

Pirke Avot

Traditional Text

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Pirke Avot

Sayings Of The Jewish Fathers

Produced by Dan Dyckman

TRANSCRIBER'S COMMENTS

The source book for this e-text included an Introduction, Preface, and extensive footnotes. These are omitted in this text, which consists of only the translation of the Pirkei Avot. A full version of this e-text may be found as a different entry in the Gutenberg Project archives.

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The Sayings of the
Jewish Fathers

[pirkei avot]
"PIRKE ABOT"

Translated, with an
Introduction and Notes

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SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS

One of the following chapters is read on each Sabbath from the Sabbath after Passover until the Sabbath before New Year.

All Israel have a portion in the world to come, and it is said, “And thy people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified.”

CHAPTER I

1. Moses received the *Torah* from Sinai, and handed it down to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets delivered it to the men of the Great Synagogue. They said three things, “Be deliberate in judgment; raise up many disciples; and make a fence about the *Torah*.”
2. Simon, the Just, was of the last survivors of the Great Synagogue. He used to say, “Upon three things the world rests: upon the *Torah*, upon the Temple service, and upon the doing of acts of kindness.”
3. Antigonus of Soko received (the tradition) from Simon, the Just. He used to say, “Be not like hirelings who work for their master for the sake of receiving recompense; but be like servants who minister to their master without any thought of receiving a reward; and let the fear of Heaven be upon you.”
4. Jose, the son of Joezer, of Zeredah, and Jose, the son of Jochanan, of Jerusalem received (the tradition) from them. Jose, the son of Joezer, of Zeredah said, “Let thy house be a meeting-place for the wise; cover thyself with the dust of their feet, and drink in their words with thirst.”
5. Jose, the son of Jochanan, of Jerusalem said, “Let thy house be open wide; let the poor be members of thy household, and engage not in much gossip with woman.” This applies to one's own wife; how much more, then, to the wife of one's neighbor? Hence the sages say, “Whoso engages in much gossip with woman brings evil upon himself, neglects the study of the *Torah*, and will in the end inherit *gehinnom*.”
6. Joshua, the son of Perachyah, and Nittai, the Arbelite, received (the tradition) from them. Joshua, the son of Perachyah, said, “Provide thyself with a teacher, and possess thyself of a companion; and judge every man in the scale of merit.”
7. Nittai, the Arbelite, said, “Keep aloof from a bad neighbor; associate not with the wicked, and abandon not the belief in retribution.”
8. Judah, the son of Tabbi, and Simeon, the son of Shatach, received (the tradition) from them. Judah, the son of Tabbi, said, “(In the judge's office) act not the counsel's part; while the litigants are standing before thee, let them be regarded by thee as guilty, but when they are departed from thy presence, regard them as innocent, the verdict having been acquiesced in by them.”
9. Simeon, the son of Shatach, said, “Be very searching in the examination of witnesses, and be guarded in thy words, lest through them they learn to lie.”
10. Shemaiah and Abtalion received (the tradition) from them. Shemaiah said, “Love work; hate lordship; and seek no intimacy with the ruling power.”

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11. Abtalion said, “Ye sages, be heedful of your words, lest ye incur the penalty of exile and be exiled to a place of evil waters, and the disciples who come after you drink thereof and die, and the Heavenly Name be profaned.”

12. Hillel and Shammai received (the tradition) from them. Hillel said, “Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving mankind and drawing them right to the *Torah*.” 13. He used to say, “A name made great is a name destroyed; he who does not increase (his knowledge) decreases (it); and he who does not study deserves to die; and he who makes a worldly use of the crown (of the *Torah*) shall waste away.” 14. He used to say, “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I care for myself only, what am I? And if not now, when?”

15. Shammai said, “Set a fixed time for thy (study of) *Torah*; say little and do much; and receive all men with a cheerful countenance.”

16. Rabban Gamaliel said, “Provide thyself with a teacher; be quit of doubt; and accustom not thyself to give tithes by a conjectural estimate.”

17. Simeon his son, said, “All my days I have grown up amongst the wise, and I have found nothing better for man than silence; not learning but doing is the chief thing; and whoso multiplies words causes sin.”

18. Rabban Simeon, the son of Gamaliel said, “By three things is the world preserved; by truth, by judgment, and by peace, as it is said, 'Judge ye the truth and the judgment of peace in your gates.'”

Rabbi Chanania, the son of Akashia, said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, was pleased to make Israel worthy; wherefore He gave them a copious *Torah* and many commandments, as it is said, 'It pleased the Lord, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify the *Torah* and make it honorable.’”

CHAPTER II

All Israel have a portion in the world to come, and it is said, “And thy people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified”.

1. Rabbi said, “which is the right course that a man should choose for himself? That which is a pride to him who pursues it and which also brings him honor from mankind. Be as scrupulous about a light precept as about a grave one, for thou knowest not the grant of reward for each precept. Reckon the loss incurred by the fulfilment of a precept against the reward secured by its observance, and the gain gotten by a transgression against the loss it involves. Consider three things, that thou mayest not come within the power of sin. Know what is above thee—a seeing eye, and a hearing ear, and all thy deeds written in a book.”

