

UPDATED
EDITION

פרקי אבות

Pirkei Avos Synthesized

ECLECTIC TORAH COMPILATIONS

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— TALMUDIC BOOKS —



PIRKEI AVOS

SYNTHESIZED

Based on a variety of classic commentaries



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In Memory of
R' Naftali (Tully) Burstein z"l
Raanana
ת.נ.צ.ב.ה.

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Preface

Pirkei Avos (Sayings of the Fathers) is dramatically unlike any other collection of wise sayings or book of thoughtful quotations.

Although almost all of these sayings of wisdom are attributed to one particular Sage or another, Pirkei Avos is really Torah Shebe'al Peh – the Oral Torah, and comes directly from God, passed on at Sinai from Moses, from Sage to Sage, and ultimately to the Tannaim of the Mishna and Braisa. As such, we must approach these adages with added reverence and humility. We must study and seriously contemplate their meanings and messages, and their inherent truths. But mostly, we must give effort to apply these teachings to our daily lives.

What you have before you is a modest attempt to synthesize the essence of each Mishna incorporating the insights of a few easily accessible and popular commentaries. This was done with the intent of enabling the reader to read and absorb the basics of each judicious maxim quickly, enjoyably and meaningfully.

For this new edition, I have added the Hebrew text of each Mishna with my translation. I based the translation of a few Biblical verses on the Hirsch Siddur edition.

Key Sources Used for This Monograph:

Rashi, Rabbeinu Yona, Rav Ovadiah M'Bartenura, Ikar Tosafos Yom Tov, Biurei HaGra, Rabbi Yaacov Emden, Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, Siddur Avodas Yisroel of R' Seligmann Baer, Eitz Yosef in Siddur Otzar Hatefillos, and R' Eliezer Levi in Mishna M'fureshes. Due to the brilliant uniqueness of Rav Hirsch's commentary, it has been singled out and shown in the lightface type.

Footnotes are based on the commentary of R' Chanoch Albeck.



CHAPTER 1



ONE

Moses received the Torah at Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua who, in turn, transmitted it to the Elders, who transmitted it to the Prophets¹. The Prophets transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly². They³ said three things, "Be deliberate⁴ in your judgments, set up many students, and make a fence⁵ around the Torah".

א משה קבל תורה מסיני,
ומסרה ליהושע, ויהושע
לזקנים, וזקנים לנביאים,
ונביאים מסרוה לאנשי כנסת
הגדולה. הם אמרו שלשה
דברים, הוו מתונים בדין,
והעמידו תלמידים הרבה, ועשו
סיג לתורה:

The Torah in its entirety, both the Written Law and the Oral Law, including these lessons, was derived from God at Sinai. It has been faithfully transmitted from generation to generation, from Moses down to our own day. ♦ As all of Israel was present at Sinai, the Giving of the Torah was a matter of experience and actual knowledge, not one of faith.

You should be patient, serious and deliberate before judging other people; set up many students for yourself, even when you are old; and create safeguards by making decrees and ordinances to promote and preserve the Law. ♦ Setting students up means to make certain that they are thoroughly well-versed and can check the sources themselves, and that they have enough conviction to rely on their own faith. ♦ Teach Torah to whoever wants to learn it, regardless of their level of understanding.

¹ From Shmuel to Malachi.

² At beginning of the Second Temple period.

³ The Men of the Great Assembly.

⁴ Before deciding a case.

⁵ In order not to violate a Torah prohibition.

TWO

Shimon the Righteous was one of the last surviving members of the Great Assembly. He was wont to say, "The world is supported on three pillars: The Torah, the Service, and acts of mercy⁶".

ב שְׁמֵעוֹן הַצְּדִיק הָיָה מְשִׁירֵי
 כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה. הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר,
 עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד,
 עַל הַתּוֹרָה וְעַל הָעֲבוּדָה וְעַל
 גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים:

The world can exist only when there is observance of Torah, prayer and Temple service, and acts of loving-kindness, such as lending money to the poor. ♦ Lending is greater than charity as it does not shame the poor man. ♦ Loving-kindness is greater than charity since it is performed with the rich as well as with the poor, the dead as well as with the living, one's person as well as with one's money. ♦ The world was only brought into being so there would be a place for these things to exist. ♦ Torah is knowledge of the truth and the Will of God; Service refers to dutiful obedience and proper attitude towards God; and Loving-kindness is selflessness, brotherhood and creating happiness and prosperity for our fellow men.

⁶ With your fellow man.

THREE

Antigonus, from Socho⁷, received it⁸ from Shimon the Righteous. He was wont to say, "Do not be like those slaves who serve their master only because they want a reward. Rather, be like those slaves who serve their master, regardless of any reward⁹; and may the awe of Heaven¹⁰ be upon you."

