

Are you a senior citizen?-they ask at the ticket booth. We answer yes, at best ambivalently. Though it does get Ingrid and myself into the movies cheaper and gets us a discount, sometimes evokes a challenge (with Ingrid, I mean is she really a senior?)—Does the discount make these really the Golden Years?—or simply American promo and hype. Is it a lie – BS, or is it based on something? We each of us knows that old age is not for sissies, and as George Vaillant his seminal book, *Aging Well*¹ has put it, we know that old age is rarely getting exactly what you want.² Is there some truth in “Golden years”?

Years back, a perturbed woman came to see me in my office . Her husband had just retired from being a security guard at the local City Trust Co bank in Bridgeport CT. For forty-five years he'd left the house at 8:30 a.m., arrived at work at ten of nine, did his job 'til five o'clock, and returned home. She told me in her first session that she was eager for him to finally retire after 45 years. One morning three weeks after he retired he went out to get the paper and some cigarettes, and next thing she knew -- he was gone. Dissappeared. Not a word! Four months later she found out that he was in Seattle, Washington, which is about as far as you can get from the City Trust Co bank in Bridgeport.

So old age is not always getting what one wants or think they want, For the retiree or the retiree's partner. No matter how we gussy it up, it's a downward slope, the days moving by ever more quickly to the end of the run. It is a slippery slope that needs to be negotiated with as much flexibility and grace as one can muster. The obstacles and impediments show up suddenly surprise you, knock you off course and can even kill you. But it *can* be a good time, and oddly for some people it turns out to be the best time. For some it's Jerusalem at sunset, when the walls are most golden and radiant as the sun sets marking the end of the day.

Edgar Bronfman³ in his book “The Third Act”,⁴ asked Philip Johnson the ninety plus year old, who collaborated with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe in the design and construction of the "Building of the Millennium," none other than the Seagram Building. --what piqued his interest most at this point in his celebrated career. Which of his famous projects held him most in its thrall? Johnson leaned across the table without hesitation and said, "What interests me most is the next project I'm doing. And the next one after that. All my attention

¹ *Aging Well* George E. Vaillant. MD. Little, Brown & Co. 2002

² *ibid.* p. 186

³ I bought his book because I owed him-he was reading my book “The Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar” shuttling between one of his many homes.

⁴ E.M.Bronfman w. C. Whitney; *The Third Act; Reinventing Yourself After Retirement.* G.P.Putnam Sons NY NY 2002

is focused on the horizon, though I don't know what's on that horizon. But I'll find out. If you don't keep learning, you're finished. The only reality in the world is change. As Heraclitus said, Change is the only absolute in life.' Luckily, I love change." ⁵

Talk about change-Who could have imagined the path each of us has come. As mature adults we know that we have traversed an ever changing terrain, peaks of achievement and valleys of despair--too many bumps, and too few meadows, times when the view was fantastic, and times when pebbles made us fall flat on our faces, We know well that life is a [both/and] proposition. A favorite aphorism of mine –is attributed to Winston Churchill–“If you think you know your path, it’s not yours”.

Vaillant suggests that the vital question retirees in the “Golden Years’ must answer is; “; “What is the most important thing that makes you want to get out of bed in the morning, eager for a new day- excluding your bladder”?⁶

In choosing whatever it’s going to be that gets us out of bed day by day, we have to recognize that our future is to some extent predicted by our past, by our DNA, parental influences, our childhood, our education, and of course our health. Yet chance has a very crucial place-- sometimes what happens is totally unexpected.

