

It was as an ordained rabbi, who had fled congregational life and a clinical psychologist in full time private practice, that I first met Stephen Gilligan. The location near the continental divide, high in the Colorado Rockies, might well have been a metaphor for the divisions within me. Stephen, then 28, was co-leading a Hypnosis workshop. I needed all the trance I could get to navigate the rapids of an exquisitely painful divorce. That we would become beloved friends was unimaginable to me. An even greater bonus was Steve's developing Self-Relations which enabled me to fully reclaim the estranged religious half of my identity and then to create a both/and relationship so that I am now at one and the same time both rabbi and psychologist.

Being a rabbi or clergy of any kind means being set apart to serve as a symbolic exemplar, a walking, talking, living symbol standing for both God and the best in humankind. Symbolic Exemplarhood an irrevocable component of clergy being. is the major provider of rabbinic influence, potency and power. It is also the root of much rabbinic loneliness and isolation.

Initially being a rabbi was seductive. I was treated with respect and deference far beyond my age and knowledge. Yet in a few years approaching mid-career I found like many of my colleagues, clergy of all stripes and beliefs, that being a symbolic exemplar was extraordinarily difficult. I complained as all clergy do whenever two or more gather, about living in a "glass house," set-apartness in the midst of the crowd, always having to be "on", and being treated differently than anyone else.

Symbolic exemplarhood is doubly difficult because it attributes to the rabbi superlative inner qualities and inordinately deep-set commitments which must be exemplified in a relatively unprotected arena. The private and public life of rabbis though uninsulated, is expected to be a seamless whole marked by the warp of integrity and the woof of caring love. Therapists are also experienced by clients as something "other", but have the distinct advantage of being able to be "just plain folks", once the office door is closed.

It was the desire to just be "me" that led me after ten years in a congregation to become a clinical psychologist. I kept my rabbi "self" under wraps. For twenty years, I did not lead public prayer and did no other officiating. At the funeral of a beloved older cousin, I offered to do the eulogy, but suggested that my family needed to get a rabbi to recite the required psalms. Yet I always recognized that what I had done as a pulpit rabbi was vital and had changed many lives. So paradoxically as I imbibed and practiced Gestalt Therapy, NLP, and Ericksonian

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work, I devoted part of my career to stopping other rabbis from doing what I did, i.e. leaving the pulpit due to the ravages of symbolic exemplarhood.

I learned over the years that to use the rabbinic power implicit in their being symbolic exemplars, Rabbis must *accept* and be *comfortable* with being walking talking symbols, and need to be *skilled* in using their symbolic exemplarhood as a major source of their rabbinic power, while doing all they can to avoid the enervating price that often results.

Self-Relations helped bridge the gap. It enabled me to go from warning about the dangers of symbolic exemplarhood, as important as that was and is, to fully realizing and teaching about the upside of being a symbolic exemplar.

Witnessing, Naming and Blessing are rabbinic powers that symbolic exemplarhood aids and abets. Witnessing is open to all who are skilled and sensitive, therapists of all stripes, people in helping work, workplace supervisors and just plain caring folks.

Rabbis and other clergy being symbolic exemplars, have power to name. This power comes from themselves being named "ordained" of God. This is not their power alone. Therapists, parents also have it, as does anyone who stands in legitimate authority over another. But being *ordained* has a special quality which comes from standing within a long and rich tradition of naming as sacred acts with all that implies.

Blessed by being symbolic exemplars of God, from whom blessing flows, and humankind who need all the blessing they can get, Rabbis have great power to bless. Establishing what blessings are needed and how they are to be given so that they "take" is a crucial part of rabbinic work.

### **Self-Relations in Genesis**

A Rabbi's charge is, as our biblical father Avraham's (father of the Jews); "Be a blessing" -that having been blessed we in turn, must bless others.