ג אַנְטִיגֹנוֹס אִישׁ סוֹכוֹ קִבֵּל
מִשְׁמֵעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק. הוּא הָיָה
אוֹמֵר, אֵל תִּהְיוּ כְעֹבְדִים
הַמְשֻׁמְשֵׁין אֶת הָרֵב עַל מְנַת
לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס, אֲלֵא הָיוּ כְעֹבְדִים
הַמְשֻׁמְשֵׁין אֶת הָרֵב שְׂלֵא עַל
מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס, וַיְהִי מוֹרָא
שָׁמַיִם עֲלֵיכֶם:

Perform the Commandments simply because they were so demanded by God, and out of awe of Him recognizing how great He is, and not because of the reward you will receive for observing them. ♦ But also serve God out of love. For the one who serves God out of love is meticulous with the Positive Commandments, while the one who serves Him out of fear is careful with the Prohibitions. ♦ Being called to serve God, as we Jews have been, is in itself the richest reward.

⁷ One of two cities in Judea with this name.

⁸ The Torah.

⁹ Only out of love.

¹⁰ מוֹרָא is from יִרְאֵת הַשֵּׁם, fear of God, but also that God sees what you do.

FOUR

Yosse ben Yoezer from Tzereidoh¹¹ and Yosse ben Yochanan, the Jerusalemite, received it from them¹². Yosse from Tzereidoh said, "Make your home a gathering place¹³ for the sages, and cover yourself in the dust of their feet¹⁴, and drink thirstily¹⁵ their words".

ד יוסי בן יועזר איש צְרֵדָה ויוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים קבלו מהם. יוסי בן יועזר איש צְרֵדָה אומר, יהי ביתך בית ועד לחכמים, והוי מתאבק בעפר רגליהם, והוי שותה בצמא את דברייהם:

Your home should be a place where distinguished scholars (are willing to) assemble. Sit by their feet to learn Torah, drink their every word thirstily, and serve them. ♦ Even the ordinary conversation of sages is instructive and should be studied.

¹¹ The name of a city.

¹² Alternative reading, from him, Antigonus.

¹³ A study hall.

¹⁴ A way of honoring them.

¹⁵ With great desire.

FIVE

Yosse ben Yochanan, the Jerusalemite, said, "Open your home for providing welfare¹⁶, and poor people should become members of your household. Do not overly engage in conversation with a woman." As this refers to his wife, even more so does this apply to his fellow's wife. From here the Sages learned that one who overly engages in conversation with a woman brings perniciousness upon himself¹⁷, and nullifies the words of Torah. In the end, he shall inherit Gehinnom.

ה יוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים אומר, יהי ביתך פתוח לרוחה, ויהיו עניים בני ביתך, ואל תרבה שיחה עם האשה. באשתו אמרו, קל וחומר באשת חברו. מכאן אמרו חכמים, כל זמן שאדם מרבה שיחה עם האשה, גורם רעה לעצמו, ובוטל מדברי תורה, וסופו יורש גיהנם:

Open your home to way-farers, and either make the indigent members of your household or hire them as household staff. ♦ Make your home a place to relieve the distress of those in want and who are suffering. Let the homeless share in the pleasures of your home and hospitality. ♦ **Do not engage in idle chatter with women, even your wife, for most such discussions are frivolous, without modesty, and generally wind up by speaking gossip.** Better you should spend your time learning Torah. ♦ **A man cannot think about Torah and women at the same time. It is either one or the other.** ♦ **Don't chat with women because people might get suspicious of your motives.** ♦ **Talking leads to desire, and desire leads to action.** ♦ Nevertheless, respect and attach importance to your wife's views, opinions and counsel. Hold her in esteem and show genuine appreciation for her wisdom by engaging her in serious conversations.

¹⁶ For way-farers.

¹⁷ You will just up sinning.

SIX

Yehoshua ben Perachyoh and Nittai the Arbelite¹⁸ received it from them¹⁹. Yehoshua ben Perachyoh said, "Appoint for yourself a rabbi²⁰, acquire a friend²¹ and assume every man to be innocent²²."

וְיְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה וְנִיטַי הָאֲרֵבֵלִי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֵם. יְהוֹשֻעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אָמַר, עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רַב, וּקְנֵה לְךָ חֵבֵר, וְהָיוּ דָן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת:

Everyone must choose a rabbi for himself to teach him Torah, and proper behavior. ♦ Find a teacher who can help you attain spiritual perfection. ♦ One should not teach himself Torah, but must always look for a teacher. A teacher is preferable than relying on your own reasoning. One remembers more from his teacher than what he learns on his own. ♦ Acquire a good, trustworthy friend. ♦ Rebuke from a true friend will not diminish your mutual admiration. ♦ Judge everyone favorably and treat them charitably, for as you judge others, so will God judge you.

¹⁸ Arbel was a city in the Lower Galilee.

¹⁹ Yosse ben Yoezer and Yosse ben Yochanan.

²⁰ To whom you go to regularly to learn from.

²¹ Someone with whom you bond and with whom you go to learn together.

²² If you could judge him as being either innocent or guilty, judge him innocent.