In 1959, I was the candidate to be the assistant rabbi at the Society for the Advancement of Judaism, the mother synagogue of the Reconstructionist movement in New York City. The SAJ had been founded by Mordecai M. Kaplan, who took no salary for many years. By 1959 Jack Cohen was the rabbi of a thriving congregation, and they wanted an assistant rabbi in charge of youth work. At that time I was probably the last unreconstructed Reconstructionist at the Jewish Theological Seminary, ideologically I was the right candidate. Being someone who had been in charge of the teenagers at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin, and doing a reasonably successful job of it, I was the right candidate that way also. The other candidate was very different. As far as we knew he was anti-reconstructionist and had little experience with children. The choice seemed obvious. Seemed! And so on July 3, 1959, (a date that will live in the annals of my life) I as a newly ordained rabbi, was assisting at my very first wedding – that of Joel and Ann Zaiman⁷ at Beth El Synagogue Center, in New Rochelle NY. Where Rabbi David Golovensky held sway. As the reception line formed up, I looked for a public phone andI confidently called up Jack Cohen at the SAJ, - the board meeting to ratify my selection as assistant rabbi took

⁵ Ibid; p. 136

⁶ ibid. p.5

⁷ They were and are exemplars of a rabbi and a gracious talented wife.

place that night. Jack picks up the phone and I say; “Well, Jack, how did it go?” and he says; “Jack, they picked the other guy.” I said “**What?**” I already had rented a brand new apartment in New York. I had a date book full of names of prospective rebbitzens. I had my shrink- three times a week in New York. I had everything all set, and I said “They did **what?**” He said, “They picked the other guy.” I said to him, “Jack, how could that happen?” and he said to me something which has reverberated in my mind down through the years, ⁸“Jack, that’s how boards are!” Rosh Hashanah was just a couple of months away, and I was going to St. Louis a day or two later, to court the woman who is now my ex, whom I had known for about a week. I came back in the middle of July. I didn’t have a job. Finally a job appeared on the Rabbinical Assembly list.⁹ In Bridgeport Connecticut ,50 miles from Times Square. ¹⁰They wanted an assistant rabbi to Harry Nelson, one of the greats of our time, and as it worked out, I ended up going to Bridgeport CT to be in charge of a suburban congregation next door in Fairfield, CT. I spent 10 years as a congregational rabbi there, and I’ve been in Fairfield ever since, I arrived there by mistake. Happenstance changed my life.

From one chance occurrence to another. In 1969, I decided to take my family to Israel. I was leaving congregational life and doing a second psychology internship at Hadassah hospital. My office was distinguished not because it was 4 ft. x 6 ft, but because it was 10 feet from the world famous Chagall windows right across a small divide. There were three kids who constituted the Anglo-Saxon landsmanschaft¹¹ in a gan¹² on 11 Ibn Ezra Street in Rechavia, Jerusalem,. The landsmanschaft consisted of Ray & Roz Arzt’s daughter Ilana,(they were our friends and neighbors in Fairfield and lived at 9 Ibn Ezra), my daughter Rebecca and a little boy, Jackie, about whose existence, I had no inkling. The three English speakers skipped class one day and went exploring Rechavia. The teachers distraught about these three three year olds wandering around Jerusalem found them within an hour. The father of Jack Glaser, was Rabbi Joseph Glaser z’l¹³, spending a year in Israel prior to taking over as executive vice-president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. He invited me to his apartment and over a cup of instant coffee asked; “What are you studying?”
 “I’m studying clinical psychology.”

⁸ A couple of years ago, I had the privilege of sitting next to Jack, at Cong Mevakshei Derech in Jerusalem and I told him this story and what he told me on July 3rd, 1959. “Well I was right!” he responded.

⁹ The association of Conservative rabbis. I am now both a Conservative and Reform rabbi

¹⁰ An arcane fact that only few know was that Wolfe Kelman z’l Director of Placement for the Rabbinical Assembly, had a map on his wall noting how far everything in the world was from Times Square.

¹¹ A group organized in their new home on the basis of country of origin – in this case all were from the U.S

¹² Nursery school

¹³ An abbreviation for the Hebrew *zichrono l’vrachah*. May his/her memory be a blessing.

“Why are you studying clinical psych?”,

“This is going to sound weird, Joe, but I want to help rabbis **not** to do what I did.”

“What do you mean not to do what you did?”

“Well,” I said, “I essentially left the pulpit.”

He looked at me quizzically and said,

“You want to help rabbis not do what you did,”,

“That’s right.”