2. Rabban Gamaliel, the son of Rabbi Judah, the Prince, said, “Excellent is the study of *Torah* combined with some worldly pursuit, for the effort demanded by them both makes sin to be forgotten. All study of *Torah* without work must at length be futile, and leads to sin. Let all who are employed with the congregation act with them for Heaven's sake, for then the merit of their fathers sustains them, and their righteousness endures for ever. And as for you (God will then say), 'I account you worthy of great reward, as if you had wrought it all yourselves.' 3. Be on your guard against the ruling power; for they who exercise it draw no man near to them except for their own interests; appearing as friends when it is to their own advantage, they stand not by a man in the hour of his need.” 4. He used to say, “Do His will as if it were thy will. Nullify thy will before His will, that He may nullify the will of others before thy will.”

5. Hillel said, “Separate not thyself from the congregation; trust not in thyself until the day of thy death; judge not thy neighbor until thou art come into his place; and say not anything which cannot be understood at once,

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in the hope that it will be understood in the end; neither say, 'When I have leisure I will study'; perchance thou wilt have no leisure." 6. He used to say, "An empty-headed man cannot be a sin-fearing man, nor can an ignorant person be pious, nor can a shamefaced man learn, nor a passionate man teach, nor can one who is engaged overmuch in business grow wise. In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man." 7. Moreover, he once saw a skull floating on the surface of the water. He said to it, "Because thou didst drown (others) they have drowned thee, and at the last they that drowned thee shall themselves be drowned." 8. He used to say, "The more flesh, the more works; the more property, the more anxiety; the more women, the more witchcraft; the more maid-servants, the more lewdness; the more men-servants, the more robbery; the more *Torah*, the more life; the more schooling, the more wisdom; the more counsel, the more understanding; the more charity, the more peace. He who has acquired a good name has acquired it for himself; he who has acquired for himself words of *Torah* has acquired for himself life in the world to come."

9. Rabban Jochanan, the son of Zakkai received (the tradition) from Hillel and Shammai. He used to say, "If thou hast learnt much *Torah*, ascribe not any merit to thyself, for thereunto wast thou created."

10. Rabban Jochanan, the son of Zakkai, had five disciples, and these are they: Rabbi Eliezer, the son of Hyrcanus; Rabbi Joshua, the son of Hananiah; Rabbi Jose, the Priest; Rabbi Simeon, the son of Nataniel; and Rabbi Eleazar, the son of Arach. 11. He used thus to recount their praise: "Eliezer, the son of Hyrcanus, is a cemented cistern, which loses not a drop; Joshua, the son of Hananiah, happy is she that bare him; Jose, the Priest, is a pious man; Simeon, the son of Nataniel, is a fearer of sin; Eleazar, the son of Arach, is like a spring flowing with ever-sustained vigor." 12. He used to say, "If all the sages of Israel were in one scale of the balance, and Eliezer, the son of Hyrcanus, in the other, he would outweigh them all." Abba Saul said in his name, "If all the sages of Israel were in one scale of the balance, and Eliezer, the son of Hyrcanus, also with them, and Eleazar, the son of Arach, in the other scale, he would outweigh them all." 13. He said to them, "Go forth and see which is the good way to which a man should cleave." R. Eliezer said, "A good eye"; R. Joshua said, "A good friend"; R. Jose said, "A good neighbor"; R. Simeon said, "One who foresees the fruit of an action"; R. Eleazar said, "A good heart." Thereupon he said to them, "I approve of the words of Eleazar, the son of Arach, rather than your words, for in his words yours are included." 14. He said to them, "Go forth and see which is the evil way that a man should shun." R. Eliezer said, "An evil eye"; R. Joshua said, "A bad friend"; R. Jose said, "A bad neighbor"; R. Simeon said, "One who borrows and does not repay—it is the same whether one borrows from man or the Omnipresent; as it is said, 'The wicked borroweth and payeth not again, but the righteous dealth graciously and giveth'; R. Eleazar said, "A bad heart." Thereupon he said to them, "I approve of the words of Eleazar, the son of Arach, rather than your words, for in his words yours are included."

15. They each said three things. R. Eliezer said, "Let thy friend's honor be as dear to thee as thine own; be not easily excited to anger; and repent one day before thy death." And (he further said), "Warm thyself by the fire of the wise, but beware of their glowing coals, lest thou be burnt, for their bite is the bite of the fox, and their sting is the scorpion's sting, and their hiss is the serpent's hiss, and all their words are like coals of fire." 16. R. Joshua said, "The evil eye, the evil inclination, and hatred of his fellow-creatures, put a man out of the world." 17. R. Jose said, "Let the property of thy friend be as dear to thee as thine own; prepare thyself for the study of *Torah*, since the knowledge of it is not an inheritance of thine, and let all thy deeds be done in the name of God." 18. R. Simeon said, "Be careful in reading the *Shema* and the *Amidah*; and when thou prayest, consider not thy prayer as a fixed (mechanical) task, but as (an appeal for) mercy and grace before the All-present, as it is said, 'For he is gracious and full of mercy, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness, and repenteth him of the evil'; and be not wicked in thine own esteem." 19. R. Eleazar said, "Be diligent in studying *Torah*, and know what answer to give to the unbeliever; know also before whom thou toilest, and who thy Employer is, who will pay thee the reward of thy labor."