SEVEN

Nittai the Arbelite said, "Distance yourself from a bad neighbor, do not associate with an evil person, and do not despair from punishments²³".

ז נתאי הארבלית אומר, הרחק
משכן רע, ואל תתחבר לרשע,
ואל תתיאש מן הפרענות:

Avoid bad neighbors for they will have a harmful and detrimental influence upon you. ♦ Before you check out a new house, check out the neighborhood. ♦ Avoid contact and dealings with wicked people for their dishonesty, thoughtlessness, and indifference will soil you, too. ♦ Neither despair if you don't see them as yet punished nor contemplate joining with them in their fleeting moment of success. Know that the wicked will be punished, sooner or later. ♦ Don't take for granted that your wealth is everlasting. ♦ Do not become a member of a community where evil people dominate.

²³ Even though things are going good for you now, if you have sinned, know that you will be punished.

EIGHT

Yehudah ben Tabbai and Shimon ben Shetach received it from them. Yehudah ben Tabbai said, "Do not make yourself like one of those who advise the litigants²⁴. When litigants first appear before you, assume them to be evil²⁵, but when they depart from you, look at them as guiltless²⁶, inasmuch as they did accept upon themselves the judgment."

ח יהודה בן טבאי ושמתון
בן שטח קבלו מהם. יהודה בן
טבאי אומר, אל תעש עצמך
כעורכי הדין. וכשיתו ביעלי
דין עומדים לפניך, יהיו
בעיניך כרשעים. וכשנפטרים
מלפניך, יהיו בעיניך כזקאין,
כשקבלו עליהם את הדין:

A judge must not do anything to assist a litigant, such as by bringing evidence to support his position or by helping him formulate his arguments. ♦ Don't give tips to the litigants. ♦ A judge must look at all litigants suspiciously in order to investigate their claims thoroughly. However, after the verdict, he is to view them as being innocent people who have willingly accepted the judgment. ♦ A judge must not favor one party over another, such as a poor man over a rich man or an honorable person over an ordinary man. ♦ A judge must rule objectively and dispassionately without regard to personalities.

²⁴ By teaching them what to say when before the judges in order that they receive a favorable verdict.

²⁵ Question them thoroughly making sure they are not trying to deceive you.

²⁶ As honest and righteous people.

NINE

Shimon ben Shetach said, "Thoroughly investigate the witnesses, and be very careful with what and how you say things, lest they learn from you how to falsify matters".

ט שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן שֵׁטַח אוֹמֵר, הָיִי מְרַבֵּה לְחַקוֹר אֶת הָעֵדִים, וְהָיִי זָהִיר בְּדַבָּרֶיךָ, שֶׁמָּא מִתּוֹכָם יִלְמְדוּ לְשָׁקֵר:

Investigate the veracity of the witnesses very well. ♦ Measure your words very carefully lest the witnesses and litigants learn from your line of questioning and your inflections as how to lie by adjusting their testimony accordingly.

TEN

Shemayah and Avtalyon received it from them. Shemayah said, "Love work, hate having to be in a position of ruling over others, and do not become chummy with the ruling authorities²⁷".

י שְׁמַעְיָה וְאַבְטַלְיוֹן קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם. שְׁמַעְיָה אָמַר, אֲהוֹב אֶת הַמְּלָאכָה, וְשֹׂנֵא אֶת הָרִבּוּנוֹת, וְאֵל תִּתְּוֹדַע לְרִשׁוֹת:

Love working. ♦ This is so even if one has enough money that he doesn't have to work, since idleness leads to boredom, and boredom leads to sin. ♦ The one who doesn't live off of charity lives longer. ♦ Hate having power over others. Rather, flee from this. ♦ The demands and pressures on one in a position of power bury him in that position. ♦ Do not become intimate with the authorities in order to receive entitlement to rule over others. ♦ The more one serves a king, the less one serves the King. ♦ The purpose of these maxims seems to be to counsel us to preserve our personal independence.

²⁷ Make no such efforts.

ELEVEN

Avtalyon said, "Wise men! Take great care with what you say²⁸ because you will be condemned²⁹ to an exile in a place of bad waters³⁰, and your students who follow you will drink and die³¹, and you will find that the name of Heaven has been profaned³²."

יֵאָבֵד אֲבַטְלִיּוֹן אוֹמֵר, חֲכָמִים, הִזְהָרוּ בְּדַבְרֵיכֶם, שְׂמָא תַחֲבוּ חוֹבַת גְּלוֹת וְתִגְלוּ לְמָקוֹם מַיִם הָרָעִים, וְיִשְׁתּוּ הַתְּלָמִידִים הַבָּאִים אַחֲרֵיכֶם וְיָמוּתוּ, וְנִמְצָא שֵׁם שָׁמַיִם מִתְחַלֵּל:

Sages must be extra careful with what they say. The consequences of misunderstood words and rash statements can be disastrous. ♦ In reality, this warning applies to everyone, except that the Sages influence more people, so it is addressed to them. ♦ Scholars are cautioned against delivering inaccurate, vague or ambiguous lessons which may inspire erroneous views and result in spiritual and moral deviations from goodness and truth.