It has become a glib half-truth, fashionably intoned at every occasion to quote Genesis and affirm that each person is blessed by dint of having been created in the Image of God. (in Hebrew *b'Tzelem Elohim* ) - Like any truism this one, so easily accepted and so little respected requires careful scrutiny.

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The *Tzelem*, following Maimonides, can perhaps best be understood to be humankind's cognitive being, since the creating God was and is incorporeal, and any other understanding is or borders on idolatry.

The Biblical Author, evidently unsatisfied with this partial truth of Genesis; chapter 1, hastens to add the complementary truth of chapter 2; that beyond our cognitive essence, each of us is a living being because the Living God [YHWH] (from the Hebrew root "to be", its best meaning is; **[Was! Is! Will be!]**)-has infused in us the breath of life, saturating each with the precious gift of *N'shamah* (From the Hebrew root, NSHM--to breath)

The *N'shamah* can best be understood as our somatic being, marked by pulsation and throbbing, feelings of all sorts, pleasant and painful, and a sense of corporeal aliveness.

The two inextricably linked, form the [*Tzelem*<=>>*N'shamah*]. (The brackets [ ] indicate the interrelated unity of these two elements. The double arrow <=> signifies reciprocal relationship.) The *Tzelem* provides thought, form, and direction. The *N'shamah* gives life, energy and vitality. The [*Tzelem*<=>>*N'shamah*] is at one and the same time, both indivisible and yet with each part having a life of its own. When "things" are going well both parts are in living interaction and relationship with 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 *N'shamah*, but both simultaneously, interacting reciprocally. When one is ignored, incapacitated, or traumatized, the other is grievously wounded. We are truly blessed when the *N'shamah* sustains the *Tzelem* and the *Tzelem* shapes the *N'shamah*.

The [*Tzelem*<=>>*N'shamah*] is not negotiable. It is a given, ever present in us and in all others. The [*Tzelem*<=>*N'shamah*] is not contingent on 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 or won't, cannot be rid of it. It is our God given essence.

This religious fact undergirds the entire Jewish religious structure. It accounts for who we humans are and how we are. We ignore it at our peril. All are created this way. If only one human is not so created, all are in trouble.

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Blessing others, arguably a rabbi's most important work, requires a great deal of skill beyond the simple desire to do "it". A rabbi must develop significant skills in witnessing and properly naming evidences of the *[Tzelem<=>N'shamah]* - a prerequisite for proper blessing.

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 evidences of the *[Tzelem<=>N'shamah]* in ourselves and in others is not easy or simple work.

### **Witnessing**

Though obscured in the murky fog of compromised living, the *[Tzelem<=>N'shamah]* is always waiting to be seen, heard and attended to. When we and/or others turn away from the *[Tzelem<=>N'shamah]*, 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, violence of all sorts directed towards ourselves but even more dangerously at others, increase one's sense of alienation and isolation, turning us ever more away from our *[Tzelem<=>N'shamah]*, and blocking any chance of experiencing it in others.

To paraphrase Gilligan; the main ingredient in witnessing the *[Tzelem<=>N'shamah]* is intentionality. As Blessed Symbolic Exemplars of God and of those icons of God, humankind, a rabbi has made a decision to support and become interested in the *[Tzelem<=>N'shamah]* of her self, the other, and the greater community. She has taken a "solemn pledge" to witness, behold/take interest in/be delighted by/become attentive to/become curious about/support/acknowledge/ protect/ honor/etc. the *[Tzelem<=>N'shamah]* always present and hopefully awakening in each person or community. But intentionality is not sufficient. Practices/ traditions/disciplines must be invoked implicitly or explicitly. The great thing about witnessing and sponsoring is that it requires that the rabbi surrender to a larger field than herself. The rabbi is part of a long and beautiful tradition spanning over five thousand years of witnessing the *[Tzelem<=>N'shamah]*.

