

Chancellor Schorsch, my beloved friends Neil Gillman and Bill Lebeau, colleagues, friends, guests, Ingrid, my very own Schatz, my brother Ace and my family.

A Rabbi's charge is, and remains, as was our father Abraham's; והיה ברכה that having been blessed we in turn must bless others.

It has become a glib half truth, quoting Genesis, that all are blessed by creation in the Image of God, Tzelem Elohim. Like any truism this one, so easily accepted and so little respected- requires careful scrutiny. The Biblical Author, unsatisfied with this partial truth, hastens to add the complementary truth that each of us is a living being because the Divine breath, the Neshamah was breathed into us by the living God.

The Tzelem, our cognitive being is blessed by creation in the Image of God. The Neshamah, our somatic being is blessed by the divine breath infused in us.

The Tzelem provides thought, form, and direction. The Neshamah gives life, energy and vitality. The [Tzelem<=> Neshamah] is at one and the same time, both indivisible and with each part in living relationship to the other. Thought, form, and direction alone would lead to a useless spinning of the wheels. Life, energy and vitality alone would be directionless, and we would be dragged around aimlessly by our feelings. We are thus not either Tzelem or Neshamah, but both simultaneously, interacting reciprocally. When one is ignored or incapacitated, the other is grievously wounded. We are truly blessed when the Neshamah sustains the Tzelem and the Tzelem shapes the Neshamah.

This religious fact, that humankind's inalienable core, is the [Tzelem<=>Neshamah] undergirds our entire Jewish structure. We ignore it at our peril. If only one of us is not so created we are all in trouble.

The [Tzelem/Neshamah] is not negotiable. It is a given, ever present in us and in all others. The [Tzelem/Neshamah] is not contingent on our thinking and feeling correctly, behaving one way or another, on accomplishment or the lack thereof, on perceived goodness or experienced badness. Each of us, do what we will, cannot be rid of it. It is our essence. Though obscured in the murky fog of compromised living, the [Tzelem/Neshamah] is always waiting to be seen, heard and attended to. When we and/or others turn away from the [Tzelem<=>Neshamah], neglecting it in ourselves, ignoring and disregarding it in others, harm is done, commitments broken, intimacies violated, children hurt,

trusts betrayed, and great evil perpetrated. Blame and contempt, anger and condemnation, all too often directed towards ourselves as well as others, increase our sense of alienation and isolation, turning us ever more away from the [Tzelem/Neshamah] with which we are blessed, and blocking any chance of experiencing it in others.

As Blessed Symbolic Exemplars of God and of those icons of God, humankind, a rabbi has taken a "solemn pledge" to bear witness to, properly name and then bless the [Tzelem/Neshamah] always present and hopefully awakening in each person or community. That which is unwitnessed, unnamed and unblessed, can never be fully human. And that which is not fully human detracts from God's presence in the world, thus as it were, diminishing God.

Witnessing, naming, and blessing the [Tzelem/Neshamah] in us and in others is not easy or simple work.

Witnessing requires that at all times and in every encounter, we bring full awareness to the [Tzelem/Neshamah] always present and especially in stress, almost always obscured. A rabbi, is a sort of satellite dish, focused on picking up the distant, often scrambled transmissions and emanations coming from one's own and others [Tzelem/Neshamah]. This tuning device picks up that what is presented is not all that is there - that behind anger, there may be loving concern. Underneath a rigid unyielding exterior, there may be a compassionate heart, and hidden from view in the whining and suffering may be courage. We are always checking for who else is in the room- for hidden parts that are evidence of the ongoing, never ceasing presence of each human's idiosyncratic and thus unique [Tzelem/Neshamah]. Witnessing requires being curious about, alert to, delighted by, supportive of, the signs and signals of the often hidden [Tzelem/Neshamah] in one's self, in the other, and in the greater community.

Veheyeh Berachah- To be a blessing, requires witnessing the [Tzelem=>Neshamah]

Naming creates new realities. Naming gives relational meaning to already existing though inchoate realities. God said, "Let there be light"! And there was light. God saw the light that it was good. God separated the light from the darkness. God named the light: Day! and the darkness He named Night!

By naming the light, God moves the primeval chaos into a new reality. The light was light, but day is a new reality one can relate to.

When we [Tzelem/Neshamah] seekers witness constellations ever present though long concealed; garner evidence of the [Tzelem/Neshamah] so often obscured and sometimes rejected and by proper naming bring these into human "being", perception, experience and discourse, we create as it were something new. Humans cannot relate to that which has no name. Naming that which heretofore had no name makes relationship possible. And it is only in relationship that "things" attain human "being". Naming makes an I-Thou relationship possible.

Veheyeh Berachah- To be a blessing requires proper naming.

Blessing others on God's behalf is an audacious act. Aware of our own relationship with God, whose bounty and being has made room in the world for us and our unique "being", and so knowing that our beingness is blessed, we in turn can bestow blessing on others. Blessing others with our personal presence, and words is one of the ultimate acts of love a rabbi can do. Crucial to being a rabbi, it is a primary way of attending to the [Tzelem/Neshamah] in us and in others. As with Abraham, only one who receives the blessing can impart it. Rabbis, blessed by being God's Exemplars, are duty bound to bless humankind.

Veheyeh Berachah- To be a blessing requires blessing others.

Are we up to the task? And do we have a choice?

It is told of one of my teachers, the late Milton H. Erickson z'l, who was perhaps the greatest therapist of our era. A patient having heard of his healing prowess traveled halfway around the world to see him. Entering Milton's somewhat shabby office, he was shocked as he took in its well worn furniture, overused chairs and ramshackle bookshelves, rather humble surroundings for such a great man. Erickson noticed him looking around in disbelief, fixed his intense gaze upon him and said, "I know it's not much, **but I'M HERE!**"

**I'M HERE!** We can have no better motto. Each of us is more than enough. Each of us and all of us are blessed. Know and be assured that your blessedness is not in the doing, it is in the being. Through no choice of our own. So when the going gets tough, and assuredly it will, you can do no better than respond- **Hineni - I'm Here**, words that have reverberated down the ages. Each of us is more than enough.

Today the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, itself a blessing, distilled from the quintessence of Jewish tradition, has witnessed our work and our holiness, has recognized and affirmed the divine [Tzelem<=>Neshamah] in each of us and has named us this day Doctors of Divinity, Honoris Causa and if I might mangle the Latin, Doctors of Divinity in an honorable cause; It has in this convocation, through its Chancellor extended a blessing of Yasher Koach to us for all we have done.

Chancellor Schorsch- On behalf of all of us so witnessed, so named and so blessed, I respond in the time honored manner-Baruch Tihyeh, May you Chancellor Schorsch, and all those who share your sacred work be blessed. And may Gods bountiful blessing envelop us all as we go forth to meet the ancient charge

Veheyeh Berachah Be a blessing