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**Franklin D. Roosevelt — “The Great Communicator”**  
**The Master Speech Files, 1898, 1910-1945**

**Series 2: “ You have nothing to fear but fear itself:” FDR  
and the New Deal**

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**File No. 1206**

**1939 March 6**

**Statement on being awarded the American  
Hebrew Medal**

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT  
ACKNOWLEDGING AWARD OF THE  
AMERICAN HEBREW MEDAL  
MARCH 6, 1939.

GENERAL JOHNSON, FRIENDS:

I am proud to receive this award. And I like the broad spirit of good will which prompts the bestowal. I like also to think that no matter how diverse and conflicting and mutually contradictory our views may be on any number of questions and policies -- there remains one issue upon which we are in complete accord. Embodied in the Federal Constitution and ingrained in our hearts and souls is the national conviction that every man has an inalienable right to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.

After all, the majority of Americans, whether they adhere to the ancient teaching of Israel or accept the tenets of the Christian religion, have a common source of inspiration in the Old Testament. In the spirit of brotherhood we should, therefore, seek to emphasize all those many essential things in

which we find unity in our common Biblical heritage.

If we labor in that spirit may we not hope to attain the ideal put forth by the Prophet Micah: "And what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

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*Arnestine M. Spence*

*(original word)*

Mr. President: As a member of the Committee of Award of The American Hebrew Medal to honor the outstanding service of the year in promoting better understanding between Christians and Jews, I have been asked by that Committee to effect its unanimous decision, by presenting to you this civic honor.

Trophies for your great service to humanity have been many. But in this bewildering day of insensate prejudice and barbaric persecution, I doubt if any was better deserved or more important.

Jews, Catholics and Protestants -- among them the outstanding leaders of each group -- your political followers and those who disagree with you -- had no hesitation whatever in making this award. It represents their conviction that you have done more than any man to reconcile the silly differences of these separate faiths to universal brotherhood in the fear and love of God.

But it speaks of even more than that. The old pillars of our civilization seem to be rocking. They are faith in religion, in the promises of men and nations, and a decent respect for the rights and dignity of underprivileged or oppressed minorities. If there were no other contribution in your distinguished career to the welfare of the world, it must be acknowledged forever that you have done more to awaken the conscience of your country to the defense of those principles than any man of your time and generation -- here or anywhere at all.

It is an honor far beyond any merit of mine to be chosen to say this to you. But, if you will glance at the list of your distinguished fellow-citizens who unanimously made this award, you will see that I act only as a sort of Charlie McCarthy for Bergens of the best hearts and minds in your country -- men of the utmost diversity of opinion. Yet they are united in this tribute. And, Mr. President, that is democracy of which you are the most distinguished champion in this dangerous world. If trouble comes, the world may know from this how your country will unite to support you. That, I think, is the true meaning of this medal. And so, my old friend, differences of opinion do not count in our country at such a time. It is with a heart full of pride -- in the name of distinguished countrymen -- that I offer you this medal.

Committee of Judges

of the

American Hebrew Medal for the  
Promotion of Better Understanding  
Between Christian and Jew in America

M. J. Ahern  
Bernard M. Baruch  
George Gordon Battle  
Albert W. Beaven  
Paul Block  
Mrs. Sidney C. Borg  
Frederick Brown  
John S. Burke  
Herold G. Campbell  
Carrie Chapman Catt  
Harry Woodburn Chase  
Martin Conboy  
John Dewey  
John H. Finley  
Daniel J. Fleming  
Harry Emerson Fosdick  
Mrs. J. Walter Freiberg  
Edwin S. Friendly  
Zona Gale  
Frank E. Gannett  
Albert N. Greenfield  
Edward J. Hanna  
Carlton J. H. Hayes  
Will H. Hays  
John Haynes Holmes  
Clark Howell  
Meyer Jacobstein

Hugh S. Johnson  
Louis E. Kirstein  
Rebekah Kohut  
Fiorello H. LaGuardia  
Irving Lehman  
Lucius N. Littauer  
Charles S. MacFarland  
Bishop William T. Manning  
Edwin Markham  
Bishop Francis J. McConnell  
Alfred J. McCosker  
James G. McDonald  
Robert A. Millikan  
Henry Morgenthau, Sr.  
Mrs. Frederick Nathan  
P. A. O'Connell  
Daniel A. Poling  
Roscoe Pound  
Frederick B. Robinson  
Lewis Rosenstiel  
David Sarnoff  
Charles M. Schwab  
Ida M. Tarbell  
Lowell Thomas  
Arturo Toscanini  
Lillian D. Wald  
Grover A. Whalen  
William Allen White