That was it, nothing more.

Years later, back in the states, out of the blue, Joe calls up and says;

“What do you know about mid-life crisis?”,

“Joe, whatever you want me to do, I’ll do.”

And that’s how I became the Director of Professional Career Review of the Central Conference of American Rabbis - totally by accident,. No one would have dared predict that we would meet, and that my life would change as a result.

As it was in the past, so it is with retirement. Many of the things that are going to happen to us, no matter how thorough our planning will happen by chance, others inevitably accompany aging. This is even more true for our future than our past. And the challenge is- what do we do with them? Our problem is not about retiring to doing nothing, but what are we going to do with these perhaps bonus years. How will we respond? Rob Rossel, a therapist colleague about to retire points out that “the word end ...can mean both a terminus (end of the line) and a purpose (an outcome worked toward). He says; “I have learned so much in going through this passage and find myself wondering what I will find in my new “ends”.¹⁴ His question resonates for us all. What will our new ends be?

If one thinks back to 30, 40, 50 years ago, these retirement years that modern seniors are engaged in were thought of as an endpoint, and not a new beginning. Those who know the name Robert Havighurst know that he wrote about Developmental Tasks in Education. Havighurst finally wrote about developmental tasks for people in our age bracket, and of course it was all dealing with how things were going downhill. He outlines a really sorry, disheartening set of developmental tasks.

Developmental Tasks of Later Maturity

1. Adjusting to decreasing physical strength and health
2. Adjustment to retirement and reduced income
3. Adjusting to death of a spouse
4. Establishing an explicit affiliation with one's age group
5. Adopting and adapting social roles in a flexible way

¹⁴ Slightly adapted from SR-L Digest - 8 Oct 2004 to 12 Oct 2004 (#2004-195)

6. Establishing satisfactory physical living arrangements ¹⁵

There may be a lot of truth there but not much to get one out of bed each morning.

As late as 1978- Daniel Levinson then in his fifties, in his very popular book “The Seasons of a Man's Life”, wrote gloomily that men approaching 60 may "feel that all forms of youth...are about to disappear-.a man fears that the youth within him is dying and that only the old man -- an empty dry structure devoid of energy, interest or inner resources will survive for a brief and foolish old age.¹⁶

That's what they call “golden years?

Vaillant suggests that “to see age as continued human development involves a revolutionary paradigm shift.” ¹⁷And that's exactly what he sets about doing.

He starts with some facts from ‘**The Study of Adult development**’ which he describes as a rarity- in medicine, for quite deliberately it set out to study the lives of the well, not the sick. In so doing it has integrated three cohorts of elderly men and women -- all of whom have been studied continuously for six to eight decades.

First, there is a sample of 268 socially advantaged Harvard graduates born about 1920 -- the longest prospective study of physical and mental health in the world.

Second, there is a sample of 456 socially disadvantaged inner city men born about 1930 - the longest prospective study of "blue collar" adult development in the world.

Third, there is a sample of 90 middle-class, intellectually gifted women born about 1910 -- prospective means that it studies events as they occur, and not in retrospect.)¹⁸

In the general population only a third of adults alive at 60 will live past 80; but in the three Study of Adult Development cohorts, 70 percent of college-educated members alive at 60 will be alive at 80 -- twice as many as expected. In other words, many Study members are now enjoying the exceptional longevity and the prolonged retirement that will become the rule for American children born in year 2000.¹⁹

Vaillant points out that among the many significant findings to emerge from the Study of Adult Development thus far are the following:

- “It is not the bad things that happen to us that doom us; it is the good people who happen to us at any age that facilitate enjoyable old age.”

¹⁵ R. J. Havighurst (1971) *Developmental Tasks and Education*, Third Edition. New York. Longman.

