Because of the large number of previous speakers who have paid tribute to Jack D. Weiler, and because the time is so limited and the material so massive and my reverence for Jack so unlimited, I shall refrain from enumerating his various and multifaceted virtues and, instead, limit myself to a few remarks based on the insights of the Talmudic Sages which are characterized by remarkably concentrated wisdom.

I choose to honor Jack with divrei Torah, because of the fact that one of the great inspirations of Jack's life was his late father, Rabbi Weiler, of blessed memory, a renowned Talmudic scholar, and I feel that this medium will be most appropriate to my message.

In Hebrew, an elderly man, from the Bible on down, is called a zaken. Advanced age is ziknah. (In Yiddish, with its remarkable capacity for self-mocking humor, the word ziknah...
consisting of the four letter Z-K-N-H, is regarded as the acrostic of the Yiddish words ziftzen, krechtzen, nussen, and hussen, (sighing, groaning, sneezing, and coughing...) That may be true enough, but there is more, much more, that needs to be said and can be said on this subject.

The Talmud prefers its own play on words: Zaken, zeh she'kanah chokhmah: "A zaken is one who has acquired wisdom." One who has attained respectable age has acquired more facts and, in addition, the life experience to transform mere facts into insight and mere data into wisdom. So much so, that the term zaken is usually taken in the Talmud not to refer to an old person but to a bright, wise person; it is not a chronological term, but an intellectual one. In the Bible too, a term such as "the elders of the city" refers not to the old people of that community but to its wisest leaders, no matter what their age.

Isn't that marvelously true of our zaken, Jack D. Weiler? We are all the beneficiaries not only of his long and distinguished record of philanthropy and friendship, but also his foresight and his insight, his vision and his acuity, and his finally honed intuition--the distillate of his many and fascinating life experiences; in short, his chokhamah or wisdom.

I have been privileged to know our guest of honor for over 35 years and have relied upon him for counsel, for direction, and
for moral support. His wisdom has been never-failing. The one questionable decision in his communal career took place over seventeen years ago when, as a member of the Presidential Selection Committee of the Board of Trustees of Yeshiva University, he nominated me as President of the University... When, shortly thereafter, I asked him to take on the duties of Chairman of the Board of Overseers of the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, he immediately accepted, even though he had already served his term in that office several years earlier. But he did so in order to help a novice in a difficult position.

One other Talmudic comment is worthy of citation and analysis. The Mishnah (Avot, end of Chapter 5) describes the stages in the life of man. For instance: age five is for beginning the study of Torah; age thirteen is the time one is responsible to perform the commandments (hence, Bar Mitzvah); age eighteen is the time for chupah, to get married; at twenty, one begins to pursue a career; at thirty, one reaches the zenith of his power, etc. Then, towards the very end of the list, the Sages say, ben tish'im la-shuach, "at the age of ninety it is a time to bow down."

The simple meaning of that text is self-evident: at ninety, one's strength is spent; it is a time of physical deterioration, when the spine weakens and one no longer can stand erect and so must bow.
However, that is not the only explanation. Note that the Sages' remarks are both descriptive and normative, i.e., some describe life at that particular stage, whereas others prescribe what it ought to be like.

I believe that both apply to this stage of life. The venerable age of ninety is a time of physical disabilities and medical problems. The description is correct. But it also prescribes for us how to deal with a distinguished person who has reached his ninetieth year -- bow down to him! He deserves it!

Jack, we hail you today with happily bowed heads. We salute you for your warmth and your wisdom, your faith and your friendship, your vision and your vitality, your spirit and your support.

You have meant so much for so many, especially to us at Yeshiva University and the Albert Einstein College of Medicine -- who regard you as the "grandfather figure" of our Yeshiva family -- that we gladly and enthusiastically bow our heads to you in reverence and appreciation, in respect and gratitude and, most of all -- in love!

Our prayers are with you and Doris: May the Almighty -- or, as the Kabbalistics call Him, the "Ancient of Days" -- grant you more days and weeks and months and years, in good health and courage, with stamina and vigor, to reap the harvest of all the
good you have sewn in the course of these nine eventful and historic decades.

As you begin the tenth decade of your life, we bow in acknowledgement of you and in gratitude to the Almighty, and pray -- in paraphrase of the standard blessing -- "to a hundred like 20 years!" May your mind be as clear at a hundred as it was when you were twenty, and may your inner resources of moral might and freshness of vision continue with the enthusiasm and vigor of a young man. And may you continue to be erect and firm (even in a wheelchair!), sound in body and mind, as you accept the accolades which you have so richly earned.