

# Fascinating INSIGHTS

כג' מרחשון תשפ"ו

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L'Refuah Shleima Gutzya Bryna bas Perel Chaya, Danielle bat Lucie and Rafael ben Danielle

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[Meet and Greet](#)

We are instructed to receive everyone בסבר פנים יפות,<sup>1</sup> with a pleasant facial expression.<sup>2</sup>

There was a person who would give R' Chaim Kanievsky a hard time. Despite this, R' Chaim always greeted him with a special warmth. When R' Chaim was asked about why his reaction to this person was always one of warmth, he answered that it says והוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות,<sup>3</sup> receive everyone with a cheerful face — that is, every person, and not just the people you like. Even those that annoy you.<sup>4</sup>



internal grief.<sup>6</sup>

R' Avraham Grodzinski (1883-1944) spent two years perfecting the attribute of "greeting every individual with a pleasant facial countenance."<sup>5</sup> People would later attest to the extent he instilled this principle into his character. Even in the most horrific times in the Kovno Ghetto during the Holocaust, his pleasant facial expression masked his

When R' Shlomo Hoffman (1922-2013) was young and learning in the Slabodka yeshiva he had a learning session with R' Isaac Sher (1875-1952) in his house. He once entered the house and R' Sher asked him why he was sad. Unaware of how somber his appearance was, he responded that he wasn't sad. R' Sher told him, "You must have not looked in a mirror recently because if you did, you would be embarrassed to go out into the street with such an expression on your face. If you knew how you looked, you wouldn't dare enter my house with such a look on your face." For a long while after that encounter, R' Sher demanded that Shlomo wear a smile on his face whenever he entered his house. R' Sher assigned him

several exercises to get him accustomed to smiling. One time he told him, "You are like a pit in the public thoroughfare. You cause damage to everyone around you with that glum expression on your face."<sup>7</sup>

R' Chaim Friedlander, who was the mashgiach of the Ponovezh yeshiva and a student of R' Dessler,<sup>8</sup> would have a particular smile when he would speak on the phone. He was asked why he smiles if the other person can't see him anyway. He answered that although they can't see the smile, but they can hear the smile.<sup>9</sup> There is something that they can sense.



At one point during the Corona pandemic, the law in Los Angeles was that for teachers teaching indoors it was mandatory to wear a mask in contrast to those teaching outdoors. In a certain Jewish high school there, the staff had a meeting discussing which teachers would teach indoors and which outdoors. Before the debate ensued, one rabbi interjected and said that he would be teaching outside. He explained, "For the past year I have been teaching while wearing a mask and it is recognizable from the way students looked at me that they weren't enjoying my words as much because they weren't able to discern that I was smiling as I was speaking. I need my students to see me smile as I speak to them."<sup>10</sup>

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander ztz"l for close to five years and received semichah from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg ztz"l. Rabbi Alt has written thousands of Torah articles on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of ten books including the recently released "Astounding Torah Insights about the Human Body." His writings, many of which have been translated into Yiddish, Hebrew, German, Spanish and French, inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. His shiurim can be found on various websites including Kol Halashon's. Rabbi Alt lives with his wife and family in Kiryat Yearim (where the Aron was for 20 years [Shmuel 1, 7:1,2]) where he studies, lectures, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

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<sup>1</sup> The English word "face" has its origins in the Latin "facies," which is related to "facade," "surface," and "superficial." All these indicate that the essence of the face is its external reality. In contrast, the Hebrew word for face is פנים which is the same spelling as פנים, inside. Jewish thought considers the face to be the one part of the body that reveals the inside. It expresses the spiritual, the internal, and the soul of the person.

<sup>2</sup> Avos 1:15. It's been said half-jokingly that sometimes we're so busy, we forget to even say hello to people. But at least once a month, we do say hello to others—at "Shalom Aleichem" during Kiddush Levanah.

<sup>3</sup> The Meiri (s.v. מקבל והוי מקבל) explains the word סבר as סברא, think. He explicates that even if you are not upbeat and happy to meet this person, you should appear to the person as if you are to the extent that he thinks (סבר) your radiant countenance is because you are happy to see him.

<sup>4</sup> There is a saying, "Be the type of person you want to meet."

<sup>5</sup> We should have the response of R' Goldberg, an ordinary Rebbe in yeshiva, who whenever he is asked how he is doing, he responds enthusiastically, "I have never been better. I am living the dream."

<sup>6</sup> Someone once wrote a poem:

Look not for beauty nor niceness of skin,  
nor a figure so thin,  
but look for the heart that is loyal, warm within,  
For beauty will fade,  
nice skin will grow old,  
but a heart that is warm will never grow cold.

<sup>7</sup> A similar story is told with the Alter of Slabodka. A student in Slabodka was in the habit of walking around with a dour face. The Alter told him, "It is forbidden for you to be in the Beis Midrash with such an expression. The Torah forbids a person to dig a pit in a public thoroughfare because it may be injurious to a passerby who can fall in. Similarly, the Beis

Midrash is a public thoroughfare and your face is a pit since people who look at you grimace feel worse. What difference does it make if you damage someone's arm, leg or mood?"

<sup>8</sup> R' Dessler was a pioneer in utilizing technology to spread Torah. He made use of stencils and mimeographs to distribute his shiurim to students across great distances. At one point, he even considered recording his shiurim with tapes in the Ponovezh Yeshiva and sending them back to England. However, the presence of a tape recorder in a beis midrash was still a novelty at the time, and he was advised against it. One of those who advised him that such innovation might brand R' Dessler as "modernish" in the eyes of the Torah world in Eretz Yisrael was R' Chaim Friedlander. In later years, R' Friedlander would often express regret over his role in discouraging the recordings, realizing the great loss of not having R' Dessler's shiurim preserved for future generations (Biography of R' Dessler, p. 312 by R' Yonoson Rosenblum).



<sup>9</sup> When a person smiles, their entire face expands which means their inner world is also expanding. When a person is upset their face becomes constricted. Their lips lock, their eyes become smaller and their face seems to tighten. This reflects the constriction that is happening inside of them. This idea is conveyed in the words *panim*, face and *pnim*, inner, which are clearly related based on the Hebrew spelling. Their face and the expression it displays is a window to what is happening inside that person.

<sup>10</sup> We must keep in mind, "Share your smile with the world."