20. Rabbi Tafron said, "The day is short, the task is great, the laborers are sluggish, the reward is much, and the Master of the house is urgent." 21. He also used to say, "It is not thy duty to complete the work, but

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neither art thou free to desist from it; if thou hast studied much *Torah*, much reward will be given thee; and faithful is thy Employer to pay thee the reward of thy labor; and know that the grant of reward unto the righteous will be in the time to come.”

Rabbi Chanania, the son of Akashia, said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, was pleased to make Israel worthy; wherefore He gave them a copious *Torah* and many commandments, as it is said, 'It pleased the Lord, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify the *Torah* and make it honorable”.

CHAPTER III

All Israel have a portion in the world to come, and it is said, “And thy people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified”.

1. Akabia, the son of Mahalalel, said, “Consider three things, and thou wilt not come within the power of sin: know whence thou camest, and whither thou art going, and before whom thou wilt in the future have to give an account and reckoning. Whence thou camest: from a fetid drop; whether thou art going: to a place of dust, worms, and maggots; and before whom thou wilt in the future have to give an account and reckoning: before the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.”

2. R. Chanina, the Vice-High-Priest, said, “Pray for the welfare of the government, since but for the fear thereof men would swallow each other alive.”

3. R. Chananiah, the son of Teradion, said, “If two sit together and interchange no words of *Torah*, they are a meeting of scorners, concerning whom it is said, 'The godly man sitteth not in the seat of the scorners'; but if two sit together and interchange words of *Torah*, the Divine Presence abides among them; as it is said, 'Then they that feared the Lord spake one with the other; and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name.' Now the Scripture enables me to draw this inference in respect to two persons; whence can it be deduced that if even one person sedulously occupies himself with the *Torah*, the Holy One, blessed be He, appoints unto him a reward? Because it is said, 'though he sit alone, and meditate in stillness, yet he taketh it (the reward) upon him.’”

4. R. Simeon said, “If three have eaten at a table and have spoken there no words of *Torah*, it is as if they had eaten of sacrifices to dead idols, of whom it is said, 'For all their tables are full of vomit and filthiness; the All-present is not (in their thoughts).' But if three have eaten at a table and have spoken there words of *Torah*, it is as if they had eaten at the table of the All-present, for Scripture says, 'And he said unto me, This is the table that is before the Lord.’”

5. R. Chanina, the son of Hakinai, said, “He who keeps awake at night, and goes on his way alone, while turning his heart to vanity, such a one forfeits his own life.”

6. R. Nechunya, son of ha-Kanah, said, “Whoso receives upon himself the yoke of the *Torah*, from the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care will be removed, but whoso breaks off from him the yoke of the *Torah*, upon him will be laid the yoke of the kingdom and the yoke of worldly care.”

7. R. Chalafta, the son of Dosa, of the village of Chanania said, “When ten people sit together and occupy themselves with the *Torah*, the *Shechinah* abides among them, as it is said, 'God standeth in the congregation of the godly.' And whence can it be shown that the same applies to five? Because it is said, 'He hath found his band upon the earth.' And whence can it be shown that the same applies to three? Because it is said, 'He judgeth among the judges.' And whence can it be shown that the same applies to two? Because it is said, 'Then they that feared the Lord spake one with the other; and the Lord hearkened, and heard.' And whence can it be

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shown that the same applies even to one? Because it is said, 'In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come unto thee and I will bless thee.'"

8. R. Eleazar of Bertota said, "Give unto Him of what is His, for thou and thine are His: this is also found expressed by David, who said, 'For all things come of Thee, and of Thine own we have given Thee.'"

9. R. Jacob said, "He who is walking by the way and studying, and breaks off his study and says, 'How fine is that tree, how fine is that fallow,' him the Scripture regards as if he had forfeited his life."

10. R. Dostai, the son of Jannai, said in the name of R. Meir, "Whoso forgets one word of his study, him the Scripture regards as if he had forfeited his life, for it is said, 'Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen.' Now, one might suppose (that the same result follows) even if a man's study has been too hard for him. (To guard against such an inference), it is said, 'And lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life.' Thus a person's guilt is not established until he deliberately and of set purpose removes those lessons from his heart."

11. R. Chanina, the son of Dosa, said, "He in whom the fear of sin precedes wisdom, his wisdom shall endure; but he in whom wisdom comes before the fear of sin, his wisdom will not endure." 12. He used to say, "He whose works exceed his wisdom, his wisdom shall endure; but he whose wisdom exceeds his works, his wisdom will not endure." 13. He used to say, "He in whom the spirit of his fellow-creatures takes not delight, in him the Spirit of the All-present takes not delight."

14. R. Dosa, the son of Horkinas, said, "Morning sleep, midday wine, childish babbling, and attending the houses of assembly of the ignorant waste a man's life."

15. R. Eleazar ha-Mudai said, "He who profanes things sacred, and despises the festivals, and puts his fellow-man to shame in public, and makes void the covenant of Abraham, our father, and makes the *Torah* bear a meaning other than the right; (such a one) even though knowledge of the *Torah* and good deeds be his, has no share in the world to come."