²⁸ Before your students.

²⁹ You will be held accountable for what you say.

³⁰ A reference to detrimental opinions and beliefs which will be quoted in your name.

³¹ For they will sin or because the teaching was not in accordance with the Halacha.

³² People will either say that you died young even though you learned Torah or you learned Torah but did not teach it in accordance with the Halacha.

TWELVE

Hillel and Shammai received it from them. Hillel said, "Make yourself a disciple of Aaron who loved peace, pursued peace, loved all human beings, and drew them near to the Torah."

יב הַלֵּל וְשַׁמַּי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֵם.
הַלֵּל אָמַר, הָיִי מִתַּלְמִידוֹ שֶׁל
אַהֲרֹן, אֹהֵב שְׁלוֹם וְרוֹדֵף
שְׁלוֹם, אֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת
וּמְקַרְבֵּן לַתּוֹרָה:

Emulate Aaron, love and actively pursue peace, and love all people without distinction, for we are all the children of one father and, thus, brothers; attract them to Torah. ♦ All mankind are creatures of God. ♦ Pursuing peace means to go to wherever you have to, to attain it. ♦ Sacrifice for peace! but not at the expense of compromising your loyalty to God and your duty to Him.

THIRTEEN

He³³ said, “One who seeks to exalt³⁴ his own name, loses his name. The one who does not add³⁵, will diminish³⁶. The one who does not learn is deservant of death. The one who uses the crown³⁷, will vanish³⁸.”

יג הוא הִזָּה אוֹמֵר, נִגְדַּ שְׁמָא, אֲבַד שְׁמֵהּ. וְדָלָא מוֹסִיף, יִסִּיף. וְדָלָא יִלִּיף, קִטְלָא חֵיב. וְדֹאֲשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בְּתַנְא, חֲלָף:

The one who is selfishly greedy in the pursuit of honor and fame will ultimately be repudiated for his reprehensible conduct. ♦ Whatever good reputation he may have gained at the outset will vanish apace. ♦ One must always add to his learning, because he who fails to do so loses the opportunity for a worthwhile and worthy life. ♦ Someone who says, “I have learned everything there is to learn in the Torah”, forfeits his life. ♦ Do not exploit the crown of Torah-learning or Torah scholars for your own benefit or for manipulating Nature, as by incanting God’s Name for magical purposes, for this will remove you from this world.

³³ Hillel.
³⁴ Pursues veneration of his own name.
³⁵ To his learning.
³⁶ His learning.
³⁷ Of Torah for his own benefit.
³⁸ From this world.

FOURTEEN

He³⁹ was wont to say, "If I am not for myself⁴⁰, who will be for me? But, if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now⁴¹, when⁴²?"

יֵד הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אִם אֵין
אֲנִי לִי, מִי לִי. וְכִשְׁאֲנִי לְעַצְמִי,
מָה אֲנִי. וְאִם לֹא עַכְשָׁיו,
אִימָתָי:

Pursuit of self-perfection, performance of Mitzvahs and Torah-learning are, first and foremost, one's own responsibility. ♦ Never keep your learning for yourself alone, but spread it amongst others. Do things for the benefit others and not just for yourself. ♦ It is only when one, in selfless devotion, actively works to create, to establish and to increase the happiness and prosperity of his fellowmen, does he begin to become truly human in the image of his God. ♦ Do now while you are alive, for there is no doing after death; only reward or punishment. ♦ Torah must be learned every day, and regularly, because, if not, it will be forgotten. Torah is to be your main objective in life.

³⁹ Hillel.

⁴⁰ If I do not improve my ways.

⁴¹ If I do not do now what I am obliged to do.

⁴² My procrastination will cause me to miss the proper time to do things.

FIFTEEN

Shammai said, "Make your Torah enduring (a regular activity); say little⁴³ and do a lot; and welcome everyone hospitably".

טו שַׁמַּאי אוֹמֵר, עֲשֵׂה תוֹרָתְךָ קֹבֵעַ. אֲמֹר מְעַט וַעֲשֵׂה הַרְבֵּה, וְהוּי מְקַבֵּל אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם בְּסִבֵּר פָּנִים יְפוֹת:

Establish and adhere to a regular schedule of learning Torah. ♦ Make Torah permanent, and everything else transitory. ♦ Don't come to change the Halacha or the Tradition. ♦ Say little and do much, for this is the way of the righteous. ♦ Receive everyone warmly, friendly and with a kind disposition, as this promotes brotherhood, unity, and solidarity. ♦ Angry people are disliked. ♦ Be ready at all times to, with the best of your ability, fulfill whatever good and reasonable request another may make of you.

⁴³ Promise little.

