A TRIBUTE TO HERBERT TENZER

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On my desk, as I write these words, is a small bronze plaque that reads, "There is no limit to what a man can do or where he can go, if he doesn't mind who gets the credit." That sign, whose message I have endeavored to incorporate into my own life, was given to me by Herbert Tenzer. Never have I come across a man who more completely personified this gem of wisdom.

Herbert Tenzer never claims credit, directly or indirectly—which may account for how much he has done and how far he has come in his four score years. Herbert has served with distinction in the U.S. House of Representatives and retired from his congressional duties undefeated. He is one of the most eminent lawyers in our city, and his reputation in the real estate community is beyond reprobation. He has founded and headed synagogues, Jewish schools, rescue operations, and all kinds of organizations dedicated to enhancing friendship and mutual trust amongst human beings. Thus, he has assumed leadership roles in the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and is president of the America-Israel Friendship League. A distinguished Orthodox layman and a vigorous leader of the United Jewish Appeal, he is aware of the possible frictions and tensions amongst his various loyalties—Jews and Christians, America and Israel, Blacks and Whites, Republicans and Democrats. Yet, Herb Tenzer is above all one who seeks to avoid confrontations, and to bring people and groups together. In this, he has been a most enviable success. Perhaps the greatest test of his personal, life-long triumph as a man of peace and conciliation is the warm, loving, and precious relationship between Herbert and his beloved Florrie!

The Talmud records a fascinating incident which Maimonides in his Guide for the Perplexed cites as one of the most precious Talmudic anecdotes. R. Hanina was present at a service conducted by a prayer-leader at a time before the Prayerbook was reduced to writing. In the repetition of the Amidah, he expanded upon the four standard phrases of praise (God, Who is Great, Mighty and Awesome) by adding a long string of elaborate adjectives of his own devising. When he finished, and looked to the rabbi with an obvious expectation of approval for his liturgical creativity, R. Hanina scolded him instead, and asked: "Is that all?" When the cantor showed his perplexity at this response, R. Hanina explained that really we ought not to say anything at all about the Creator, because everything we say implies that only that with which we articulate is true of Him, but no more, thus limiting His greatness. The four phrases of praise are permitted to us only because the "Men of the Great Assembly" used those adjectives, and therefore we must limit ourselves to those terms and no others.

In a manner of speaking, making provision for the obvious and infinite difference between the Creator and His creatures, this accounts for my feeling that all the genuine love and profound esteem that a grateful community feels for Herbert Tenzer is best left unsaid, lest what we really want to say—no matter how lengthy or eloquent—prove inadequate. Indeed, what can one say that will neither offend his innate modesty nor pale by comparison with his actual record?

I have had the personal privilege of knowing Herbert Tenzer for most of my life, and I have worked closely with him in his role as chairman of the board of trustees of Yeshiva University for almost a decade. I know that my experience writ large is that of all the various individuals and institutions whose lives Herbert has touched: a marvelous combination of strength and sympathy, perseverance and sensitivity, fortitude and faith, valor and charm.

The America-Israel Friendship League is joined by the host of organizations which have benefited from his leadership, and from the even greater number of individuals whose lives have been enriched by him, in wishing Herbert Tenzer a very happy 80th birthday. May he, and his beloved wife and family, enjoy the years to come in health and contentment, and with renewed vigor may he continue his creative contributions to his country, his people, his faith, and all humanity.