

Rabbi's Column

In the Torah this week we are leaving Egypt, which means that the New Year for the trees is not far behind. Yes, it is indeed supposed to be the beginning of Spring like weather in some parts of the world. When Almond Trees begin to blossom, Spring is here.

Unless you are in Wyoming, or Minnesota, or several other places on the planet, in which case the almond trees have nothing to do with when Spring shows up.

Below you will find the D'var Torah I gave the morning of the pre-legislative Interfaith service last Tuesday morning, as well as the texts I was basing the D'var Torah upon.

Torah Quotation

Genesis 21:25-26 Then Abraham reproached Avimelech because of the well of water which Avimelech's people had siphoned off. Avimelech said, "I don't know who did this! If you had not told me about it today, I still would not have heard about it!"

Prophets Quotation

Micah 6:6-8 "With what shall I show that God is a priority for me? Is it in giving God what I no longer need? Will God find satisfaction in troops of rams, in torrents of oil – does giving up even that which is important to me do anything for my wrongdoings?" A person has already told you the good that God seeks from you: doing justice, loving kindness and walking the path of your God in humility.

Writings Quotation

Proverbs 11:1-3 False statistics are abhorrent to God; integrity in weighing all things is what is desired. In the wake of the arrogant you will find disgrace; among the more modest is where wisdom can be located. The clarity of those with integrity stands them in good stead as the deviousness of the deceitful destroys them.

Gospel Quotation

Matthew 5:3-10 [NRSV translation]

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Baruch shenatan michvodo l'vasar v'dam – I'll explain more later on.

Justice. Kindness. Humility. Integrity. Blessedness. As well as a bit of politics. All of these are contained within the Sacred Texts I selected to be read this morning. Hopefully they are also a part of each of you as you begin this year's legislative session.

Let's begin with Abraham, who might be considered the first lobbyist. That particular selection which was read is also normally read during Rosh HaShanah, the start of the Jewish new year (which in 2019 will take place on September 30 and October 1). Most of the time that I read it in the context of the surrounding story, I imagine that Avimelech knew all about the wells. He uses too many words to make his protest. Abraham is therefore lucky that Avimelech comes to him, so he has the opportunity to right a wrong and keep it from happening again during his lifetime.

Yet, as foreign rulers go, Avimelech is one of the good guys. God appears to him in a dream, letting him know why his family and staff are being punished, so he can rectify the situation. So what if he did not actually know about the wells?

This can teach us about some truths of political life today. Sometimes, a member of the various branches of the government does not know about the effects of a particular decision until they are informed. In theory, that is what lobbyists are for, and the best ones manage to do just that – even if in several cases the effects are merely potential, since the law has not yet been passed in Wyoming.

Within Judaism, we recite a lot of blessings. The typical blessing format is "You are blessed, YHVH, the unique God we identify as ours who happens to run everything, for having created ..." The creations range from food to splendid landscapes to, well, leaders. I said a Bracha when I began – "blessed is the One who has given from their weightiness/honor/glory to flesh and blood." When we say, "You are blessed" the verb form is the same as that used to tell us that a book is written. Saying "This book is written" is not the same as writing the book. In the same way, any blessings recited within Judaism do not change the status of a single item. They are a way to recognize that the reality around us always includes components that prove that God is blessed. This gathering today includes proof for the religious among us that God is blessed.

Justice, kindness, humility, integrity, modesty – the principles that are espoused by Micah and the Proverbs are essential to good governance. Any one of these is difficult. All of them together in any one of us is probably an impossible dream towards which one should strive. Full disclosure: As a registered lobbyist for the Wyoming Interfaith Network, I will have a chance ever so often to see how close you get to fulfilling that quest. In the meantime, let's all try to be kinder towards each other.