Neil Gillman (1999) writes;

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” To the question, Did Freud (or whoever first talked about egos) discover the ego or invent it" the answer is clearly both. Freud discovered the pattern, at least partially because he was looking for it and knew what to look for. But then he identified it, gave it a name, and fitted it into his broader psychodynamic theory (or myth). But Freud discovered the ego because it was out there to be discovered. The ego itself, in distinction to its name, is not a fiction, not a pure invention out of the blue...Does the physicist invent the quark or discover it! Again the answer is both: he discovers the pattern, but because his theory provides him with a name and a way to identify it when it is there, he can then see the quark. But the quark-pattern is out there to be discovered; it is not a fictitious creation of the physicist.”

Paraphrasing Gillman, I would add: Witnessing the presence of the [Tzelem<=>N'shamah] is like witnessing ... an ego, in the sense that the [Tzelem<=>N'shamah] is a pattern of activity that is always present in humankind, as an ego is "in" the person...Again, the experience is a relationship experience: The witness brings his interpretive structure (the Bible's religious myth) to his witnessing, and sees the pattern that we call the [Tzelem<=>N'shamah] Do we discover the [Tzelem<=>N'shamah] or do we invent it. Both. We discover and are witness to the [Tzelem<=>N'shamah] patterns no matter how hidden. And then our religious task is to name, bless and generally sponsor them so as to bring them to "human being". ...the [Tzelem<=>N'shamah] is not invented. It is both out there and in us waiting to be witnessed.

Evidences of the [Tzelem<=>N'shamah] are most often either too strident or too dormant. They are often in flux, out of focus, flowing to and fro, moving irregularly at all times. Our most stringent yet paradoxically relaxed/centered efforts are required to witness those difficult, irascible, unredeemed parts of ourselves and others, and their [Tzelem<=>N'shamah] relationship. Witnessing that, is the first step towards blessing.

## **Naming**

A name may be thought of as an alias, as on my Macintosh computer, that enables me to access a programmatic reality hidden somewhere in my computer, and bring it to view so it can be of use. Rabbinic symbolic exemplarhood provides a special, unique ability to use language to name, to create new aliases changing experience by revealing hidden attributes, thereby bringing new realities into being.

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Naming, almost always involving language creates, molds, sustains and changes “reality”.

Technically, a name is a word or words by which an entity is designated and distinguished from others. Language used this way is of course descriptive. But as J.L.Austin points out, language can be used to make things happen, to create what has not been there before, such as new statuses, obligations, and expectations. Austin calls these Performative Utterances. A Performative Utterance is where "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action."

Using language this way is very different than saying, “The weather is changing,” or “John is tall”. Those words do not make anything new happen. They do not create new realities. Naming when done as a Performative Utterance creates new realities.

“I name this ship *Queen Elizabeth*”, said under the right conditions with the proper vintage champagne in a shipyard with a designated person doing it etc. is a Performative Utterance- the ship goes from being a hulk of steel, wire, plastic and whatever, to being *the Queen Elizabeth*. The ship now named begins to have a history and might be said to even develop a “personality” of "her" own with which many have a “relationship”

The foregoing is very different than saying, upon seeing the ship dock, “That's the *Queen Elizabeth*.” That makes nothing happen. It is a descriptive not a Performative Utterance.

We return to Genesis;

"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!"

God not only creates the world but by witnessing what has been created and naming it, moves the primeval chaos into a new reality. The light was light, but day is a new reality his not yet created humankind can be in relationship with. And that makes it good.

Man is given the task of naming the animals, after the breath of life has been breathed into him, thus giving order and meaning and relationship The implication

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follows that though the creatures exist, relationship with them can only take place when they are properly named.

When we witness constellations ever present though long concealed; garner evidence of the [*Tzelem* <=> *N'shamah*] 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 do not and perhaps 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-You relationship possible.

At the funeral of a twice-married man, the first wife "named" the widowed second wife, publicly saying to her at the funeral, "You are a most gracious woman". That act of naming created a new identity that can change and sustain a new and different relationship.