16. R. Ishmael said, "Be submissive to a superior, affable to the young, and receive all men with cheerfulness."

17. R. Akiba said, "Jesting and levity lead a man on to lewdness. The *Massorah* is a rampart around the *Torah*; tithes are a safeguard to riches; good resolves are a fence to abstinence; a hedge around wisdom is silence." 18. He used to say, "Beloved is man, for he was created in the image (of God); but it was by a special love that it was made known to him that he was created in the image of God, as it is said, 'For in the image of God made he man.' Beloved are Israel, or they were called children of the All-present, but it was by a special love that it was made known to them that they were called children of the All-present, as it is said, 'Ye are children unto the Lord your God.' Beloved are Israel, for unto them was given the desirable instrument; but it was by a special love that it was made known to them that that desirable instrument was theirs, through which the world was created, as it is said, 'For I give you good doctrine; forsake ye not my *Torah*.' 19. Everything is foreseen, yet free will is given; and the world is judged by grace, yet all is according to the amount of the work." 20. He used to say, "Everything is given on pledge, and a net is spread for all living; the shop is open; the dealer gives credit; the ledger lies open; the hand writes; and whosoever wishes to borrow may come and borrow; but the collectors regularly make their daily round, and exact payment from man whether he be content or not; and they have that whereon they can rely in their demand; and the judgment is a judgment of truth; and everything is prepared for the feast."

21. R. Eleazar, the son of Azariah, said, "Where there is no *Torah*, there are no manners; where there are no manners, there is no *Torah*: where there is no wisdom, there is no fear of God; where there is no fear of God,

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there is no wisdom: where there is no knowledge, there no understanding; where there is no understanding, there is no knowledge: where there is no meal, there is no *Torah*; *where there is no Torah, there is no meal.*”
22. He used to say, “*He whose wisdom exceeds his works, to what is he like? To a tree whose branches are many, but whose roots are few; and the wind comes and plucks it up, and overturns it upon its face, as it is said, 'And he shall be like a lonely juniper tree in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited.'* But he whose works exceed his wisdom, to what is he like? To a tree whose branches are few, but whose roots are many, so that though all the winds in the world come and blow upon it, they cannot stir it from its place, as it is said, 'And he shall be as a tree planted by the waters; and that spreadeth out its roots by the river and shall not perceive when heat cometh, but his leaf shall be green; and shall not be troubled in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.'”

23. R. Eleazar Chisma said, “The laws concerning the sacrifices of birds and the purification of women are essential ordinances; astronomy and geometry are the after–courses of wisdom.”

Rabbi Chanania, the son of Akashia, said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, was pleased to make Israel worthy; wherefore He gave them a copious *Torah* and many commandments, as it is said, 'It pleased the Lord, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify the *Torah* and make it honorable”.

CHAPTER IV

All Israel have a portion in the world to come, and it is said, “And thy people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified”.

1. Ben Zoma said, “Who is wise? He who learns from all men, as it is said, 'from all my teachers have I gotten understanding.' Who is mighty? He who controls his passions, as it is said, 'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth over his spirit than he that taketh a city.' Who is rich? He who rejoices in his portion, as it is said, 'When thou eatest the labor of thine hands, happy art thou, and it shall be well with thee'; happy art thou in this world, and it shall be well with thee in the world to come. Who is honored? He who honors others, as it is said, 'For them that honor me I will honor, and they that despise me shall be held in contempt.’”

2. Ben Azzai said, “Hasten to do even a slight precept, and flee from transgression; for one virtue leads to another, and transgression draws transgression in its train; for the recompense of a virtue is a virtue, and the recompense of a transgression is a transgression.” 3. He used to say, “Despise not any man, and carp not at any thing; for there is not a man that has not his hour, and there is not a thing that has not its place.”

4. R. Levitas of Jabneh said, “Be exceedingly lowly of spirit, since the hope of man is but the worm.”

5. R. Jochanan, the son of Berokah, said, “Whosoever profanes the Name of Heaven in secret will suffer the penalty for it in public; and this, whether the Heavenly Name be profaned in ignorance or in wilfulness.”

6. R. Ishmael, his son, said, “He who learns in order to teach, to him the means will be granted both to learn and to teach; but he who learns in order to practise, to him the means will be granted to learn, and to teach, to observe, and to practise.”

7. R. Zadok said, “Separate not thyself from the congregation; (in the judge's office) act not the counsel's part; make not of the *Torah* a crown wherewith to aggrandize thyself, nor a spade wherewith to dig.” So also used Hillel to say, “He who makes a worldly use of the crown (of the *Torah*) shall waste away.” Hence thou mayest infer that whosoever derives a profit for himself from the words of the *Torah* is helping on his own destruction.