¹⁶ D.J. Levinson *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York:Knopf;1978 p.34

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 37

¹⁸ *Ibid.* p.16

¹⁹ *Ibid*; p.12

- “Healing relationships are facilitated by a capacity for gratitude, for forgiveness, and for taking people inside. Allowing them into your life. (By this metaphor I mean becoming eternally enriched by loving a particular person.) “
- “A good marriage at age 50 predicted positive aging at 80. surprisingly, low cholesterol levels at age 50 did not. “
- “Learning to play and create after retirement and learning to gain younger friends as we lose older ones add more to life's enjoyment than retirement income.”
- “Objective good physical health was less important to successful aging than subjective good health. .. it is all right to be ill as long as you do not feel sick.”

“In a world that seems ruled by genetic predestination, we need hope that we still can change. The lives of the Study members offer us guides. ²⁰“

An Early Guide for Me- Mr. Krane's Dad

Mr. Charles Krane, my beloved cello teacher, totally failed to teach me cello My two older brothers were musicians, excellent musicians – My eleven year older brother. played the piano. My middle brother Sol played the violin, It was determined by father and brothers that Jackie would play the cello. **I was terrible.** Mr. Krane soon figured out that it was better to take me to Brooklyn Dodgers games at Ebbets Field and to read the comics during our Sunday morning lessons, fill the conversation with other tidbits and the hour lesson was diminished to about half an hour. One Sunday morning he told me a story that I never forgot. He told me about Pittsburgh, where he grew up and where in the morning if you went out with a white shirt, by mid-day the shirt was black. And he told me of his father did heavy work in the steel mills, hauling and shlepping large ingots of steel all day. Hard, tough physical work. When his father retired at age sixty-five a doctor who did his exit physical said to him; “Mr. Krane, if you don’t find something that’s going to keep you active, you’re going to be dead in six to nine months.” That quickly. And he told me that his father moved to Florida, learned ballroom dancing , and with that new skill, charmed all the women there and ballroom danced across his seventies, through his eighties and died in his early nineties, still ballroom dancing. So Mr. Krane failed at teaching me cello but he sure did teach me something about learning to play after retirement.

Vaillant points out that **Erik Erikson** became the first social scientist to conceptualize

²⁰Ibid; p.13

clearly adult development as progress, not decline.

Through a sequence of stages, he believed adults participated in life within a widening social radius. Life after age 50 was no longer to be a staircase leading downward but a path leading outward. Adult development passed through the four stages of "Identity vs. Identity Diffusion," "Intimacy vs. Isolation," "Generativity vs. Stagnation," and "Integrity vs. Despair."²¹

Erikson--later emended the last stage from

Ego Integrity vs. Despair; to Renunciation and *Wisdom*²²

The Study of Adult Development at Harvard has allowed *Vaillant* to study Erikson's theory empirically. Similar to time-lapse photography of blooming flowers, the Study of Adult Development permitted him to remain the same and watch Study members evolve from adolescents into great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers. ... Like Erikson Vaillant concluded that one way to conceptualize the sequential nature of adult social development may lie in appreciating that it reflects each adult's widening radius over time. Imagine a stone dropped into a pond; it produces ever-expanding ripples, each older ripple encompassing, but not obliterating, the circle emanating from the next ripple." Adult development is rather like that.

Vaillant's revision of Erikson's model, notes that for charting adult development a term like Robert Havighurst's developmental task's is more scientifically correct than Erikson's stage. Adult developmental tasks are more often than not sequential - but not always.

To Vaillant; The penultimate life task is to become a Keeper of the meaning,

"This task involves passing on the traditions of the past to the next generation. .. becoming a Keeper of the Meaning allows one to link the past to the future. Finally, there is Integrity, the task of achieving some sense of peace and unity with respect both to one's own life and to the whole world "²³ " the virtue inherent in the task of Keeper of the Meaning is justice; for justice involves a more non- partisan and less personal approach to others. Society needs dispassionate judges as much as it needs passionate trial lawyers. If the task of young adults is to create biological heirs, the task of old age is to create social heirs."²⁴

John Kotre " to invest one's substance in forms of life and work that will outlive the self" ²⁵

²¹ E.H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society*, W.W. Norton & Co. London, New York 1961/Quoted in Vaillant p. 43

²² E.H Erikson; *Afterthoughts* 1985 . fn.. p.273 "The italicized words are called *basic* virtues because without them, and their re-emergence from generation to generation, all other and more changeable systems of human values lose their spirit and their relevance.