It was common knowledge that around age forty, many people felt a sense of discontent. Life was not living up to the possibilities so fervently hoped for. The very work they had dreamed of and been educated for grew increasingly empty of meaning. The marriage partner, they had pledged eternal love to, now seemed unexciting and boring. The name "seven year itch" had found its way into common parlance, describing the dangers facing such marriages. Behavior would become erratic and inappropriate. "Burnout", itself only recently "named", was declared to be a cause of the soon to be named syndrome. All this existed prior to "Mid-Life Crisis" being named. Naming created a new entity. "Mid-Life Crisis" became par for the course, an almost inescapable part of everyone's life cycle. Properly named, it was now less aberrant. It could be related to and treated. Programs, such as The Professional Career Review Program of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, came out of a discussion about Rabbis and Mid-Life Crisis, to deal with this now "named" and thus well established condition.

The name offered an explanation for the person going through "it" and gave those around a way of accounting for their weird behavior. Proper naming changes relationships.

Rabbis, as Symbolic Exemplars, have great power to name, "You are a *loving* man. "I sense the presence of a *courageous* woman". "You truly are a *big hearted* person", etc. Successful naming becomes part of the others self-identity. Not all labeling or relabeling becomes naming. Sometimes repetition is needed, or naming needs to take place in another way, and another context.

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Naming creates new realities when after witnessing what is implicit in the universe; constellations ever present though long hidden; patterns in others behavior are properly named, and so brought into human "being", perception, experience and discourse. Naming can give a new meaning to those already existing realities that are present, but unacceptable, kept from human "being". Naming that which had no name makes relationship possible. And it is only in relationship that "things" attain human "being". Proper naming brings forth what seems like new entities and makes new relationships possible.

The rabbi as witness to the pattern, names it, and invites it into human "being". All clergy need to believe that whatever the state's legal procedures, (Birth Certificates; marriage licenses etc.) or the requirements of religious law, the experiential "fact" is that it is as ordained clergy that rabbis and others name infants, bar-mitzvah teenagers, confirm confirmands, marry couples, convert Jews by choice, consecrate houses, and assist the departed on their journey.

Beyond characterological naming, rabbis have the power, to do special work with the suffering, ill, and dying. This involves witnessing and naming parts of one's personhood that illness has paradoxically either hidden or revealed. . Outward courage may mask inner fear, and the fearful may have reserves of courage not immediately on view. Witnessing the ever present [*Tzelem* <=> *N'shamah*] and naming it appropriately is a most important part of rabbinic work.

Life Cycle changes are a fertile field for naming. Rabbis are vested to change reality by naming a baby; change something fundamental in a convert; "Bar Mitzvah" a thirteen year old; to "marry" two single adults. Those so "named" are vested with new and different obligations, expectations, responsibilities and hopefully new ways of perceiving themselves. A rabbi makes it happen with words. Naming a child is paradigmatic of this power. The child is an inchoate blob of protoplasm barely distinguished from the parents from whom it comes. When the traditional formula is uttered;

"Let her name in Israel be so and so the daughter of so and so  
and so and so."

the child becomes a separate person with an identity differentiated from the parents. A new status has been created with words.

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Experientially, a rabbi's pronouncement "Therefore, by the power vested in me, I now pronounce you husband and wife." change a man into a husband and a woman into a wife-a profound difference!

If we would pay closer attention, beyond what we have been taught in our seminaries, to our own mind/body experience, to occasions when we were "named" in some way, "bar mitzvahed", "married", described as possessing some special attribute, we would easily acknowledge this "fact". Knowing that in reality nothing changes and yet everything changes, we could stop resisting and bemoaning our power. We would use it in the service of those we love, who are in our charge.

