

Rabbi's Column

This was the basic content that I delivered at the Interfaith service at the start of the legislative session sponsored by St. Mary's.

Texts: [Hillel often states] If I am not acting towards my own benefit, who will? When I am only out for myself, what have I become? If not now, when? (Pirkei Avot 1:14)

Ben Zoma says: Who is wise? One who learns from everyone. Who is strong? One who has mastered their addictions. Who is rich? One who is happy with their current possessions. Who is honored? One who honors other people and creatures. (Pirkei Avot 4:1)

Shalom!

Within Judaism, one type of prayer is learning. When we learn, whatever we learn, we are listening to what God has to say to us. This morning, I would like to explore some of the meanings that can be derived from the texts in the handout.

Earlier in my life I was a Youth Advisor, and many of the teens running for various offices would base their speeches upon these words.

Paraphrasing Hillel's statements as they relate to the State government, I might say the following: If I do not do the best I can for the people who voted me into office and the other people who live in the territory I represent, which of my colleagues could I trust to do so for me? If I do not keep in mind the needs of the rest of the people in Wyoming and the USA, then did I really deserve to be elected? When I do not keep this balancing act in mind at all times, I know that it will come back to bite me later on when the situation is worse, and harder to resolve.

I am given to understand that some people might look at the second of Hillel's questions and answer it with the single word – lobbyist.

Ben Zoma's statements sort of clarify what a decent political human being is all about. Having wisdom and strength, feeling wealthy and being honored. You might have already heard of these aphorisms. Following them helps lead towards lived humility.

Learning from everyone, whether you agree with them or not; knowing your own personal problems and not letting them interfere with your job or your judgment; living within your means and not bemoaning the life history that brought you to where you are today; paying more attention to others than you expect them to pay to you – striving towards accomplishing these will help you as a group to function as well as possible.

Shalom.