²³ Vaillant; *Ibid*; pp. 43-45

²⁴ *Ibid*; p.144

²⁵ *Ibid* p.115 note p. 352 J.Kotre, *Outliving the Self* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) p.10

Or according to Ashley Montague the idea is to be young as late as possible"²⁶

I Would like to add to be young as late as possible but more than that with the advantages that age gives

There are advantages and special resources needed that age can bring to one's life.

Among others, they are;

- New and and More Useful Frames
 - Our Past-Refurbished and Renewed.
 - Freedom to be Who We Are.
 - Wisdom and All its Manifestations.
- New and More Useful Frames²⁷ — The frame through which we see our older years can determine what we see, what is clear, what is fuzzy, what we include and what we ignore and how we experience and value the world in which we live. We can go into these years wondering how terrible they are going to be or we can go in eagerly wondering what we can do to make them rewarding, yes, what fun. Learning and satisfaction is in store for us.

The frames for people our age are starting to change, and become much more hopeful. As Valliant pointed out before; good physical health was less important to successful aging than subjective good health. .. it is all right to be ill as long as you do not feel sick.” That’s not easy but very important. Going through one of the medical procedures of the Golden Years, one can be of course be frightened of the possible outcome or one can frame it, that other’s have gotten through this, if they could I can. It’s the frames we have and the perspective they provide, that’s important.

Zalman Schachter’s reframing, indicated by the very title of his book “From Age-ing to Sage-ing suggests the need to adjust our frames. He offers; "The years beyond sixty, the years of our second maturity, may be evolution's greatest gift to humanity," ... 'No longer needing to compete and to be acceptable, likeable, and all those other things considered respectable in society, people are finally uncaged in their elder years, free to release energies and capacities that the culture restrained in them when they were younger. The energies that people release after age sixty-five are not really new at all, but exist in a state of latency within the mind-body system. When we don't have to devote a large percentage of our time in fulfilling social obligations and meeting other people's expectations, we can unleash these energies and harness them for self-awareness, spiritual development, and creativity."²⁸

²⁶ Ibid; Bronfman p.135

²⁷ See chapter two; Using Your Mouth with Your Head for explication of frames and their use.

²⁸ From Age-ing to Sage-ing; A Profound New Vision of Growing Older Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

Betty Friedan writing in her seventies offers a useful new frame; “We have barely even considered the possibilities in age for new kinds of loving intimacy, purposeful work and activity, learning and knowing, community and care...”²⁹

- **OUR PAST –REFURBISHED AND RENEWED.**

We need to reprocess our past, to change and rewrite it. We do that anyway quite unconsciously. It is OK to do it more overtly, as long as the change is positive and nourishes our present and our future. Victoria Fitch points out that –“Gerontologists tell us that one of the major tasks of old age is to reflect on the wealth of our past experience--our personal achievements as well as our unresolved conflicts--in an attempt to understand what life has meant. She describes this process of introspection as "a kind of inner cooking or brewing." ... "The flame is the knowledge of mortality, the ingredients are a lifetime of perceptions, experiences, and relationships as yet unprocessed, and the vessel is the human heart.”³⁰

- **Freedom to be Who We Are.**

There's a certain freedom that comes with age. We often envy the freedom our older citizens feel about saying and doing exactly what they want. No holds barred. Edgar Bronfman points out that Mike Wallace laughed when he told me "One of the great things about getting this old is the absolute freedom to say what you want. What the hell? What are they going to do? Fire me? Kill me? I'm fearless." Mike's colleague, Waiter Cronkite, concurred. "I am in a position now to speak my mind. And that is what I propose to do

