**Goldsmith Speech (No. 15525)**

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Inspirational speech for Larry Goldsmith for presentation (initially) at the “Making a Difference” Conference.

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an ancient hebrew schoolar WHO WAS born more than a 100 years before jesus, asked three very simple questions to get his students thinkING about the TRUE meaning and puprpose of their lives. THIS scholar’s name was hillel [pronounced: HILL-el], AND i’d like to share HIS three questions with you this [morning/afternoon/evening]; and AS I DO, i want YOU TO ASK YOURSELVES how *you* would answer them.

NOW hillel’s first question WAS this:  *“If i am not for myself, who will be for me?”*

what do you suppose he meant by this question? it’s very simple. WITH this question he was pointing out the INESCAPABLE truth that — once we become adults, once we leave home and the guidance and protection of our families — there’s absolutely *nobody* on THE planet EARTH who’s legally responsible for our safety, our well-being, OR our prosperity. if *you* don’t look out for “number one,” then who’S GONNA DO IT? what hillel is implying is that the answer to this question is that *NO one* will. it’s *your* job now, and nobody else’s.

now this is very important. for this question represents the leap WE ALL must take from the safety and support of childhood to a state of *self*-reliance, of being on ONE’S own, of becoming the *“master of ONE’S fate and the captain of ONE’S soul.”* this is a big leap for some; for others maybe not so MUCH. but it’s probably the most important leap anyone ever takes in this life when — to paraphrease 1 corinthians, chapter 13 verse 12— THE TIME HAS COME to *“become a man and put away childish things.”*

but there’s a deeper implication to this observation, and that is that we’ve got to be the *best* “selves” we can be.

We’ve got to take CARE of ourselves. we’ve got to take care of our bodies. we’ve got to manage our finances. we’ve got to maximize our own inner potential. We’ve got to cherish and celebrate, through both words and deeds, the giftS of life and love that god has BESTOWED UPON us. OUR FIRST DUTY IN LIFE IS TO OURSELVES.

now, i can understand how this might strike you as selfish, self-centered, and egotistical. so let me hasten to hillel’s second question, and that IS:

*“if i am for myself alone, what am i?”*

THIS QUESTION SUGGESTS that just looking out for “number one” isn’t good enough. FOR if that’s *all* you spend your time and energy doing — looking out only for yourself — then it’s not A VERY MEANINGFUL life.

*“if i am for myself alone, then what am I?”*

hillel sayS: not much — at least, not much in the eyes of god. true . . . hillel’s first commandment to us is that we must take care of ourselves and look out for ourselves. But this is *not* the reason we were put HERE on this earth. the reason each of us was put on this earth is to help others, to alleviate the suffering of others, to help others maximize *their* potential in life. It is to serve the unserved, to help the helpless and give hope to the hopeless. It is to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and heal the sick — in short, to help god do his work here on earth. for as jesus said, *“whatever you do for the least of my brothers and sisters, SO you do ALSO for me.”*

*THIS* IS why we’re here. not to make as much money as we can or to have sex with as many partners as we can or to acquire as much material wealth as we can. no. that’s not enough. for unless our lives have a purpose greater than ourselves, unless we dedicate our lives to helping others, UNLESS WE BECOME COMMITTED TO “MAKING A DIFFERENCE” . . . our lives HERE ON EARTH WILL truly have very little meaning. this is what hillel means when he asks, *“if I am for myself alone, what am i?”*

which brings me FINALLY to his third question, the shortest and perhaps most meaningful one of the three. THE FIRST QUESTION, you’LL remember, asks who’s going to look after my happiness and well-being if not for me? THE SECOND QUESTION asks, if *all* i’m doing is looking out for myself, then what kind of person *am* i? And hillel’s third question WAS, very simply:

*“if not now, when?”*

*“If not now, when?”* . . . what a profound question! short, sweet and to the point. and of course the point is: if you want to dedicate yourself to living a helpful, godly life . . . if you define a purpose for your life that’s greater than yourself . . . if you truly understand the importance and NECESSITY OF “MAKING A DIFFERENCE” . . . then i would ask you only this:

what the hell [heck] are you waiting for?!?

thank you.

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