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## **Taking Man Seriously**

Address by  
DR. NORMAN LAMM  
President, Yeshiva University

delivered at  
the dedication of the

**CARL & DOROTHY BENNETT  
CHAIR IN  
PASTORAL COUNSELING**

at the  
**Wurzweiler School of Social Work,  
Yeshiva University**

in honor of  
Rabbi Joseph H. Ehrenkranz  
Spiritual Leader of  
Congregation Agudath Sholom  
Stamford, Connecticut.

August 17, 1982



The significance of the special occasion which brings us together this evening deserves to be considered in the context of the larger questions of the philosophical and psychological nature of our society.

Our civilization is undergoing accelerated depersonalization as part of the modernization process, one in which technology plays a critical role. Human beings have begun to lose their status as unique and irreplaceable personalities. The unparalleled successes of science, which have transformed human society, have made us worship the "objective" and shun the subjective. Human relations are seen as "games that people play," patients as "beds," ideas as "strategies," life as a series of self-replicating macro-molecules, mind as merely brain, morals as nothing more than mores. Philosophy has been reduced to linguistics, and even poetry and music have been mathematicized and computerized. In a context of this sort, values are considered chimerical and virtually nonexistent. Thus, philosophers speak of the "reification" of man, his reduction to a mere "thing." The spiritual grandeur of individual humans has sustained a stunning defeat, as man is stripped of his mystique, his metaphysical dignity, his mystical special-ness. This is what the philosopher Martin Buber meant when he spoke of modern life substituting the "I-It" for the "I-Thou."

This depersonalization is really the latter half of a two-step process. The first of these is the erasure of all differences between individual human beings, the homogenization of all men and women in a vast melting pot. This tragic insistence on uniformity is often the result of a fallacy whereby we equate equality with same-ness. Thus, Julian Huxley, in his introduction to *The Phenomenon Of Man*, by the distinguished Jesuit paleontologist



Teilhard de Chardin, writes of "the tendency to destroy the effect of cultural diversification and lead to drab uniformity instead of the rich and potent pattern of variety in unity." He is, quite correctly, haunted by the spectre of a planet inhabited by six or ten or fifteen billion nobodies-in-particular.

The second step is to strip these nobodies-in-particular of any human emotions or the capacity to excite such emotions, any feeling of warmth or worth, thus making numbers of them. Once we are no longer different from each other, it is easy to depersonalize us and reduce us to ciphers and undo the dignity of man, which has been a fundamental of Western Civilization since its very beginnings.

A society of this sort can be efficient and successful — but to what end? If quality and values and love and compassion and sympathy and friendship cannot be expressed in charts and statistics and numbers, are they without significance? And if they are, is not all of life a meaningless progression of numbers, bytes, and equations?

Let me give you a worst-case example, one that is admittedly extreme but which constitutes an apocalyptic vision of what society is capable of when this depersonalization of humanity is given free rein. One of the most vicious and successful techniques of the Nazis in the concentration camps was to deny the inmates their own names, and to give them numbers instead. The concentration camp number tattooed onto the arms of the Nazi victims is perhaps the most frightening symbol of depersonalization. This demonic chapter in our contemporary history must always haunt us as we contemplate the loss of respect for individual men and women, and the devaluation of humans and individuals to which modern society may be leading us.

This is a murky and cold kingdom in which we encounter only interchangeable profiles and deny importance to individual people, we no longer care about them, we no longer offer our fellow humans our concern and sympathy. Remember, we are only two years away from Orwell's 1984 . . .

The entire Jewish tradition rejects this mechanization of life and its depersonalization. True, it encourages man to exploit his technological genius in the material world — "fill the earth and subdue it" is the Biblical warrant for scientific mastery over our environment — but it reminds us that "man does not live by bread alone," that man is endowed with heart and soul and feelings and thirst for the spiritual, and that these require the development of different and far more personal talents. It bids us to care for people. It warns us that the greatest sin is to make ourselves deaf and dumb and blind to our neighbor's pleasure and pain, love and hate, fear and desire. It tells us that when our neighbor is in trouble, *lo tukhal le-hitalem*, you must not be able to turn away from him — that is, not only are we commanded not to turn away, but we must so educate ourselves that we will simply be *unable* to deny our care and concerns and help for a suffering fellow man. Compassion and human solidarity must become part of our viscera, our guts, and decency must become our automatic response.

The portion of the Torah we shall read this Shabbat records the command to set aside cities of exile for those guilty of manslaughter. The introduction to the biblical law of unpremeditated homicide is as follows: "This is the case of the manslayer. . . who kills his neighbor unawares (*b'iveli daat*) and hated him not in times past" (Deut. 19:4). Manslaughter is located somewhere between the guilt of outright murder and total innocence. The



term *bi'veli daat*, "unawares," is ordinarily taken as the mitigating factor. However, I suggest that in a sense it should also be taken as the opposite, as that which confirms guilt: A man can be a murderer or manslayer when he kills his neighbor with the weapon of *bi'veli daat*, when he strikes him with thoughtlessness, mindlessness, carelessness, by being unaware of his needs and fears and concerns, by failing to give him a word of encouragement and solace, a smile of friendship. Cutting oneself off from a fellow man by means of *bi'veli daat* can be as deadly and devastating as the assailant's bullet or the mugger's dagger.

Such an attitude of indifference characterizes too much of contemporary society, and is the logical outcome of its stripping us of our innate differences and reducing us to numbers, to ciphers, to interchangeable cogs in the social machine.