A long time rabbi friend shared with me that the experience of being called back to serve the same congregation he had served for many years before his retirement was a totally different experience than it was before –He was free at this now to be the rabbi he wants to be-rather than the rabbi they wanted him to be. They treated him one way ten years ago and now it's a whole different story. A piece of that different story is his different sense of himself. And the freedom to say precisely what he wants to say in the way he wants to say it.³¹

- **Wisdom and All its Manifestations;**

The other thing we bring as an advantage in staying young till we're very old is Wisdom and all its varieties. Each of us has been through a lot. Golden Agers know a lot about what counts and what doesn't, what battles are worth fighting, ranging from who puts the dishes

and Ronald S. Miller Warner Books p.34ff

²⁹ B. Friedan, *The Fountain of Age* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993,p.87

³⁰ Fitch, Victoria. "The Psychological Tasks of Old Age." *Naropa Institute Journal of Psychology* 1985,V3: 90-106. quoted in Schachter.

³¹ Rabbi Donald Crain, Personal Communication

in the dishwasher to getting one's spouse to change the way they do something one used to and may still consider vitally important.

Yet a great danger in the senior years is that one can become very crotchety and rigid, Sometimes I get a little frightened about that myself. When I come home after the cleaning lady has made her appearance, and moved the things I kept in one place to someplace else. It's not only because I have to guess where the thing is, but there's something in me that says rather petulantly—"that's the place for my nail clippers, don't move them around." And I have to respond lovingly to that other "self". "Thanks for your help in keeping me organized- but just because we've done something a certain way doesn't mean that's the only way. And if I attend only to you—"I'll start to sound like a crotchety old geezer. I'll pay attention to your keeping me organized in a familiar way, but don't make such a fuss. You and I can deal with the clippers being in another place." We need to be careful about getting rigid. Old folks can easily slip into being fundamentalists, forgetting that it's a [Both/And] world which their whole life has taught them and resorting to it's my way or the highway. Rigidity, self-imposed, is a great risk and endangers the very wisdom that is so available to us.

Erikson reassures us; "Those in late mid-life describe both themselves and their aged contemporaries as more tolerant, more patient, more open-minded, more understanding, more compassionate and less critical than they were in their younger years." Erikson then goes on to quote from the septuagenarians whom he studied. "Patience is one thing you know better when you're old than when you're young." "Now I can see both sides." "Nothing shakes me any more."

And that whole business of having wisdom is very, very important.

Paul Baltes, of the Max Planck Institute in Berlin and perhaps the leading scholar in the world of wisdom development. has wisely pointed out,..." Everybody's definition of wisdom will be different in the words; but the melody I suspect, will be the same"³²

If we were Havighurst today, knowing all the changes that have happened since 1971, we would ask; What are the developmental tasks that are required of us. that we need to undertake --given the added assets of useful frames, a refurbished history, freedom and wisdom that would answer the crucial question; **What is the most important thing that makes you eager to get out of bed in the morning so you can do it that day. Or to put it another way. What is the passion you will pursue?**

A characteristic of **PASSION** is that it is an activity you get so involved in that it absorbs you completely. A template for knowing when a passion absorbs you completely is; if I

³² Vaillant p.251

came up to you while you were absorbed, doing your passion and asked;

Where at this moment do you end and the world begins?³³

You have been abruptly interrupted. Taken aback you would do a quick doubletake. It would be an almost impossible question. You would have to reorient yourself to respond. We have all had that experience of being absorbed and then suddenly disrupted. I get that at times when I'm writing. Others when deep in a gripping book. Others when they're doing research, Some while absorbed in prayer. Others when the phone rings while deep in conversation. with their spouse; some while exercising, The list is endless When you're into your passion the boundary between you and the world is blurred.

