] of each and every single day. Marc very much wanted to be with us, and I hope and pray that, God willing, he will be back with his family and [from?] service to the community in a relatively short period of time, hopefully within a counting of days. But today is not to be one of those days. [Instead?] of his [prisons in prison?] this morning. We not only have is beautiful and charming wife to accept the award on his behalf, [01:00] but we also have a lecture that he delivered at the University of Wisconsin, I believe, within the last month that encompasses the basic framework and outline of the lecture that he was going to be delivering to us this morning on why Jewish-Christian relations -- in fact, Marc was kind enough to forward the text of the lecture to us yesterday, to fax over to us. But we felt that

[*ano dome reilah beshmila?*], that to be able to see [like video?] our dear friend, and truly (inaudible) American Jewish personality, Marc Tanenbaum, in the second-best manner, namely through the video, would be most meaningful to us. So that will come in just a very few [02:00] short moments. I do want to express, before introducing Dr. Solomon Mowshowitz on behalf of the Mowshowitz family to make the award to Mrs. Tanenbaum. I'd like to express our appreciation first through our executive vice president, Rabbi Joe Rosenthal. In the short period of time in which I'm now serving as president of the New York board, I've come to realize that [Gil?] Rosenthal and the New York board are synonymous, they are one and the same. And emergencies don't faze Gil, and we are in the hands of a marvelous steward. So I want to thank you, Gil, for all of the arrangements for this morning's program. And to express collectively, on behalf of the Board of Governors, our regard to our revered teacher and leader of the New York board, the name of Rabbi Israel Mowshowitz, [03:00] and the name of (inaudible) is "He brings glory to us." And (inaudible) to the rabbinate, to the Mowshowitz name, which is a name of esteem and pride to the entire American Jewish community. [We'd like to?] welcome Rabbi Mowshowitz, and we pray for a (inaudible) that this conference and this prize, for many years to come, in your presence, will

be dignified as one of the most significant of awards that we can bring.

Dr. Solomon Mowshowitz, himself a noted scientist, and a esteemed [*talit chacham?*], encompassing all of the great virtues of the Mowshowitz family. We are pleased to have him, and (tape noise problems) presentation of the Mowshowitz Prize. Dr. [Mowshowitz?]. (applause)

**Solomon Mowshowitz:**

Thanks so much. (inaudible) esteemed rabbis, (inaudible) [hand down?], and Peter's [going all the more so?] because (inaudible). We wish him (Hebrew). Considering [how it's right and proper?] to speak more freely of [an individual *hasheba?*] in this absence than one made in his presence. Let's take this opportunity to do so. I'm grateful that Mrs. Tanenbaum can be here to accept the presentation. Rabbi Tanenbaum once said about her, "During our years together. Georgette has made me possible." At the time, no doubt, he spoke graciously and truthfully. I know this, because [05:00] truth with grace is a (inaudible) [on which we have taught?] never (inaudible). They say that when Eddie Cantor began to make real money, he went out and bought himself, of all things, a yacht. He even bought himself a snappy-looking nautical captain's outfit so he could

look the part. He just couldn't wait to show (inaudible) off, so symbolic of having [a lot?] to his mother. "Look, Ma," he said. "I'm a captain!" His mother must have been a lot like my mother, (laughter) looked him skeptically up and down, and [with a?] she signed, "By you, Eddie, you're a captain. And by me, you're a captain. But by the captains, are you a captain?" (laughter)

Well, by Marc Tanenbaum, today's recipient of the Israel and Libby Mowshowitz Award is, by the captains of this world, an acknowledged and formidable captain. *New York Magazine* described Rabbi Tanenbaum as "the foremost Jewish ecumenical [06:00] leader in the world today." National and international organizations, religious, political, and civic leaders around the world, heads of state, popes, presidents, have taken to heart and benefitted from Rabbi Tanenbaum's counsel, wisdom, and occasionally, his candid criticism. In his former capacities as national interreligious affairs director, and as director of international relations at the American Jewish Committee, Rabbi Tanenbaum represented and communicated effectively the Jewish reality around the world to leaders, organizations, and governments at the highest level. He was the only rabbi at Vatican Council II. We are now only beginning to recognize fully the colossal, historic significance of *Nostra Aetate*. Rabbi Tanenbaum's participation was crucial in delicate, diplomatic

challenges associated with the drafting of *Nostra Aetate*.