SIXTEEN

Rabban Gamliel was wont to say, "Appoint for yourself a rabbi⁴⁴; remove yourself from doubt; and do not tithe by means of estimating."

טז רבן גמליאל היה אומר, עשה לך רב, והסתלק מן הספק, ואל תרבה לעשר אַמְדוּת:

Find a trustworthy and conscientious instructor with whom you can confer in cases of uncertainty. ♦ Always be precise in your tithing, measuring, weighing and calculations, and do not rely on estimates which inevitably result in errors.

⁴⁴ Appoint for yourself a rabbi to help you remove any doubts you may have.

SEVENTEEN

Shimon his⁴⁵ son said, "My entire life, I have grown up among the Sages and I have taken note that nothing is better for the body than silence; and it is not the talk⁴⁶ that matters, but the action⁴⁷; and he who adds words, brings sin."

יֵז שְׁמֵעוֹן בְּנוֹ אוֹמֵר, כָּל יְמֵי
גְדַלְתִּי בֵּין הַחֲכָמִים, וְלֹא
מְצָאתִי לְגוֹף טוֹב אֲלָא
שְׁתִּיקָה. וְלֹא הַמְדַרְשׁ הוּא
הָעֵקֶר, אֲלָא הַמַּעֲשֶׂה. וְכָל
הַמְרַבֵּה דְבָרִים, מְבִיא חַטָּא:

Silence is the best response to humiliation. ♦ Speech of men and their discussions should center on spiritual and moral concerns and not much on the physical aspects of life and personal affairs. Regardless, too much talk is always bad. ♦ **Although the real objective is to learn in order to do, learning for learning's sake can also be of great value.** ♦ Unfounded conceptual extrapolations lead to sin.

⁴⁵ Rabban Gamliel.

⁴⁶ Of Torah.

⁴⁷ Performing the Mitzvoths.

EIGHTEEN

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said, "The world rests on three pillars: the Law, the truth and peace, as it says (Zechariah 8), '*Administer truth, justice and peace at your gates.*'"

יח רבן שמעון בן גמליאל
אומר, על שלשה דברים
העולם עומד, על הדין ועל
האמת ועל השלום, שנאמר
(זכריה ח) אמת ומשפט שלום
שפטו בשעריכם:

The world can only exist if there is truth, justice and peace. ♦ Repentance and Torah are truth. ♦ Without truth there would only be error, falsehood and deceit. Without justice there would selfishness, violence, aggression and usurpation. Without peace there would be no one who would freely sacrifice of his own for the sake of peace. ♦ The one who habitually lies even though he has neither loss nor gain will become incapable of speaking the truth, because lying has now become his intrinsic nature.



CHAPTER 2



ONE

Rebbe⁴⁸ asked, "What is the correct course that a man should choose? One which is admirable for himself⁴⁹, and others see it honorable for him⁵⁰. Be as careful with a light Mitzvah as with a more serious one, since you do not know the reward for Mitzvahs. Consider the reward⁵¹ you shall receive versus any loss you may incur by performing a Mitzvah, and think of the retribution you shall receive versus the pleasure you had from committing a sin. Always remember these three things and you shall not come to sinning: Contemplate what is above you, an eye which sees, an ear which hears, and all your deeds are recorded in the book."

א רבי אומר, איזוהי דרך
 ישרה שיבור לו האדם, כל
 שהיא תפארת לעושיה
 ותפארת לו מן האדם. והוי
 זהיר במצוה קלה כבחמורה,
 שאין אתה יודע מתן שכרן
 של מצות. והוי מחשב הפסד
 מצוה כנגד שכרה, ושכר
 עברה כנגד הפסדה. והסתכל
 בשלשה דברים ואי אתה בא
 לידי עברה, דע מה למעלה
 ממך, עין רואה ואזן שומעת,
 וכל מעשיך בספר נכתבין:

The noblest path for one to travel through life is for him to act in a way which brings glory to himself by observing God's Torah and by carefully fulfilling all your obligations to your fellow man. ♦ Make yourself acceptable to people by avoiding extreme behavior. Even being overly generous is to be shunned. ♦ Execute every Torah obligation with equal earnestness, eagerness and enthusiasm for no one knows what the real rewards are for any Mitzvah. Have in mind that the ultimate reward for performing a Mitzvah exceeds any loss you might have now for performing it, and the final punishment for a transgression

⁴⁸ Rebbe Yehudah HaNassi.

⁴⁹ It is good for him, it fits him.

⁵⁰ Others praise him for his ways and he finds favor with them.

⁵¹ Its ultimate reward.

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exceeds any of its short-term benefits and ephemeral pleasures. ♦ The reward for each Mitzvah has been withheld from us in order that we perform all the Mitzvahs. Otherwise we would only perform the more profitable ones. ♦ The recompense for any evil act is instantaneous; it takes the form of a sense of loss of moral purity, a weakening of moral fiber, a greater propensity to additional sin, and the realization that we have failed to fulfill our purpose, sinning against our destiny. ♦ Do not say that God does not care about simple Mitzvahs, “What is it to Him if I do it or not?” He cares! All acts have everlasting ramifications. ♦ God withholds the reward in this world for performing a Mitzvah in order that the person will do it with faith. ♦ Remind yourself at all times of three things, and you will never sin: Know that there is an omniscient God above you; that He sees and hears everything that you do; and that all your deeds are recorded. ♦ God forgets nothing.