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8. R. Jose said, “Whoso honors the *Torah* will himself be honored by mankind, but whoso dishonors the *Torah* will himself be dishonored by mankind.”
9. R. Ishmael, his son, said, “He who shuns the judicial office rids himself of hatred, robbery, and vain swearing; but he who presumptuously lays down decisions is foolish, wicked, and of an arrogant spirit.” 10. He used to say, “Judge not alone, for none may judge alone save One; neither say (to thy judicial colleagues), 'Accept my view,' for the choice is theirs (to concur); and it is not for thee (to compel concurrence).”
11. R. Jonathan said, “Whoso fulfils the *Torah* in the midst of poverty shall in the end fulfil it in the midst of wealth; and whoso neglects the *Torah* in the midst of wealth shall in the end neglect it in the midst of poverty.”
12. R. Meir said, “Lessen thy toil for worldly goods, and be busy in the *Torah*; be humble of spirit before all men; if thou neglectest the *Torah*, many causes for neglecting it will be present themselves to thee, but if thou laborest in the *Torah*, He has abundant recompense to give thee.”
13. R. Elieser, the son of Jacob, said, “He who does one precept has gotten himself one advocate; and he who commits one transgression has gotten himself one accuser. Repentance and good deeds are as a shield against punishment.”
14. R. Jochanan, the sandal-maker, said, “Every assembly which is in the Name of Heaven will in the end be established, but that which is not in the Name of Heaven will not in the end be established.”
15. R. Eleazer, the son of Shammua, said, “Let the honor of thy disciple be as dear to thee as thine own, and the honor of thine associate be like the fear of thy master, and the fear of thy master like the fear of Heaven.”
16. R. Judah said, “Be cautious in study, for an error in study may amount to presumptuous sin.”
17. R. Simeon said, “There are three crowns: the crown of *Torah*, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty; but the crown of a good name excels them all.”
18. R. Nehorai said, “Betake thyself to a home of the *Torah*, and say not that the *Torah* will come after thee; for there thy associates will establish thee in the possession of it; and lean not upon thine own understanding.”
19. R. Jannia said, “It is not in our power (to explain) either the prosperity of the wicked or the afflictions of the righteous.”
20. R. Mattithiah, the son of Heresh, said, “Be beforehand in the salutation of peace to all men; and be rather a tail to lions than a head to foxes.”
21. R. Jacob said, “This world is like a vestibule before the world to come; prepare thyself in the vestibule, that thou mayest enter into the hall.” 22. He used to say, “Better is one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than the whole life of the world to come; and better is one hour of blissfulness of spirit in the world to come than the whole life of this world.”
23. R. Simeon, the son of Eleazer, said, “Do not appease thy fellow in the hour of his anger, and comfort him not in the hour when his dead lies before him, and question him not in the hour of his vow, and rush not to see him in the hour of his disgrace.”
24. Samuel, the younger, used to say, “Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: lest the Lord see it and it displease him, and he turn away his wrath from him.”

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25. Elisha, the son of Abuyah, said, “If one learns as a child, what is it like? Like ink written in clean paper. If one learns as an old man, what is it like? Like ink written on used paper.”

26. R. Jose, the son of Judah, of Chefar Babli said, “He who learns from the young, to what is he like? To one who eats unripe grapes, and drinks wine from his vat. And he who learns from the old, to what is he like? To one who eats ripe grapes, and drinks old wine.”

27. Rabbi Meir said, “Look not at the flask, but at what it contains: there may be a new flask full of old wine, and an old flask that has not even new wine in it.”

28. R. Eleazar ha-Kappar said, “Envy, cupidity, and ambition take a man from the world.” 29. He used to say, “They that are born are doomed to die; and the dead to be brought to life again; and the living to be judged, to know, to make known, and to be made conscious that He is God, He the Maker, He the Creator, He the Discerner, He the Judge, He the Witness, He the Accuser; He it is that will in future judge, blessed be He, with Whom there is no unrighteousness, nor forgetfulness, nor respect of persons, nor taking of bribes; and know also that everything is according to the reckoning; and let not thy imagination give thee hope that the grave will be a place of refuge for thee; for perforce thou wast formed, and perforce thou wast born, and thou livest perforce, and perforce thou wilt die, and perforce thou wilt in the future have to give account and reckoning before the Supreme King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.”

Rabbi Chanania, the son of Akashia, said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, was pleased to make Israel worthy; wherefore He gave them a copious *Torah* and many commandments, as it is said, 'It pleased the Lord, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify the *Torah* and make it honorable”.

CHAPTER V

All Israel have a portion in the world to come, and it is said, “And thy people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified”.

1. With ten sayings the world was created. What does this teach us? Could it not have been created with one saying? It is to make known the punishment that will befall the wicked who destroy the world that was created with ten sayings, as well as the goodly reward that will be bestowed upon the just who preserve the world that was created with ten sayings. 2. There were ten generations from Adam to Noah, to make known how long-suffering God is, seeing that all those generations continued provoking him, until he brought upon them the waters of the flood. 3. There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham, to make known how long-suffering God is, seeing that all those generations continued provoking him, until Abraham, our father, came, and received the reward they should all have earned. 4. With ten trials our father Abraham was tried, and he stood firm in them all, to make known how great was the love of our father Abraham. 5. Ten miracles were wrought for our fathers in Egypt, and ten at the Sea. 6. Ten plagues did the Holy One, blessed be He, bring upon the Egyptians in Egypt, and ten at the Sea. 7. With ten temptations did our fathers tempt the Holy One, blessed be He, in the wilderness, as it is said, “And they tempted me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice.” 8. Ten miracles were wrought for our fathers in the Temple; no woman miscarried from the scent of the holy flesh; the holy flesh never became putrid; no fly was seen in the slaughter-house; no unclean accident ever befell the high-priest on the Day of Atonement; the rain never quenched the fire of the wood-pile on the altar; neither did the wind overcome the column of smoke that arose therefrom; nor was there ever found any disqualifying defect in the omer (of new barley, offered on the second day of Passover) or in the two loaves (the first fruits of the wheat-harvest, offered on Pentecost), or in the shewbread; though the people stood closely pressed together, they found ample space to prostrate themselves; never did serpent or scorpion injure any one in Jerusalem; nor did any man ever say to his fellow, “the place is too strait for me to lodge over night in Jerusalem.” 9. Ten things were created on the eve of Sabbath in the twilight: the mouth of the earth; the mouth of the well; the mouth of the ass; the rainbow; the manna; the rod; the shamir; the

shape of written characters; the writing, and the tables of stone: some say, the destroying spirits also, and the sepulchre of Moses, and the ram of Abraham our father; and others say, tongs, also, made with tongs.

