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Happy Face

In our *Mishnah* we are told “*Shammai* said... receive every person with a happy face”. Two questions must be asked. What exactly does this mean? And why was this considered sufficiently important to be mentioned in *Masechet Avot*, which has so few of the *Tanaim*'s teachings, and so few in particular of *Shammai*'s?

I believe the answer to the first question can be found in *Gemara Brachot* (6b):

R' Chelbo said *R' Huna* said everybody who knows somebody who he regularly greets should do so at the earliest opportunity, as it is written: “Request peace and pursue it” (*Tehillim* 34) and if he was greeted and did not return [the greeting] he is called a thief, as it is said: “It is you that have eaten up the vineyard; the spoil of the poor is in your houses” (Isaiah 3:14)

In other words, this *Mishnah* would seem to refer to the friendly greeting of other people.

This however still leaves the question as to why this is considered so important. There are three important possible reasons mentioned in the various commentaries. The first in the explanation of the *Meiri* found in his commentary for *Brachot*:

A man should always be comfortable with others and greet them as quickly as possible and show respect to them and to their occupation as much as he may and in this way he will love others and **causes them to complete their obligation of respect for *Torah* and *Mitzvot*.**

In other words, the *Meiri* viewed friendliness on the part of a Jew to be a sanctification of G-d's name in that it would cause other to pay greater respect for *Torah*.

However, the *Meiri* also stated that “he will love others” and this is a theme which can be found in *Avot DeRebbi Natan* (13), a commentary on *Tractate Avot*. There it is written:

Receive every person with a happy face: What does this mean? It teaches that if someone were to give his fellow all the good gifts in the world and his face is down turned the *Torah* treats him as though he did not give anything. But if he receives his fellow with a happy face, even if he gave nothing the *Torah* treats him as though he had given [his fellow] all the good gifts in the world.

While it is not immediately apparent how this is related to the issue of loving others, upon examination the connection is clear. How can the *Torah* treat a person who merely greets others kindly as though he had given them all the gifts in the world? It cannot, for such a thing would be both grossly unjust and completely illogical. However, something here is as though he had given that person all the gifts in the world. The answer can be found in *Masechet Avot* in another *Mishnah* (2:9):

[*Raban Yochanan Ben Zakai*] said to [his five students] go out and see what is the straight way that a man might adhere to it. *Rabbi Eliezer* said a good eye. *Rabbi Yehoshua* said a good friend. *Rabbi Yosi* said a good neighbour. *Rabbi Shimon* said to see future ramifications. *Rabbi Elazar* said a good heart. He said to them I see the words of *Rabbi Elazar Ben Arach* that his words include all of your words.

In other words, a good eye and friendliness, which are both a part of our idea of greeting others with a happy face, can be found as part of a good heart. If so, they form outwards indications of a good heart. However, this does not explain why somebody is rewarded for greeting others with a happy face. The answer can be found in the introduction of the *Sefer HaChinnuch*: “after the deeds are drawn the hearts”. If so, greeting people happily, while possibly a sign of a good heart, can also lead to a good heart. This is the reward spoken of in *Avot DeRabbi Natan* and a second possible reason for the importance placed upon this idea.

The third possibility as to why this idea is viewed as so important is that given by *Rabbeinu Yona*:

After he has received people with a happy face, he will distance himself from the personality trait of anger that is surely undesirable and he will conduct himself in a pleasing manner **in such a way that people will be pleased with him.**

Rabbeinu Yona provides the simple reason for this *Mishnah*. While it would seem initially that the motivation he provides is selfish, in reality it is not, for this is the way for people to get along.

If so, the reason for this *Mishnah* is probably threefold, a friendly greeting benefits the souls both of those being greeted and of the greeter and it contributes to the general friendliness of community which is vital for society to function.

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Revision Questions

אבות א': י"ד – ב' ט'

- Complete the following statement made by *Hillel*: (א': י"ד)
אם אין אני לי _____ וכשאני לעצמי _____? _____ אימתני?
 - Complete the following statement made by *Shammai*: (א': ט"ו)
עשה תורתך _____, אומר מעט _____,
והוי מקבל את כל אדם _____.
 - What three things did *Rabban Gamliel* teach? (א': ט"ז)
 - What three things did *Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel* teach regarding speech? (א': י"ז)
 - According to *Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel*, on what three things is the world sustained? (א': י"ח)
 - According to *Rebbi*, what is the straight path in which one should lead his life? (ב': א')
 - If one focuses on which three things will he be saved from sin? (ב': א')
 - According to *Rabban Gamliel* the son of *Rebbi Yehuda HaNasi* with what should *Torah* be combined? What is the result if one does not do so? (ב': ב')
 - What guidance does he give to one who will be involved in communal affairs? (ב': ב')
 - What warning does he give to one who will be involved in affairs with the government? (ב': ג')
 - Complete the following statement: (ב': ד')
- עשה רצונו כרצונך, _____
בטל רצונך מפני רצונו, _____
- What five statements did *Hillel* make beginning with אל? (ב': ד')
 - What did *Hillel* say regarding: (ב': ה')
 - A boor?
 - An *am ha'aretz*?
 - A *bayshan*?
 - A *kapdan*?
 - One who increases in business?
 - What did *Hillel* say when he saw a skull floating in the water? (ב': ו')
 - Complete the following statements? (ב': ז')
- מרבה בשר מרבה _____, מרבה נכסים מרבה _____;
מרבה עבדים מרבה _____, מרבה שפחות מרבה _____;
מרבה נשים מרבה _____, מרבה תורה מרבה _____.
קנה שם טוב, קנה _____; קנה דברי תורה, קנה _____.
- Complete the following statement of *R' Yochanan ben Zakkai*: (ב': ח')
- אם למדת תורה הרבה _____, _____
- Who were the five student of *R' Yochanan ben Zakkai* and how did he describe each of them? (ה': ח')
 - What did each of them think is the "straight path" to which one should attach themselves and with who did *R' Yochanan ben Zakkai* agree? (ה': ט')
 - What did each of them think is the "evil path" which one should avoid and with who did *R' Yochanan ben Zakkai* agree? (ה': ט')

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Between mincha & ma'ariv
Mizrachi Shul

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Next Week's Mishnayot...

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | שבת קודש |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 9 th March ב' אדר ב' | 10 th March ג' אדר ב' | 11 th March ד' אדר ב' | 12 th March ה' אדר ב' | 13 th March ו' אדר ב' | 14 th March ז' אדר ב' | 5 th March ח' אדר ב' |
| Avot 2:10-11 | Avot 2:12-13 | Avot 2:14-15 | Avot 2:16-3:1 | Avot 3:2-3 | Avot 3:4-5 | Avot 3:6-7 |