TWO

Rabban Gamliel, son of Rebbe Yehudah the Prince said, "How pleasant it is to combine the learning of Torah with Derech Eretz⁵², the way of the land! If you toil in both, sin shall be forgotten⁵³. And any Torah which is not accompanied by work will, in the end, be nullified and you will be drawn to sin⁵⁴. And all those who engage themselves with the public should do so for the sake of Heaven. The merits of their⁵⁵ fathers assist them⁵⁶, and their⁵⁷ righteousness shall remain with them forever. And I shall reward you⁵⁸ greatly, as if you had done it."

ב רבן גמליאל בנו של רבי יהודה הנשיא אומר, יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ, שיגיעת שניהם משכחת עון. וכל תורה שאין עמה מלאכה, סופה בטלה וגוררת עון. וכל העמלים עם הצבור, יהיו עמלים עמהם לשם שמים, שזכות אבותם מסייעתן וצדקתם עומדת לעד. ואתם, מעלה אני עליכם שכר הרבה כאילו עשיתם:

How good is it to combine Torah-learning with gainful employment! ♦ For if you become weakened by work and tired from learning Torah, you will have no energy or time to sin. ♦ Nor will you have any desire to steal since you have of your own. ♦ Torah without work results in idleness and invites sin. ♦ One who serves the public must do so only for the sake of Heaven and not in order to reap personal benefit or honor. Your reward will be great. It will be calculated by the total merit accrued by the public for all their good deeds. ♦ Those involved in community affairs must be prompted solely by a sense of duty without ulterior motives. ♦ The one who inspires and causes others to do good deeds and fulfill their duty has even greater merit than the one who does the same with his own resources.

⁵² An occupation.

⁵³ You will be so preoccupied in those other matters that you will be too weary to think about sinning.

⁵⁴ Such as thievery and robbery, and many other sins.

⁵⁵ Those of the public.

⁵⁶ In succeeding.

⁵⁷ Fathers.

⁵⁸ Who toil with the public.

THREE

Be⁵⁹ cautious with the ruling authorities inasmuch as they do not bring people close to themselves except for their own purposes. They appear loving when they see this as advantageous for themselves, but will not stand by you in your hour of need.

ג הוּוּ זְהִירִין בְּרִשׁוֹת, שְׂאִין
מְקַרְבִּין לוֹ לְאָדָם אֲלָא לְצַרְדָּה
עֲצָמָן. נִרְאִין כְּאוֹהֲבִין בְּשַׁעַת
הַנְּאֻתָן. וְאִין עוֹמְדִין לוֹ לְאָדָם
בְּשַׁעַת דְּחֻקוֹ:

Be skeptical of governmental officials and of politicians. They only get chummy with people who serve their personal agendas. They favor someone when they can gain something from this association, but will disassociate themselves and not support him when he is in trouble.

⁵⁹ This is Rabban Gamliel speaking. This is addressed to those who have to deal with the government.

FOUR

He⁶⁰ was wont to say, "Do⁶¹ His Will⁶² as if it were your own so that He shall do your will as if it were His. Negate your will⁶³ in place of His Will so that He shall nullify the will of others⁶⁴ in place of your will." Hillel said, "Do not separate yourself from the public⁶⁵, never trust yourself⁶⁶ until the day of your death, and do not judge your fellow⁶⁷ until you are in his place⁶⁸. Never say anything the end of which cannot be heard⁶⁹, and never say that you will learn⁷⁰ when you will have free time⁷¹ to do so, for you may never be free.

ד הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, עֲשֵׂה רְצוֹנוֹ כְּרְצוֹנְךָ, כְּדִי שְׂיַעֲשֶׂה רְצוֹנְךָ כְּרְצוֹנוֹ. בִּטֹּל רְצוֹנְךָ מִפְּנֵי רְצוֹנוֹ, כְּדִי שְׂיִבְטֹל רְצוֹן אֲחֵרִים מִפְּנֵי רְצוֹנְךָ. הִלֵּל אוֹמֵר, אַל תִּפְרוֹשׁ מִן הַצִּבּוֹר, וְאַל תִּאֲמֵן בְּעַצְמְךָ עַד יוֹם מוֹתְךָ, וְאַל תִּדְּוֵן אֶת חֲבֵרְךָ עַד שֶׁתִּגִּיעַ לְמְקוֹמוֹ, וְאַל תֹּאמֶר דְּבַר שְׂאֵי אֶפְשָׁר לְשִׁמוֹעַ שְׂסוּפוֹ לְהִשְׁמַע. וְאַל תֹּאמֶר לְכַשְׁאֲפָנָה אֲשֶׁנָּה, שְׂמָא לֹא תִפְנָה:

Do Heaven's Will with the same fervor as if it were your own will, so that Heaven will fulfill your will as if it were Heaven's Will. When there is a conflict, defer your will in favor of Heaven's Will so that Heaven will cancel other people's will in favor of yours. ♦ Do not say of any word that it cannot possibly be heard, for in the end it will be heard.