10. There are seven marks of an uncultured, and seven of a wise man. The wise man does not speak before him who is greater than he in wisdom; and does not interrupt the speech of his companion; he is not hasty to answer; he questions according to the subject-matter; and answers to the point; he speaks upon the first thing first, and upon the last, last; regarding that which he has not understood he says, "I do not understand it;" and he acknowledges the truth. The reverse of all this is to be found in an uncultured man. 11. Seven kinds of punishment come into the world for seven important transgressions. If some give their tithes and others do not, a dearth ensues from drought and some suffer hunger while others are full. If they all determine to give no tithes, a dearth ensues from tumult and drought. If they further resolve not to give the dough-cake, an exterminating dearth ensues. Pestilence comes into the world to fulfil those death penalties threatened in the *Torah*, the execution of which, however, is within the function of a human tribunal, and for the violation of the law regarding the fruits of the seventh year. The sword comes into the world for the delay of justice, and for the perversion of justice, and on account of the offence of those who interpret the *Torah*, not according to its true sense. Noxious beasts come into the world for vain swearing, and for the profanation of the Divine Name. Captivity comes into the world on account of idolatry, immortality, bloodshed, and the neglect of the year of rest for the soil. 12. At four periods pestilence grows apace: in the fourth year, in the seventh, at the conclusion of the seventh year, and at the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles in each year: in the fourth year, for default of giving the tithe to the poor in the third year; in the seventh year, for default of giving the tithe to the poor in the sixth year; at the conclusion of the seventh year, for the violation of the law regarding the fruits of the seventh year, and at the conclusion of the Feast of Tabernacles in each year, for robbing the poor of the grants legally assigned to them.

13. There are four characters among men: he who says, "What is mine is mine and what is thine is thine," his is a neutral character; some say, "This is a character like that of Sodom"; he who says, "What is mine is thine and what is thine is mine," is a boor; he who says, "What is mine is thine and what is thine is thine," is a saint; he who says, "What is thine is mine and what is mine is mine," is a wicked man. 14. There are four kinds of tempers: he whom it is easy to provoke and easy to pacify, his loss disappears in his gain; he whom it is hard to provoke and hard to pacify, his gain disappears in his loss; he whom it is hard to provoke and easy to pacify is a saint; he whom it is easy to provoke and hard to pacify is a wicked man. 15. There are four qualities in disciples: he who quickly understands and quickly forgets, his gain disappears in his loss; he who understands with difficulty and forgets with difficulty, his loss disappears in his gain; he who understands quickly and forgets with difficulty, his is a good portion; he who understands with difficulty and forgets quickly, his is an evil portion. 16. As to almsgiving there are four dispositions: he who desires to give, but that others should not give, his eye is evil toward what appertains to others; he who desires that others should give, but will not give himself, his eye is evil against what is his own; he who gives and wishes others to give is a saint; he who will not give and does not wish others to give is a wicked man. 17. There are four characters among those who attend the house of study: he who goes and does not practise secures the reward for going; he who practises but does not go secures the reward for practising; he who goes and practises is a saint; he who neither goes nor practises is a wicked man. 18. There are four qualities among those that sit before the wise: they are like a sponge, a funnel, a strainer, or a sieve: a sponge, which sucks up everything; a funnel, which lets in at one end and out at the other; a strainer, which lets the wine pass out and retains the dregs; a sieve, which lets out the bran and retains the fine flour.

19. Whenever love depends upon some material cause, with the passing away of that cause, the love, too, passes away; but if it be not depending upon such a cause, it will not pass away for ever. Which love was that which depended upon a material cause? Such was the love of Ammon and Tamar. And that which depended upon no such cause? Such was the love of David and Jonathan.

Pirke Avot

20. Every controversy that is in the Name of Heaven shall in the end lead to a permanent result, but every controversy that is not in the Name of Heaven shall not lead to a permanent result. Which controversy was that which was in the Name of Heaven? Such was the controversy of Hillel and Shammai. And that which was not in the Name of Heaven? Such was the controversy of Korah and all his company.

21. Whosoever causes the multitude to be righteous, over him sin prevails not; but he who causes the multitude to sin shall not have the means to repent. Moses was righteous and made the multitude righteous; the righteousness of the multitude was laid upon him, as it is said, “He executed the justice of the Lord and his judgments with Israel.” Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, sinned and caused the multitude to sin; the sin of the multitude was laid upon him, as it is said, “For the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned and which he made Israel to sin.”