Rabbis are encouraged to have a sense of awe toward the naming experience. They should not underestimate their power to create new entities with words. It is a power rabbis can use beneficially in many ways by properly "naming" and blessing people, events, etc. Rabbis need to recognize, accept, and believe in that power to use it with discretion and respect for its potency. Internally, the rabbi, witness to a hidden attribute, about to name would do well to envision a door opening before him with an opportunity to make a difference in the other's experience. "I am about to create something new. I am about to bring forth something that did not exist in the world of human "being" before. This is serious business. I need intention, ability, and confidence. This child will go through life with the name I intone. These two will now be husband and wife, a couple, different from what they were just minutes before. This convert will be a part of a new people. This person can see her *self* differently. New expectations and behavior will be built around the new reality I am about to create with my act of naming. The person(s) I am naming will become a more human 'being'. The [Tzelem<=>N'shamah] will be more present."

Rabbis, who take this role seriously, will not just "rattle off" eulogies, invocations, benedictions but will even take chance personal encounters as an opportunity to witness and "name" evidence of the hidden [Tzelem<=>N'shamah]. All of the above will be seen as opportunities to "name" and create new realities. Rabbis, knowing that they are invested with and trained in the use of this power, will do it with a seriousness and intentionality appropriate to a sense that they are doing something very powerful and important.

### **Being a Blessing and Blessing Others**

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As ordained Symbolic Exemplars of God, standing for the best attributes of humankind, rabbis carry a precious, yet burdensome blessing. Rabbis have as their task exemplifying the blessing in themselves and evoking and blessing in others the gift of being created [*Tzelem* <=> *N'shamah*] At the primary level we affirm God's blessing and other gifts to us by thanking and blessing God for them.

Joshua Guttoff points to the relational context of blessing:

"And so: God created everything, and we are to love God with everything we are and have; Shalom aleichem, (literally, "Peace unto you", colloquially, "How do you do" or "Howdy", says God through the scent of the herb, the taste of the fruit. "Aleichem shalom", we say through the b'racha (*blessing*)...the functional meaning of "Baruch Ata" is "You are Present"; the blessing - when said mindfully - helps establish a relationship with God in the phenomenon at hand..." (p.53)

Giving thanks for God's gifts by saying the one hundred blessings we are obliged to say every day, or pronouncing (the priestly blessing), "May YHWH bless you and keep you! May YHWH shine his face upon you and favor you! May YHWH lift up his face toward you and grant you *shalom*! wherein we transmit an ancient blessing formulated by others, that all need and can use, are the *easy* parts of blessing.

Blessing others on God's behalf is the more audacious act. Crucial to being a rabbi, blessing others with one's personal presence, and words is one of the ultimate acts of love a rabbi can do. It is a primary way of attending to the [*Tzelem* <=> *N'shamah*] that is in others and in us.

Gilligan, from a Self-Relations context, emphasizes the importance of blessing and being blessed:

"The point is, you really do exist as a human being. Your beingness is blessed...The experience of beingness is first known via blessings from influential others...Most people can remember someone in their lives-a family member, teacher, friend--who really saw them as special and unique. This is not a cognitive event; It is about (*jhb* witnessing) seeing and calling forth the spirit of life that infuses each person. Blessings are crucial acts in the emergence of each person into the world; without them, love and other skillful human acts are not possible."(pp 216-217)

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Talk about influential others?! Sometimes blessings happen because of who we are perceived to be, despite our own ineptness.

Thirty-five years after it happened, I was attending a speech at the local Jewish community center. Cindy Dimenstein, then director of the Bureau of Jewish Education, reached over, tapped me on the shoulder, and said, "There's something that I've been waiting over thirty years to tell you. Remember when my family and I were members of your congregation? I was six or seven. Remember how you did birthday blessings? You had all the kids stand under the talit."(prayer shawl).

I nodded politely. I detested doing birthday blessings. I did them because my congregants, knowing that the neighboring rabbi was doing them, expected me to.