⁶⁰ Rabban Gamliel the son of Rebbe Yehuda Hanassi.

⁶¹ Whole-heartedly.

⁶² Observe the Torah, perform the Commandments.

⁶³ To sin.

⁶⁴ Who may want to cause you harm.

⁶⁵ Participate in their sorrows, joys and enterprises.

⁶⁶ Believing that you are so righteous that you won't sin.

⁶⁷ Negatively.

⁶⁸ You find yourself in the same predicament as he is in, and you do not falter.

⁶⁹ Say nothing which is incomprehensible nor tell secrets.

⁷⁰ Torah.

⁷¹ From your various occupations.

FIVE

He⁷² was wont to say, "The ignorant man⁷³ cannot dread sin, the unlearned person⁷⁴ cannot be virtuous, the meek man cannot be learned⁷⁵, and the overly-meticulous person⁷⁶ cannot be a teacher. The one always engaged in commerce cannot become wise, and if you find yourself in a place where there are no men⁷⁷, try to be a man.

ה הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אֵין בּוֹר יֵרָא חַטָּא, וְלֹא עִם הָאָרֶץ חָסִיד, וְלֹא הַבִּישׁוֹן לָמַד, וְלֹא הַקְּפָדוֹן מְלַמֵּד, וְלֹא כָּל הַמְרַבֵּה בְּסַחֲוֹרָה מַחְבִּים. וּבְמָקוֹם שֶׁאֵין אָנָּשִׁים, הַשְׁתַּדֵּל לְהִיּוֹת אִישׁ:

If you abandon the public in their time of need, they will abandon you in yours.
 ♦ It is not to the individual, but the community that God entrusted His Torah as an inheritance for all generations to come. ♦ **Don't assume that you will always remain faithful to God. You may even come to abandon Judaism at an old age.**
 ♦ **Never judge anyone until you are in his shoes. He may have failed the test, but so might have you.** ♦ **Never begin to say something which you might not be able to finish, lest the listener misunderstand your words and be misled.** ♦
 Alternatively, do not refrain from expressing a good and true opinion for ultimately you will be heard. ♦ **Don't reveal secrets, including your own, to anyone.** ♦ **Never say that you will get around to learning Torah when you have the time, lest you never have the time, and end up never learning.**

A person without Torah will not fear sinning for such a person does not see the long-term consequences of his actions, and he denies God's system of reward and punishment. ♦ **A person without Torah cannot be fully virtuous.** ♦ **A shy person cannot become a scholar.** ♦ **Bashfulness is a worthy attribute, except for when learning.** ♦ **Never be embarrassed to ask a question.** ♦ **An impatient person cannot teach.** ♦ **The more business dealings one engages in, the less wisdom he will have and the less time he will have to teach others.** ♦ **When there is no one else to lead and instruct, lead and instruct.** ♦ **But if there is someone else to lead, go learn Torah.** ♦ **If you are qualified and have the skills to act as leader and spokesman, endeavor to take part in affairs where articulate leadership is needed, for under such conditions reticence would not be modest, but downright criminal.**

⁷² Hillel.

⁷³ One lacking both Torah and good character.

⁷⁴ One weak in his Torah learning.

⁷⁵ He will be too embarrassed to ask questions about the things he doesn't understand.

⁷⁶ Who is quick to anger. He has no patience to answer his students' questions.

⁷⁷ Who do what has to be done.

SIX

He⁷⁸, too, saw a skull floating on the surface of the water and said, “Because you drowned others, you were drowned; and those who drowned you, will be drowned⁷⁹.”

ו אף הוא ראה גולגולת אחת
שצפה על פני המים. אמר
(לֵה), על דאִיפֶת, אִטְפוּד. וְסוּר
מִטְיִפִיךָ יִטְפוּן:

God punishes measure for measure.

⁷⁸ Hillel.

⁷⁹ By the same standard you used (regarding them), you will be measured.

SEVEN

He⁸⁰ was wont to say, "The more meat, the more worms⁸¹. The more assets, the more worries⁸². The more women, the more spooks⁸³. The more maid-servants, the more licentiousness. The more servants, the more theft. The more Torah, the more life. The more learning⁸⁴, the more wisdom. The more counsel, the more understanding. The more charity and righteousness, the more peace. If you acquire a good name, you acquired it for yourself, but if you acquire words of Torah⁸⁵, you acquire a life in the World to Come."