So, the question remains. What passion can be specially yours, which fits who you are and how you've been trained. And will get you out of bed each morning eager to sieze the day. For those for whom the covenant of our people has been our historic calling and vocation, it is an updating and reworking of Vaillant's "Keeper of the Meaning", making it appropriate to who we are. Our father Abraham in whose footsteps we walk was commanded- "Be a source of blessing"³⁴. As Symbolic Exemplars³⁵ of both the God who intended that, and of the Jewish people who took on that task, for us the ultimate passion is that we be a blessing in the world.—by our presence and by our activity. Being a blessing is in implementing the charge of realizing fully the [Tzelem↔Neshamah]³⁶ in which each of us is created and with which each of us is blessed. It is in searching for and blessing the [Tzelem↔Neshamah] in others around us and those who follow us, that our lives take on meaning. Doing that means; Blessing the [Tzelem↔Neshamah] and its signs, no matter how obscured in ourselves and others.

As Symbolic Exemplars we've been important in other people's lives-sometimes it seems too important. We struggled to be loved, needed and all too often we made our self worth hostage to and dependent on doing for and pleasing others. Hopefully now possessed of the wisdom that comes with years, no longer professionally dependent on community or congregation, we are free to take on a task that can absorb us, and for which we are uniquely suited.

We know we are both Symbolic Exemplars and regular human folk. We intimately know both sides of that equation and that relationship with which we have struggled. We know both the power of being a symbolic exemplar and how difficult the experience can be. We've learned from our "indispensabilty" and our "dispensability" that to do the job we need to see life as a [Both/And] proposition. [Either/Or] thinking is a ticket to nowhere.

³³ Gilligan; Personal Communication

³⁴ Gen; 12;2

³⁵ See especially chapters 6 & 8 of the author's *The Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar; By the Power Vested in Me*; The Haworth Press New York, London, Oxford 2002

³⁶ *Ibid*; and first two chapters of this book.

We are Symbolic exemplars because we have been ordained and thus our “being in the world” is distinct and blessed, . Whether professionally employed or not, as Symbolic Exemplars we have no retirement age. Blessing others is the path we have chosen and been endowed with, We have made it our destiny, our passion, and our very special mitzvah³⁷. Being a blessing by blessing others is a passion where there is no ulterior motive except for spreading God's blessing, and it is what we are all about. It is a passion whose motive and outcome is letting others know and hopefully experience that they are created [Tzelem↔Neshamah] . Blessing others is the passion that can absorb us Following Valliant, We are “Keepers of the Meaning”. Beyond Vaillant, The special meaning we carry is that life is blessed and that we are to bless it in every way possible. The Symbolic Exemplars special work is about Witnessing, Naming and Blessing³⁸. the signs of the [Tzelem↔Neshamah] –exponentially multiplying the meah berachot³⁹ of each day. With our life’s experience, can have a better fuller perception and view of things enabling us to witness in the words of Rav Kook⁴⁰ the נִצּוֹצוֹת קְדוּשָׁה nizozot kedushah-the holy sparks present in all that has been created.

To do a passion well requires skill, A major skill is being and staying centered. That in itself is a task. What does it mean to be centered? Centered has a very special, experiential meaning. A mark of being centered is being in the moment and not in the moment at the same time. Being with yourself, paying attention at one and the same time to your own being, your own breathing and simultaneously paying attention to the breathing and the sounds , the appearance and all the varied emanations coming from the other person. We all know when we are off center, We know we are off center if when we are with somebody, we lose focus and our attention wanders to something seemingly irrelevant . To return, the first thing to check is how our breathing is going. Because we’re freer from a lot of stuff, such as; How will this encounter play back at the Board meeting, or is this what I should be saying or thinking, our ability to be centered, to really make room for the other person and who they are as we hear them and as we attend to them is enhanced exponentially. Even so, there is a lot that will knock us off track, and paradoxically we have a lot that can keep us

³⁷ In Hebrew, Commandment; In Yiddish, Good Deed

³⁸ See the author’s chapter on Witnessing, Naming and Blessing. In The Rabbi as Symbolic Exemplar

³⁹ The one hundred blessings every Jew is to recite daily.