Cindy continued. "While all the kids were standing under the *talit*," you asked each of us our birthday. When I called out, "September 27," you said, "September 27!! --That's a really important birthday, 'cause that's the day next to September 26, my birthday." My birthday right next to the rabbi's. Wow!!! Well, I felt so big, so puffed up, so important that I never forgot it. And every birthday since, I've had that wonderful feeling of being someone important."

Some do it better! Michael Paley affirms the importance and the effects of having been blessed in a crucial way by Zalman Schachter, founder of the Jewish Renewal movement.

"May the One who blessed our ancestors also bless this one as he struggles with his adolescence. May he have the energy to finish his college applications and may those admission officers have the clarity to understand his special gifts"

Paley writes;

"I had never been blessed like this before...at that moment, being so involved with the issues that Zalman mentioned, it made sense to me that if God could bless our ancestors, then why not me in a moment of need?"

Many years have passed since Zalman blessed me, but his charge still rings in my ears. His blessing helped me to feel part of something greater than

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myself and to realize that there were worlds beyond the ones that I could see. His blessing gave me a certain sense of much needed harmony with myself, my community, and maybe with the universe at an unexpected moment.”

What enables us to bless another? In Jewish tradition God is described as the "King of all Kings, the Holy and Blessed One." Earthly royalty is esteemed by the Biblical author to the extent that their behavior is consonant with the Supreme Ruler of All. These archetypal demands dovetail with rabbinic Symbolic Exemplars, who are archetypes of the God who created us. That this is important is affirmed by John W Perry, who asserts that the King is "the central archetype, around which the rest of the psyche is organized.”

Moore and Gillette in discussing the archetypal functions of the King point out that;

"The first of these is ordering". ...“the second function of the King...was...blessing. Blessing is a psychological, or spiritual event. The good king always mirrored and affirmed others who deserved it ...knowing them in their true worth...He recognizes them and he is generative toward them. He bestows upon them his blessing. Being blessed has tremendous psychological consequences for us. There are even studies that show that our bodies actually change chemically when we feel valued, praised and blessed...if they are (blessed), something inside will come together for them. That is the effect of blessing; it heals and makes whole.

It (blessing) stabilizes chaotic emotion and out-of-control behaviors. It gives stability and centeredness. It brings calm. And in its "fertilizing" and centeredness, it mediates vitality, life force and joy. It brings maintenance and balance. It defends our own sense of inner order, our own integrity of being and of purpose, our own central calmness about who we are, and our essential unassailability and certainty...It sees others in all their weakness and in all their talent and worth. It honors them and promotes them. It guides them and nurtures them toward their own fullness of being. (p.61)

Bradley Shavit Artson points us in this direction with an understanding of blessing that is especially relevant to what rabbis can do.

"The earliest hint of a different understanding of Baruch comes from the Midrash, (literature which interprets Scripture to extract its full implications and meaning,) where the Rabbis explain the verse “and you shall be a

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blessing” (Genesis 12:2) to mean “you shall be a spring (B'racha): ...This *midrash diverges* markedly from the tradition of Baruch as praised/blessed. Here the term doesn't imply praise or thanks. Instead, being blessed means that *one in turn can bestow fullness and well-being on others...*(emphasis *jhb*) God blesses Abraham...means that Abraham will become a source of blessing, a fount of abundance for all whose lives he touches.”(This) "reveals an understanding of B'racha" (Blessing) "as causative.

