The Hebrew Program at Tufts presents a talk with one of Israel’s most celebrated novelists, Meir Shalev. Shalev is the author of numerous works, including the novel “Gold,” which has been translated into several languages.

In the context of the Lenten season, I can see no better reminder of the new life and transformation that awaits. The act of giving up something, whether it be a cherished habit or a physical item, is a way to open ourselves to the possibility of receiving something new.

As a Christian still journeying through the traditions of my faith, I am often struck by the simple gestures that can carry great spiritual meaning. What if we were to approach every conversation, every encounter, as if it were a sacred conversation? Who is that? What is their name? Where are they going? I am grateful for how observant he is. Sure, it is a bit strange to see him walking around campus with his head down, staring at the sun and the cars. He talks to the bugs that he insists are following him. Upon passing folks on the sidewalk he stops to consciously greet each person, each element of creation, by announcing the divine in our midst?

As a Christian, I can recall the importance of the manner in which we greet each other. The phrase, “God be with you,” is followed by the response, “And also with you.” And then, if you so desired, you could add, “And with your spirit.” But how often do we get to the “And also with you” part, let alone the “And with your spirit” part? Yet it is these small gestures of acknowledgment that can make the biggest impact.

When you meet someone, do you stop to greet them? Do you offer them a smile? A nod? A handshake? And what about the elements of creation? Do you notice them? Do you take the time to greet the birds, the trees, the flowers? And do you offer them a moment of gratitude?

A second example of this is the “God to you” or quite literally, “God and Mary to you.” The reply is then “God, Mary, and Joseph to you.” To which one replies “God, Mary, and Joseph to you.”

The first example is a phrase used by Christians in certain parts of the Middle East. The second is a phrase used by Muslims in certain parts of the Middle East. Both are ways of acknowledging the presence of the divine in our midst. And both are ways of offering a blessing.

Beannachtaí na Féile Pádraig oraibh! (Blessings to you on this Feast of St. Patrick!)