⁴⁰ Abraham Isaac Kook-The Lights of Penitence, Lights of Holiness, The Moral Principles, Essays, Letters and Poems. Translation and Introduction by Ben Zion Bokser in series; The Classics of Western Spirituality; Paulist Press, Mahwah NJ 1978 see Jacob B. Agus' preface which notes Rav Kook's determination to search out and "the nitzotzot, k'dushah" the “holy sparks" in every ideology since;

*...all "lights of holiness " derive from God and lead back to Him*⁴⁰

on track. Age is an aid in the ability to be centered. Because of age, because of history, because of all those, it is easier to stay centered—we've seen it all, done most of it, nearly all of the battles are behind us, we're no longer accountable for our failures. We have a Different Perspective on life and its vicissitudes. Wisdom helps us be centered in who we are and assists us in recognizing simultaneously the [Tzelem ↔ Neshamah] in our "selves" and in others "selves" the relation between them and in doing our passion allows us to bless the nitzotzot wherever they may be found.

Judge Oliver Holmes An old Quaker expression has it that when attending Meeting for Worship, one should try to 'center down.' We are to sit quietly and listen and reflect, in the hope that what is important to life will emerge. Block Island helps me center down...⁴¹
Wisdom is a great attribute for staying centered.

Vaillant: quotes his wise young son-in-law who points out "that what all definitions of wisdom have in common is the capacity and the willingness to step back from the immediacy of the moment -- whether it is an affect, a judgment, or a conflict -- in order to attain perspective."⁴²

Veheyeh Berachah- To be a blessing requires blessing others. Relational caregiving is not limited to the indigent, ill and infirm. All need blessing.

Blessing is the task that can get us up in the morning. This is the task that can give meaning to our days and be the fulfillment of our lives. This is a task that we are never too old to do. That having been blessed by God, we can impart that blessing to others.

STORY OF NEIL GILLMAN AND MYSELF

Neil Gilman and myself (we were children then, we were about sixty, both of us) sat at a Rabbinic Training Institute,⁴³ working to help rabbis be more of who they are, and where we were working side by side for the first time in years. We said; (I don't know who said what, 'cause Neil and I are very old friends.) "Isn't it great to be sixty? We're still relatively healthy. We've fought all the battles. The political machinations are ultimately not going to bother us very much." And we pondered back and forth about the advantages of age., And we said, "Can we teach this stuff to these thirty-five year olds, they're children." And we both said, "Well I don't know if they can learn it, maybe they have to go through the years to learn it, but we have an obligation to do it anyway. That's why we're here.

⁴¹ Vaillant p.258

⁴² Vaillant p.256

⁴³ Where I taught for 15 years. Sponsored by The Jewish Theological Seminary of America

We're still HERE! We can have no better motto. Each of us can respond **Hineni** Each of us is more than enough. Each of us and all of us are blessed. Know and be assured that our 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, we can do no better than respond-**Hineni - I'm still Here**, Though a bit shabby and worn, , I'm gentler than I used to be, God has blessed me with some good years, and I'm hopefully wiser than I was, and I will be a blessing and bless others that they may realize the [Tzelem↔Neshamah] in which they have been created. Hineni-Do with me what you want. Each of us is more than enough.

Is there a blessing for all this. I don't want to end without a blessing
is there a blessing for golden years-
At coming of age—when a kid became bar Mitzvah our forbears would say .

ברוך שפטרני מענשו של זה

They felt it unnecessary to say ברוך שנתן לי נחת של זה

Taking a pintele yod from the (acronym for) the שם המפורש

We dare say; perhaps ברוך שיפטרני מענשו של זה

and the other yod that remains

ברוך שיתן לי נחת משנים אלה

And if that yod, for both purposes came from the שם המפורש itself we would be left with הוה ---being Present—not past, not future but truly Present

And for our wisdom, our blessing ,our freedom, our presence, for being part of Eternal Israel, created like all humankind [Tzelem↔Neshamah] we pray;
ברוך אתה יי אלהנו מלך העולם שנתן מחכמתו לבשר ודם וברכה ליראיו
and for those we encounter over the years bearing witness to who we are, who name
the נצוצות קדושה in us may they bless us when they see us (always present).

ברוך אתה יי אלהנו מלך העולם הטוב והמטיב