“Why is God" The Blessed One? Because everything belongs to God and God generously shares it with creation...it tells us that God can afford to be generous, since God is the Creator and owner of all there is.” (p.38)

Following Albo, Artson offers that;

“Baruch (Blessed) indicates that God is the source of all blessings, and that all benefits and good fortune of every kind come from God. If Baruch, (Blessed) is understood as an adjective, then it reveals that God is a steady source of blessing.”(p.38)

Rabbis are blessed with being God's Exemplars. It is incumbent upon rabbis to share this bounty and bless others. Though a truly crucial, inviolable part of being a rabbi, it is often experienced as an embarrassment. The discomfort may emanate from a sense of personal inadequacy or of one's limitations, or of feeling like an imposter as a Symbolic Exemplar. More generously and less pathologically, it may involve noble thoughts about human equality, the divinity of all humankind, and fear of the potential hubris involved in blessing those already blessed. Our trepidation is that we, unaware of our blessing, dare not bless others likewise afflicted. We may be even more frightened of taking ourselves too seriously and evolving into one of those pompous, grandiose, overstuffed caricatures of what a rabbi can be.

That all too real danger is acknowledged by Moore and Gillette.

"The Shadow King as Tyrant...arises...when the Ego is identified with the King energy itself, (and) has no transpersonal commitment. *He* is his own priority...The whole psyche destabilizes. The planet pretends to be a star.”(p.71)

Relationship is the powerful centering antidote to that danger. *Blessing of the other must be grounded in relationship.* Blessing starts in the Blesser's I-You, loving

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relationship with her other "selves", those very "selves" we struggle to define as "not me". Blessing continues in the Blesser's awareness of her own relationship with God, whose bounty and being has made room in the world for us and our unique "being". Blessing others is in the relationship of who we are with those others who are also blessed, but whose blessing is as it were in hiding. God is both the source of and calls forth from us our own bounty. A break in these loving I-You relationships impedes blessing.

Gilligan (1997) points out that;

"Problems arise when a single identity is isolated from the family of identities. Solutions occur when relatedness between multiple identities is brought into play."

These multiple identities are present within our "selves" and our own multiple "selves" relationship with others, who are also multiple identities.

We are at one and the same time, the recipient of blessing, the conduit of blessing, and the source of blessing. Holding all these in relationship simultaneously is imperative, so that our (the "*me doing it and the 'ain't me doing it*" now in a respectful I-You relationship), may enter a similar relationship with those we are called on to bless. This enables us to call forth from them and audaciously bless the often hidden bounty of their "being"- of *their* unique [*Tzelem* <=> *N'shamah*]. We who bless are a relationship and a part of a much greater relationship. Blessing is only possible in relationship.

Paley (1996) learned a lot from being blessed.

"Years later when I was a rabbi, I would prepare for Bar and Bar Mitzvahs with families by asking them about each person that would be called to the Torah. For each *aliyah* (the honor of reciting blessings at a public reading of the Torah,) I was able to "bring down" a blessing tailored to that individual."

That is a giant step beyond the reciting of formal ritual blessings and beyond being a conduit for ancient blessings. Blessing and encouraging the presented, positive aspects in others is very important.

Even *more* crucial and difficult is blessing the part not presented, the part being struggled with, the part which has no human existence and is experienced as the "not me". Realizing what it is in others, which is often unexpressed, witnessing the

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struggle and essence that begs inarticulately for naming and blessing, and blessing both struggle and essence with words of one's own, words not received and not encoded in the text, is a rabbinic skill of the first magnitude. It was this very part that Zalman Schachter touched when he blessed the young Michael. Sensing a young Bar Mitzvah's turbulent energy, a student's sense of inadequacy, the conflict in a mother's heart, the fear behind the brave face a hospital patient puts on, or conversely the courage hiding behind the fear, all the "not mes" that though always present in the encounter, are so often hidden in the shadows, is a prerequisite to blessing. Yet it is those "hidden" parts that not only are unsettling to their "owners", but also throw us potential blessers off center as we struggle to deal only with what is being presented. To bless those wounded, hidden parts is a great art and skill.