It is for this reason that the endowment of a chair in pastoral counseling, by the distinguished philanthropists Carl and Dorothy Bennett, assumes such special significance. By sponsoring this chair at Yeshiva University's Wurzweiler School of Social Work, they have made a trenchant point of social criticism, and they have done so creatively and constructively. As renowned "movers" in the mercantile world, they have had great success in the use of modern technology and sophisticated marketing methodologies. But as highly responsible community leaders, their endowment of the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Chair in Pastoral Counseling is a vote for man over means, for meaning over method, for people over things, for feelings over numbers, for goodness and vision and sensitivity over technique and objects and quantification. They have placed their successes in the "bottom line" of the business world at the service of their fellow men by training clergymen to be "top of the line"

experts in human relations, ministering to the lonely, the sick, the forlorn, the broken-hearted. They have recognized the illness of which we suffer, and are taking steps to heal society.

It is remarkably fortuitous that this extraordinary benefaction by the Bennett's is being made in honor of their distinguished spiritual leader, Rabbi Joseph H. Ehrenkranz, who has ministered to their congregation, Agudath Sholom of Stamford, for 33 years.

I have known Rabbi Ehrenkranz since our high school days. Even as a youngster, he had the reputation of being an excellent student, a good athlete, and a man capable of great and enduring friendship. I do not know if he has retained his athletic prowess, but he most certainly has enhanced the other two virtues in the course of the years.

Two qualities, over all others, characterize Rabbi Ehrenkranz. First, he is a *chakham*, a wise person. Mamonides defines a sage as one who can weigh and measure his own actions and attributes. Rabbi Ehrenkranz has, in the course of his distinguished career, learned to hone and finely tune the balance of his personality, producing a remarkable blend of principle and pragmatism, and these have contributed mightily to his outstanding success in the rabbinate. The late Senator Everett Dirksen used to say, "I am a man of fixed and unbending principles, and my first such fixed and unbending principle is always to be flexible." It is this unusual combination which Rabbi Ehrenkranz has effected with such admirable success.

Second, he has always been the paragon of a caring Rabbi. A loyal alumnus of Yeshiva University, and the scion of a well known rabbinic family, Rabbi Ehrenkranz has always been a specialist in human relations — which



is to say that, in addition to being a *chakham*, he has been a *mensch* who has opened his heart to his people and shared with them his warmth and sentiment and love and concern — and taught them the secret of caring and worrying about others. Indeed, Rabbi Joseph Ehrenkranz reminds me of the verse in the 81st chapter of Psalms, that when Joseph came to Egypt he heard an unfamiliar language — *sefat lo yadati eshma*. With a bit of homiletic license, one can read that as indicating not only that Joseph did not understand Egyptian, but that he heard the language of *lo yadati*, "I don't know," an expression of non-concern, of non-caring, of icy indifference. Our Joseph too is appalled by not knowing and not wanting to know about the fate and destiny of others. He is the perfect embodiment of the ideal pastoral clergyman which this chair will hold as a model before its students at our University. And may those students receive from their people, of whatever faith, the same love and devotion and esteem that Rabbi Ehrenkranz has received and will continue to receive from this congregation.

This is, therefore, a unique event in which caring people honor a caring Rabbi by endowing at a University that cares a chair for the education of Rabbis and other clergymen to professionalize their care and concern for the people to whom they minister.

I conclude with the execution of four brief and pleasant tasks.

I am delighted to present to our very gracious hostess, Mrs. Dorothy Bennett, a model of a chair as a symbol of our gratitude for the chair which she and her husband have endowed at Yeshiva University.

And I present to Mr. Carl Bennett, our distinguished host and chairman of this evening, the following proclamation:

**Whereas:** in recognition of the needs of clergy of all faiths to counsel and aid members of their congregations with diverse social problems, and

**Whereas:** Yeshiva University and its Wurzweiler School of Social Work have established a reputation for excellence and dedication to the furtherance of social welfare and the human condition, and

**Whereas:** through the generous and outstanding benefaction of Carl and Dorothy Bennett, the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Chair in Pastoral Counseling has been established, to be conducted under the aegis of the Master of Social Work for Clergy Program at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work, and

**Whereas:** Rabbi Joseph H. Ehrenkranz has, through a lifetime of devotion to the spiritual and social needs of his fellow man, demonstrated those attributes central to the highest ideals of Judaism and humane service;

Therefore, it is hereby proclaimed, by the power vested in the President of Yeshiva University and its Board of Trustees, that the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Chair in Pastoral Counseling, established in tribute to Rabbi Joseph H. Ehrenkranz, is inaugurated at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work by the endowment of Carl and Dorothy Bennett this date of Tuesday, August 17, 1982, 28 Av 5742.

At this time, I am happy to confirm the nomination of Professor Irving Levitz by Dean Lloyd Setleis to be the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Professor of Pastoral Counseling at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work of Yeshiva University.



Finally, it is with great pleasure and affection that I present a plaque to my dear friend Rabbi Joseph Ehrenkranz, which reads as follows:

**Yeshiva University**

**Scroll of Honor**

**Presented to**

**Rabbi Joseph H. Ehrenkranz**

On the occasion of establishment of the Carl and Dorothy Bennett Chair in Pastoral Counseling at the Wurzweiler School of Social Work in tribute to him, and in recognition of his outstanding contributions to his congregation, the community, the nation, and world Jewry, encompassing more than one-third of a century of distinguished spiritual leadership serving Congregation Agudath Sholom and the city of Stamford, Connecticut. His devotion to the welfare of his fellow man and the cherished traditions of the Judaic heritage symbolize those ideals central to the programs and philosophy of Yeshiva University and its affiliated Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, of which he is a distinguished alumnus.

August 17, 1982

28 Av 5742

**Dr. Norman Lamm**

President, Yeshiva University

**Hon. Herbert Tenzer**

Chairman, Board of Trustees

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