

How to Greet Others on 9Adar: Jewish Day of Constructive Conflict By Rabbi Daniel Landes

The expression of blessing, as in greeting one another, is taken very seriously in Judaism. The reason is that the core of such blessing is that the word Shalom, which is a precious Name for God. Using God's name for a secular or seemingly trivial purpose, as noting the other's existence, and even wishing a g'day could be seen as a profanation. Indeed the first one to dare to use the Name itself as a greeting is Boaz in the Book of Ruth. Boaz, the great plantation owner, and as the Book continues, is shown to be a man of moral action, greets his reapers: "Ah-Do-Nai Emachem" – "the Name is with Thee". They respond "Yivarechech Ah-Do-Nai" – "May the Name bless Thou." Put at the barley harvest season, the blessings are short, to the point, but seemingly hearty and well meant, and one responds to the other. The very Name of God is employed, as the Rabbis state: "Boaz and his court established (the practice) to greet in the Name of God" (Ruth Rabbah 4:5). This was a practice that was validated by the Heavenly Court when it had the Angel of God call out to Gideon: "The Name is with Thee O' Mighty Hero" (Judges 6:12; see J. Talmud Brachot, end).

The force of this blessing is fourfold. It expresses a) the happy discovery that indeed God is with you; b) it is beneficent, as it wishes God to be with you; c) it is a formal blessing in that it refers God's Name to the discovery and the beneficent wish; d) it draws forth a response from the other, of equal strength, spirituality and good will.

This form of blessing is a true I-Thou moment. It first of all locates the divine within the Thou which is encountered. Thus behind the earthly I-thou, which consecrates the moment into an eternal ontology: this moment of meeting is not accidental or fleeting, it participates, within the meeting within the Eternal Thou. Secondly, the structure as I pointed out calls for and draws out a response in which Thou becomes an I re-encountering the Thou who initiated the meeting. This empowers the [new] I with full validity in initiating a blessing and allows the [new] thou to receive with fullness the eternal wishes from his/her fellow.

Halakhically in our greetings, we have substituted the name Shalom, that is more of an evocation than a defining characteristic. Shalom as a Name of God thus cannot

be said in an inappropriate place such as a bath house (Shabbat 10b, Shulkhan Arukh, Orech Chayim 84). *Shalom* also evokes a state of completed being, of wholeness which indeed composes Peace. In its ultimate form it is God, but ... this Godly attribute can form our own life. In blessing the other with *Shalom*, we are also stating the way we – who bless – wish to live with those who are blessed. And so, we receive the blessing in return.

Do not we accomplish this spiritual salutation and exaltation when we simply say *shalom* when we pass each other on the street? No. In those cases, we merely acknowledge the others' existence, which has some worth. But that greeting should be understood as *Shalom Greidah* – a simple *Shalom*. The real *Shalom* needs specificity as when the final priestly blessing states, “*VaYasem Lichah Shalom*” – “And He shall bestow upon You Peace.” (see also J. Talmud, Tractate Berakhot 2:7).

Therefore my recommendation for the first part of the blessing to be said on this new/old day of 9Adar: Jewish Day of Constructive Conflict. The greeter of one person or a group should state:

Shalom Aleichem – Peace be unto thee/you.

This affirms the presence of Godliness within whomever we engage and alerts us all to the special quality of the day.

The person(s) greeted respond(s):

Aleichem HaShalom – Upon thee/you be peace.

Then either or both chime in:

SheNizkeh Limachloket RaK LiSHem SHaMaYim – That we should merit only to have disagreements that are for the Sake of Heaven on Both Sides!

This sequence needs only a small interpretation:

SheNizkeh – that we merit: That our whole exchange be good natured and mutually aspirational.

LiMachloket – to have disagreement: that we know that life, especially shared (familial, communal, tribal, national) is full of conflict.

RaK LiSHem SHaMaYim – Only for the sake of Heaven: expresses our confidence that our disagreements can actually emerge to be transformational, and that resolutions even if partial also can be blessed and effective.

I therefore wish all of those commemorating 9Adar as the Jewish Day of Constructive Conflict –

SheNizkeh Limachloket RaK LiSHem SHaMaYim!