Blessing those parts, as we mentioned earlier, requires first of all that we be centered, in touch with our own *[Tzelem<=>N'shamah]*. When knocked off center, which will happen all too often, have ways of getting centered. Being centered is experienced as a calm alertness of one's own mind/body as one returns to and sustains contact with one's own *[Tzelem<=>N'shamah]*. This makes room for one's own center and allows an act of Tzimtzum, (literally contraction- from the kabalistic idea of God withdrawing to make room for the creation of the world,) that makes room for the other's presence with neither being compromised. It is from this centered place that a rabbi as a symbol can bless the other.

**And you shall bless me also** Ex; 12; 33

It is the middle of the night. He who will be known down the ages for his hardened heart, is now heart broken. His heir who had been the guarantor of his, Pharaoh's own divine status, is now dead in his arms. The supreme ruler of the upper and lower kingdom, embodiment of Ra and of Horus, the gods of Egypt, his divine dynasty brought to its knees, defeated in the battle as to who the living God really is, is abjectly doing what he must do. Having summoned Moses and Aaron, he is sending them and their people on their way. Letting go of a work force, he frets for his failure in failing to guarantee Egypt's future, a solemn duty with which he has been charged. And as he presses them to leave with no further delay, in an act that is either chutzpah, stupidity, pitiful or all of the these, asks to be blessed. Bless me also, Pharaoh asks of Moses, guardian of the teaching and of Aaron, master of the cult, the plenipotentiaries of the living God, the very people who have brought this dreadful night to be.

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If Blessing is an attribute of the God who shares His bounty and goodness with all His creation of whom does Pharaoh ask this blessing? What is the bounty/blessing Pharaoh seeks?

The careful reader will duly note what follows;

The children of Israel had done according to Moses' words; they had asked of the Egyptians objects of silver and objects of gold, and clothing. God had given the people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, and they let themselves be asked of. Ex; 12; 35-36

And the self same astute reader will note the careful use of the words;

So did they *exploit* the Egyptians *ibid.*; v 36

The Egyptians, despite their great anguish that night, are able to see beyond the Israelites as enemy. They respond to what they are asked for. They share their bounty.

From Moses and Aaron, no blessing is forthcoming. Pharaoh's plea goes unheard and unheeded. No blessing/bounty is forthcoming. There is no salve for his wound. There is no blessing that Egypt will survive. He is not promised that his torn heart will heal. He is not reassured that there is a future worth having for the humbled representative of Ra and Horus.

Perhaps the silence came from anger over centuries of slavery; perhaps from an understandable feeling of wanting the whole thing over with; perhaps from the haste duly recorded in scripture of getting out; or perhaps more crucially from not being aware that it was in their power and even perhaps their duty as representatives of the living God to bless even Pharaoh.

What was the overflowing bounty Moses and Aaron, God's plenipotentiaries and indeed all Israel had in full measure that wondrous/appalling night. It was in the reality of the contact with the living God, who had heard their cry and come to redeem them. That God, whose bounty could include even Egypt, as it indeed had in the days of Joseph. It was relationship with the God, one of whose nicknames was "Baal HaRachamim" (Master of Mercy) whose compassion is over all. Now Pharaoh and his people are those who suffer and are deeply wounded. But even though we understand the feelings of Moses and Aaron, nonetheless there is no bounty of the living God shared with Pharaoh.

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And so we note (Ex; 14; 5), that inevitably, the unblessed suffering heart flips back, hardens this time with no record of divine intervention. Dare we say because it was not witnessed or blessed at the propitious moment. And so pursuit and enmity, the desire to subjugate resumes. Without blessing of the suffering and pain, and that which is noble in Pharaoh, the hardened heart reasserts itself. And though the story inexorably leading to the covenant at Sinai must include the redemption of God's people, nonetheless, a mighty horde is destroyed. And it is told that God's joy in His own triumph could not be complete.

Because Rabbis are God's Exemplars, blessing others is incumbent upon us. Blessing others, sharing God's bounty is a truly crucial and inviolable part of being a rabbi. As Symbolic Exemplars of God, we can do no less. Our people and the world call out to us in their pain. ***Bless me also.***

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