22. Whosoever has these three attributes is of the disciples of Abraham, our father, but whosoever has three other attributes is of the disciples of Balaam, the wicked. A good eye, a humble mind, and a lowly spirit (are the tokens) of the disciples of Abraham, our father; an evil eye, a haughty mind, and a proud spirit (are the signs) of the disciples of Balaam, the wicked. What is the difference between the disciples of Abraham, our father, and those of Balaam, the wicked? The disciples of Abraham, our father, enjoy this world and inherit the world to come, as it is said, “That I may cause those that love me to inherit substance, and may fill all their treasuries”; but the disciples of Balaam, the wicked, inherit *Gehinnom*, and descend into the pit of destruction, as it is said, “But thou, O God, wilt bring them down into the pit of destruction; bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.”

23. Judah, the son of Tema, said, “Be bold as a leopard, swift as an eagle, fleet as a hart, and strong as a lion, to do the will of thy Father who is in Heaven.” 24. He used to say, “At five years (the age is reached for the study of the) Scripture, at ten for (the study of) the *Mishnah*, at thirteen for (the fulfilment of) the commandments, at fifteen for (the study of) the *Talmud*, at eighteen for marriage, at twenty for seeking (a livelihood), at thirty for (entering into one's full) strength, at forty for understanding, at fifty for counsel, at sixty (a man attains) old age, at seventy the hoary head, at eighty (the gift of special) strength, at ninety, (he bends beneath) the weight of years, at a hundred he is as if he were already dead and had passed away from the world.”

25. Ben Bag Bag said, “Turn it, and turn it over again, for everything is in it, and contemplate it, and wax grey and old over it, and stir not from it, for thou canst have no better rule than this.”

26. Ben He He said, “According to the labor is the reward.”

Rabbi Chanania, the son of Akashia, said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, was pleased to make Israel worthy; wherefore He gave them a copious *Torah* and many commandments, as it is said, 'It pleased the Lord, for his righteousness' sake, to magnify the *Torah* and make it honorable”.

CHAPTER VI

THE ACQUISITION OF THE TORAH

All Israel have a portion in the world to come, and it is said, “And thy people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land for ever, the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified”.

The sages taught (the following) in the language of the *Mishnah* —blessed be He that made choice of them and their *Mishnah*.

1. R. Meir said, “Whosoever labors in the *Torah* for its own sake merits many things; and not only so, but the whole world is indebted to him: he is called friend, beloved, a lover of the All-present, a lover of mankind: it

clothes him with meekness and reverence; it fits him to become just, pious, upright, and faithful; it keeps him far from sin, and brings him near to virtue; through him are enjoyed counsel and sound knowledge, understanding and strength, as it is said, 'Counsel is mind, and sound knowledge; I am understanding; I have strength.' It gives him sovereignty and dominion and discerning judgment; to him the secrets of the *Torah* are revealed; he is made like a never-failing spring and like a river that flows on with ever-increasing vigor; he becomes modest, long-suffering, and forgiving of insults; and it magnifies and exalts him above all things."

2. R. Joshua, the son of Levi, said, "Every day a *bat-kol* goes forth from Mount Horeb, proclaiming and saying, 'Woe to mankind for contempt of the *Torah*, for whoever does not occupy himself in the *Torah* is said to be under the divine censure, as it is said, 'As a ring of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman who turneth aside from discretion'; and it says, 'And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, graven upon the tables.' Read not *charut*, but *cherut*, for no man is free but he who occupies himself in the learning of *Torah*. But whosoever labors in the *torah*, behold he shall be exalted, as it is said, 'And from *Mattanah* to *Nachaliel*, and from *Nachaliel* to *Bamot*.'" "

3. He who learns from his companion a single chapter, a single rule, a single verse, a single expression, or even a single letter, ought to pay him honor, for so we find with David, King of Israel, who learned only two things from Ahitophel, and yet regarded him as his master, his guide, and familiar friend, as it is said, "But it was thou, a man, mine equal, my guide, and my familiar friend." Now, is it not an argument from minor to major, that if David, the King of Israel, who learned only two things from Ahitophel, regarded him as his master, guide, and familiar friend, he who learns from his fellow a chapter, rule, verse, expression, or even a single letter, is bound to pay him honor. And "honor" is nothing but *Torah*, as it is said, "The wise shall inherit honor and the perfect shall inherit good." And "good" is nothing but *Torah*, as it is said, "For I give you good doctrine, forsake ye not my *Torah*."

4. This is the way that is becoming for the study of the *Torah* : a morsel of bread with salt thou must eat, "and water by measure thou must drink," thou must sleep upon the ground, and live a life of trouble the while thou toilest in the *Torah*. If thou doest thus, "Happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee," "happy shalt thou be" in this world, and "it shall be well with thee" in the world to come.

5. Seek not greatness for thyself, and court not honor; let thy works exceed thy learning; and crave not after the table of kings; for thy table is greater than theirs, and thy crown is greater than theirs, and thy Employer is faithful to pay thee the reward of thy work.