[07:00] Rabi Tanenbaum served as member of the prestigious Human Rights Research Committee, a Foreign Policy Association study of priorities for the 1980s. He's testified both before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee. Rabbi Tanenbaum's accomplishments, achievements, credentials, I cannot recite them all. But I will attempt, in my brief time, to go beyond these accolades and ask how do they come about? Why is it that when Rabbi Tanenbaum talks, world leaders listen? What has earned him universal respect? What are the personal values that are the engine of his luminous career?

First of all, there is the breadth of Rabbi Tanenbaum's vision. He looks beyond the immediate event and sees things clearly in their wide, historical perspective. He knows the difference between the [*chil adorot?*] and the [*chiash al chinah?*]. [08:00] Recognizes when to compromise, and when to insist. Second, there is the breadth, not only of his vision, but also of his human concern. While we all recognize Rabbi Tanenbaum's struggles on behalf of the Jewish people, some may not be as informed about his work on behalf of refugees and victims of war and oppression all over the world, including Lebanese, Nigerians, [Sudanans?], and Haitians, notably his effort on behalf of refugees from Vietnam and Cambodia, contributing significantly to the saving

of tens of thousands of lives. The National Interreligious Taskforce on Soviet Jewry, for example, which Rabbi Tanenbaum founded and co-chaired, [has taken?] not only Jews from the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, but oppressed Christians as well.

Above all is Rabbi Tanenbaum's supremacy in communication.

[09:00] There has never been more at stake for us Jews in achieving effective communication of our point of view. Rabbi Tanenbaum has attained a crucial balance between public relations and real dialogue, between advocacy and substantive communication, between diplomacy and authenticity. He's transformed the world forever, the traditional role of the [shtatemam?], to transcend [shtatu anot?]. Public relations, yes, but also real dialogue. Advocacy, yes, but also genuine communication. Diplomacy, certainly, but also authenticity. Let a vision of human concern, genius for communication, all of these would not amount to anything, were it not for Rabbi Tanenbaum's diligence, professionalism, and hard work. It's revealing that in his response on receiving the prestigious Interfaith Award [10:00] of the International Council of Christians and Jews in May 1988, Rabbi Tanenbaum said that his adopted, threefold [motto?] was, "Be effective, know the facts, and do it right."

I'm told that in some circles, Rabbi Tanenbaum has acquired his somewhat ironic title of *navi lagoyim*, prophet, or spokesman, to the gentiles. Let's inspect this title more closely. Rabbi Tanenbaum, as you of course know, is not the first to have it. The title of "prophet to the gentiles" was first given by God to the Prophet Jeremiah. One might have thought that such a title would be more aptly applied to a prophet such as Jonah, who spoke -- albeit [lovingly?] -- to goyim, and his message was directed primarily at them. But Jeremiah, the first *navi lagoyim*, [11:00] spoke to the hearts of the Jewish people, as he does to this day. Rabbi Tanenbaum, in his capacity of *navi lagoyim*, also speaks directly to the Jewish heart. He has recognized that in order to communicate the Jewish reality to the others, we must have a clear vision of it ourselves. The way we talk to others both reflects and illuminates who we are, and who we believe we are.

We're grateful for Rabbi Tanenbaum's diplomatic mastery, but even more enriched by his vision of ourselves, to the crucial sense of balance that shows Jews how to be in the world. First, passionate concern for Jews, but not only for Jews, and not only for public relations purposes. To have the kind of world in which the Jew and the Jewish people to live. Second, how shall

we communicate with goyim in the post-Holocaust [12:00] era? How to recognize what things have changed, and what kind of change we demand? Our (inaudible) Rabbi Tanenbaum's own (inaudible), neither groveling [*stalamut?*], nor angry, solipsistic rhetoric [concern?] that only his formula of truth [with grace?].

Finally, Rabbi Tanenbaum's central message to us is to take the idea seriously that Jews bring something to the world. Rabbi Tanenbaum has spoken of his passion for making a real difference for the [world?], and the abiding faith that what we do can matter. This has also been the lesson I have been taught through word and deed by my parents. It was with great difficulty that they came this morning. My parents are here because Rabbi Tanenbaum has earned their unqualified respect and affection. That alone is good enough for me. It's therefore a privilege and an honor for me to present Rabbi Tanenbaum with the Israel and Libby Mowshowitz Award. (applause)

Rabbi Israel and Libby Mowshowitz presented to Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum for advancing (inaudible) Jewish (inaudible) through cultural programs, humanitarian service, (inaudible) endeavors, and interreligious activities. The New York Board of Rabbis, 5752, corresponding to 1992. (applause)

(overlapping dialogue; inaudible) [13:52]-[14:07]

