

PRAYING with *Fire*

PRAYER POINTS



Say Hello to Your Barista

Jun 24, 2018 | by [Rabbi Jack Abramowitz](#)

A simple way to help change society.

A friend of mine recently shared the following incident on Facebook:

Ordered my decaf coffee, waiting for the person I'm meeting with to get here. Then I said, "Good morning, how are you doing today?" to the woman taking the order. She stared at me blankly for a moment, and then said, "Wow, nobody ever asks me that."

That's so sad. I said, "I'm sorry to hear that."

Try to show appreciation to the workers you meet today.

The barista was so taken aback by being asked how she was that she was struck speechless. Isn't that simply appalling? I'm not so naïve that I think everyone has a kind word to accompany their coffee order but if we've reached the point where it happens so infrequently that it incapacitates a barista out of shock... well, we as a society clearly have some work to do.

Do you know your mailman's name? Now, it's possible that someone is literally never home to see their postal carrier but those of us who do see this person on a regular basis must ask ourselves why we don't know his or her name. (Trust me, our mailmen know a *lot* about *us*. It only behooves us to know at least the barest information about them!)

So why don't more people greet their baristas, postmen, bank tellers and other service professionals with whom we may interact?

Now it could be that someone is busy or doesn't want to hold up the line. That's a legitimate concern but no one is saying to have a 30-minute conversation while the line snakes around the corner. If the barista has a moment to ask how we're doing, we can find the five seconds it takes to return the sentiment.

Most of us are simply too wrapped up in our own little bubbles. We're in our heads. We're on our phones. We just don't think about others. By definition, this makes us inconsiderate of them. Inconsiderate doesn't mean we're overtly rude, obnoxious or dismissive. The word inconsiderate literally means that one "doesn't think of" others. And we don't because if we did, we'd be saying, "Hi, good morning. How are you? Can I please have a large mocha half-caf no-whip Americano frappe in an extra-large cup? Thank you."

We have plenty of precedent for such behavior. For starters, just look at the book of Ruth which we read every Shavuot. Boaz is introduced in the second chapter, verse 4 of which tells us that "Boaz came from Bethlehem and he said to the reapers, 'God be with you.' And they answered him, God bless you."

Boaz was a rich and powerful individual. The reapers were lowly workers. Lots of high and mighty people would simply overlook the menial laborers in their fields but Boaz went out of his way to greet them first. (And you will notice that they blessed him in return.)

Shammai's famous dictum in Ethics of the Fathers (1:15) urges us to greet everyone with a cheerful countenance. The Talmud (Brachos 17a) tells us that no one ever greeted Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai first – not even random non-Jews whom he passed in the street. They weren't important people, they weren't even fellow Jews, but they were fellow human beings so Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai took the initiative to pleasantly extend greetings to everyone he met.

We all have a lot on our minds but neither you nor I have a more pressing agenda than Shammai, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai or Boaz. If Boaz can find time to greet the reapers, we can certainly find a smile for our baristas and others who perform numerous acts for us daily.