6. The *Torah* is greater than the priesthood and than royalty, for royalty demands thirty qualifications, the priesthood twenty-four, while the *Torah* is acquired by forty-eight. And these are they: by audible study; by a listening ear; by distinct pronunciation; by understanding and discernment of the heart; by awe, reverence, meekness, cheerfulness; by ministering to the sages, by attaching one's self to colleagues, by discussion with disciples; by sedateness; by knowledge of the Scripture and of the *Mishnah*; by moderation in business, in intercourse with the world, in pleasure, in sleep, in conversation, in laughter; by long suffering; by a good heart; by faith in the wise; by resignation under chastisement; by recognizing one's place, rejoicing in one's portion, putting a fence to one's words, claiming no merit for one's self, by being beloved, loving the All-present, loving mankind, loving just courses, rectitude, and reproof; by keeping one's self far from honor, not boasting of one's learning, nor delighting in giving decisions; by bearing the yoke with one's fellow, judging him favorably, and leading him to truth and peace; by being composed in one's study; by asking and answering, hearing and adding thereto; by learning with the object of teaching, and by learning with the object of practising; by making one's master wise, fixing attention upon his discourse, and reporting a thing in the name of who said it. So thou hast learned, "Whosoever reports a thing in the name of him that said it brings deliverance into the world," as it is said, "And Esther told the king in the name of Mordecai."

Pirke Avot

7. Great is the *Torah*, which gives life to those that practise it in this world and in the world to come, as it is said, “For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh”; and it says, “It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones”; and it says, “It is a tree of life to them that grasp it, and of them that uphold it every one is rendered happy”; and it says, “For they shall be a chaplet of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck”; and it says, “It shall give to thine head a chaplet of grace, a crown of glory it shall deliver to thee”; and it says, “For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased”; and it says, “Length of days is in its right hand; in its left hand are riches and honor”; and it says, “For length of days, and years of life, and peace shall they add to thee.”

8. R. Simeon, the son of Judah, in the name of R. Simeon, the son of Yohai, said, “Beauty, strength, riches, honor, wisdom, old age, a hoary head, and children are comely to the righteous and comely to the world, as it is said, 'The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness'; and it says, 'The glory of young men is their strength, and the adornment of old men is the hoary head'; and it says, 'A crown unto the wise is their riches'; and it says, 'Children's children are the crown of old men, and the adornment of children are their fathers'; and it is said, 'Then the moon shall be confounded and the sun ashamed; for the Lord of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before his elders shall be glory.'” R. Simeon, the son of Menasya, said, “These seven qualifications which the sages enumerated as becoming to the righteous were all realized in Rabbi Judah, the Prince, and in his sons.”

9. R. Jose, the son of Kisma, said, “I was once walking by the way, when a man met me and saluted me, and I returned the salutation. He said to me, 'Rabbi, from what place art thou?' I said to him, 'I come from a great city of sages and scribes.' He said to me, 'If thou art willing to dwell with us in our place, I will give thee a thousand thousand golden dinars and precious stones and pearls.' I said to him, 'Wert thou to give me all the silver and gold and precious stones and pearls in the world, I would not dwell anywhere but in a home of the *Torah*'; and thus it is written in the book of *Psalms* by the hands of David, King of Israel, 'The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver'; and not only so, but in the hour of man's departure neither silver nor gold nor precious stones nor pearls accompany him, but only *Torah* and good works, as it is said, 'When thou walkest it shall lead thee; when thou liest down it shall watch over thee; and when thou awakest it shall talk with thee'; 'when thou walkest it shall lead thee'—in this world; and 'when thou awakest it shall talk with thee'—in the world to come. And it says, 'The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.'”

10. Five possessions the Holy One, blessed be He, made especially His own in His world, and these are they, the *Torah*, heaven and earth, Abraham, Israel, and the house of the sanctuary. Whence know we this of the *Torah*? Because it is written, “The Lord possessed me as the beginning of his way, before his works, from of old.” Whence of heaven and earth? Because it is written, “Thus saith the Lord, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: what manner of house will ye build unto me? and what manner of place for my rest?”; and it says, “How manifold are thy works, O Lord! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy possessions.” Whence of Abraham? Because it is written, “And he blessed him, and said, 'Blessed be Abram of the Most High God, possessor of heaven and earth.’” Whence of Israel? Because it is written, “Till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over which thou hast acquired”; and it says, “As for the saints that are in the earth, they are the noble ones in whom is all my delight.” Whence of the house of the sanctuary? Because it is written, “The place, O Lord, which thou hast made for Thee to dwell in, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have prepared”; and it says, “And he brought them to the border of his sanctuary, to this mountain which his right hand had acquired.” 11. Whatsoever the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world He created but for His glory, as it is said, “Everything that is called by my name, it is for my glory I have created it, I have formed it, yea, I have made it”; and it says, “The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.”

Rabbi Chanania, the son of Akashia, said, “The Holy One, blessed be He, was pleased to make Israel worthy; wherefore He gave them a copious *Torah* and many commandments, as it is said, 'It pleased the Lord, for his

righteousness' sake, to magnify the *Torah* and make it honorable”.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES

CHAPTERS II through VI:

The source text included the following lines:

“All Israel,” etc., p. 29 and

“Rabbi Chanania,” etc., p. 38.

as the first and last line of each chapter, the page numbers referring to the beginning and ending of Chapter I. Rather than reference these two sentences in this manner, this text version copies the two sentences to their intended locations. The transcriber believes this better captures the intent and functionality of the text.

Chapter III:

R. Meir

umlaut over the i, wherever this name appears

CHAPTER IV:

happy art thou in this world, and

in the source text, the comma after 'wors' was a period. This was corrected for this electronic text.

CHAPTER V:

tables of stone

are as written in the source text as a translation of the Hebrew “luchot”; modern readers may better recognize the phrase 'tablets of stone'.