**Georgette Tanenbaum:**

(inaudible) [talking talis?]. Dr. Mowshowitz, I can't tell you how moved I am, and how move Marc is going to be, when he hears your words. In my years with Marc, I have never heard anybody summarize so rightly what his life has been about, what his career has been about. You have shown perfect pitch in terms of what he values about life, in terms of what he values about himself, and in terms of what he wants to be valued for. [15:00] And when I play him the tape of this wonderful, wonderful presentation that you did, it's going to double his heartbreak at not having been here today to receive this award himself, because he is heartbroken about it, terribly heartbroken. For the past few weeks, he has talked about almost nothing else. That's how much this means to him. Our life has literally been put on hold until this day was behind him. Anything I would talk to him about, "Let's get this done, let's get that done." "No, not now. (laughter) After Wednesday." So we really tried to bargain with his doctors when they told him yesterday he had to come into the hospital immediately, he said, "How about noon tomorrow?" "No, you must come in now." He said, "OK, we'll come in now, but how about [16:00] (inaudible) for one hour tomorrow morning? It's only four blocks from the hospital. Let him come,

just for one hour." "No, absolutely not." The best they could come up with is that there's a [moratorium?] (inaudible) hospital. They said you can do it here, but he cannot leave the hospital.

I'm probably out of my mind to say this in front of a room full of rabbis, but it was a little bit like Abraham arguing with God, to save the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. If only there are to be found 10 just men. Well, apparently Marc wasn't just enough, so you're stuck with me. (crowd laughter) So what would really be adding injury to insult would be if I would now turn into a pillar of salt. (crowd laughter)

Let me tell you why this particular honor means so much [17:00] to a man who has been blessed with so many honors in his life. Because this, indeed, is one of the highlight honors of Marc's 30 years of service to the Jewish community especially, and his relationship with the Christian world. Marc has received 15 honorary doctorates in his life. I can say that, I'm allowed to brag. I have no right to, because I had nothing to do with it, but I'm very proud of that. He's received 15 of them, but mostly from Christians institutions. So among his many honors, this is really one of his most treasured. And there are two reasons that it's one of his most treasured. First, the fact that it's in the

name of Israel and Libby Mowshowitz. [18:00] Israel and Libby hold a very, very special place in Marc's heart, and a very special place in my heart, too, because Israel was one of the rabbis who married us 10 years ago. We weren't taking any chances. We had three rabbis (inaudible) judge. We really had to make sure this was going to stick.

Marc sees Israel, (tape speeds up; inaudible) [a word play of their?] (inaudible), Dr. Mowshowitz. If Marc is a captain among captains, then he sees Israel as a (inaudible). (crowd laughter) A towering figure, whom to this day, Marc still tries to emulate; a soulmate. And because [19:00] Libby is the soulmate of his soulmate, he values Libby equally with friendship, Israel's scholarship, Israel's ability to be a deeply committed Jew, and express his Jewishness in a context of a very much broader world, and bring so much to all of the worlds in which he has participated. Israel's courage, which affirms everything about all of the life-affirming qualities of Judaism, because Israel just hangs on to life, and hangs on to it beautifully, and gracefully, and successfully, and we all admire him so much for that.

So that's one reason [20:00] that this award is very special to Marc, a very good reason. The other reason is that it comes from

the colleagues, it comes from you. It comes from the New York Board of Rabbis, an organization with which he has been affiliated on and off since the 1950s. And it honors a special friendship that he has with Rabbi [Harold Norton?] and Rabbi [Falk Hyatt?]. And today, the very special warmth that he feels toward Rabbi [Gilbert?] Rosenthal. And it's an honor of Israel and Libby, and an honor of the New York Board of Rabbis that Marc is enormously grateful for the [tachlas?] part of this award. He wants very much to donate this money to the Israel and Libby Mowshowitz Fund, so that in the future, [21:00] more great rabbis can be honored by Israel and Libby for their continuing work to the Jewish people.

I just want to say one word about the path that Marc has chosen, and there's very little I need to say, because Dr. Solomon Mowshowitz has expressed it so perfectly. But every one of you in this room is a deeply committed Jew, and the nature of our faith is such that it gives us so many different paths for choosing the special ways that we want to give to our people, and that we want to express the best of our faith. The path that Marc has chosen is Jewish-Christian relations. And if he were here today, then he would be able to tell you, in great detail - - (inaudible) Dr. Mowshowitz would have stolen all [22:00] his thunder -- the importance of that particular path, and why he

chose it. But I think the video that you're going to see will lay that out quite clearly.

So let me just close by telling you again how very, very much this means to Marc, how very, very sorry he is that he could not be here himself to accept it. And he thanks you, and I thank you. (applause)

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