

*When the Blessed Holy One, created humanity in the divine image this did not mean only that we were adorned with the qualities of intellect and soul, but also that we were given the power of the 'radiant face'. In the radiance of the human face is hidden a treasure of blessing...and from the 'radiant face' a concrete behavior flows. What is this behavior? It is the quality of Shammai the Elder, who said, "Receive every person with a kind face". 'Kind face' is the act of radiating the face. Moreover, one who offers a kind face to another literally "gives" peace to the other. For this reason, Rabbi Matia ben Harash said, "Be the first to give the greeting of 'shalom' to every person."* Rabbi Shlomo Walbe z.l. Alei Shur, p. 200

This teaching comes from Rabbi Shlomo Walbe z.l. (1914 - 2005) a teacher in mussar, a Jewish ethical, educational and cultural movement focusing on moral conduct, instruction and discipline. I share it with you because I believe it poetically and beautifully conveys two lessons of great value for us today.

Destructive anger and conflict fuel many aspects of our interactions with one another. This is unfortunate because both also possess the potential to be very powerful constructive forces of change. What alchemy makes this possible? An answer lies in Rabbi Walbe's teaching. When we embrace the idea that "in the radiance of the human face is hidden a treasure of blessing" it transforms the very essence of our relationship with the person whose radiance shines on us and on upon the one whom our radiance shines. In the "light" of this radiance anger is revealed to be an amalgam of many mixed unpleasant emotions allowing the holy work of conflict resolution, healing and making whole, the essence of the meaning of the word shalom, to begin. For the transformative power of this "light" to work on us we must be willing to meet face to face the one with whom we are in conflict or feel anger towards.

The smile is the "the symbol that was rated with the highest positive emotional content" according to scientist Andrew Newberg. Smiling makes our brain feels good and tells us to smile, we smile and tell our brain it feels good and so forth. A smiling face is truly the quintessential meaning of a 'radiant face'. When I see you smile it invariably causes me to smile.

The second lesson to draw from Rabbi Walbe's teaching is the magic and power of real time face to face interactions. I have no desire to denigrate the importance of the many virtual ways available to us for connecting with one another. The benefits of email, Instagram, Facebook, etc are enormous. At the same time, there is nothing like the warm feeling engendered when one is looked upon with a kind face, a radiant face.

We live in time when technology has made it possible to connect with people all over the world almost instantaneously. Without a doubt this is a huge blessing. But a quick glance at the headlines removes any doubt that this has brought the world any closer to shalom/peace/wholeness. However, the Blessed Holy One, having created us in the divine image, imbued within each of us the gift of a "radiant face". If only we might lift up our faces toward one another and shed our light of peace in this world, one smiling face at a time.

Rabbi Howard A Cohen