ז הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, מְרֻבָּה בָּשָׂר, מְרֻבָּה רָמָה. מְרֻבָּה נְכָסִים, מְרֻבָּה דְאָגָה. מְרֻבָּה נָשִׁים, מְרֻבָּה כְּשָׁפִים. מְרֻבָּה שְׂפָחוֹת, מְרֻבָּה זָמָה. מְרֻבָּה עֲבָדִים, מְרֻבָּה גֵזֵל. מְרֻבָּה תוֹרָה, מְרֻבָּה חַיִּים. מְרֻבָּה יְשִׁיבָה, מְרֻבָּה חֲכָמָה. מְרֻבָּה יַעֲצָה, מְרֻבָּה תְבוּנָה. מְרֻבָּה צְדָקָה, מְרֻבָּה שְׁלוֹם. קָנָה שֵׁם טוֹב, קָנָה לְעַצְמוֹ. קָנָה לוֹ דְבָרֵי תוֹרָה, קָנָה לוֹ חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא:

The more one eats and drinks, the more good food for the worms there will be. ♦ The more assets one has, the more worrying there will be. ♦ The more women one has, the more superstition there will be. ♦ The more maidservants one has, the more decadence there will be. ♦ The more servants one has, the more thievery there will be. ♦ However, the more Torah one has, the more life there will be. ♦ The more students one has, the more wisdom there will be. ♦ The more one asks for sage advice, the more understanding there will be. ♦ The more one gives charity and encourages others to give, the more peace there will be. ♦ The acquisition of a good name for oneself is good, but the acquisition of Torah-learning will buy one life in the World to Come. ♦ Money one can inherit, but a good name one has to earn for himself. ♦ Who is the one who has “acquired” Torah? This the individual who absorbed the words of Torah to such a degree that they have become part and parcel of his thoughts and emotions and he has learned how to apply them in study and in his personal development.

⁸⁰ Hillel.

⁸¹ In the grave.

⁸² How to prevent losing his money.

⁸³ Women were more superstitious.

⁸⁴ Lit., sitting – before the sages.

⁸⁵ Which you can never lose.

EIGHT

Rabban Yochanan be Zakkai received the Torah from Hillel and Shammai. He⁸⁶ was wont to say, "If you learned a lot of Torah, do not think good of yourself⁸⁷, because it was for this you were created." Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai had five students: Rebbe Eliezer ben Horkenus, Rebbe Yehoshua ben Chananyah, Rebbe Yosse the Kohen, Rebbe Shimon ben Nesanel, and Rebbe Elazar ben Arach. He enumerated praises for each one. Of Rebbe Eliezer ben Horkenus he said, "A plastered cistern⁸⁸ which does not lose a drop⁸⁹." Of Rebbe Yehoshua ben Chananyah he said, "Happy is she⁹⁰ who gave birth to him." Of Rebbe Yosse the Kohen he said, "Compassionate." Of Rebbe Shimon ben Nesanel he said, "Fears sin." And of Rebbe Elazar ben Arach he said, "An overwhelming spring⁹¹". He⁹² was wont to say, "If all the sages of Israel would be on one side of a balance scale, and Rebbe Eliezer ben Horkenus on the other side, he would outweigh them all". Abba Shaul said in his⁹³ name, "If all the sages of Israel would be in one side of the scale, and even with Rebbe Eliezer ben Horkenas there, and Rebbe Elazar ben Arach on the other side, the latter would outweigh them all."

ח רבן יוחנן בן זכאי קבל מהלל ומשמאי. הוא היה אומר, אם למדת תורה הרבה, אל תחזיק טובה לעצמך, כי לך נוצרת חמשה תלמידים היו לו לרבן יוחנן בן זכאי, ואלו הן, רבי אליעזר בן הרקנוס, ורבי יהושע בן חנניה, ורבי יוסי הכהן, ורבי שמעון בן נתנאל, ורבי אלעזר בן ערך. הוא היה מונה שבחן רבי אליעזר בן הרקנוס, בור סוד שאינו מאבד טפה. רבי יהושע בן חנניה, אשרי יולדתו. רבי יוסי הכהן, חסיד. רבי שמעון בן נתנאל, ירא חטא. ורבי אלעזר בן ערך, מעין המתגבר. הוא היה אומר, אם יהיו כל חכמי ישראל בכף מאזנים, ואליעזר בן הרקנוס בכף שניה, מכריע את כלם. אבא שאול אומר משמו, אם יהיו כל חכמי ישראל בכף מאזנים ורבי אליעזר בן הרקנוס אף עמהם, ורבי אלעזר בן ערך בכף שניה, מכריע את כלם:

⁸⁶ Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

⁸⁷ As one who thinks himself special since he did something voluntarily.

⁸⁸ Nothing is lost, nothing is absorbed in the ground.

⁸⁹ He forgets nothing.

⁹⁰ His mother.

⁹¹ He adds to what he has learned from his teachers.

⁹² Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

⁹³ Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

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Don't be arrogant because you have learned a great deal of Torah, since it was for that reason you were created.

From among his many students, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai had five particularly noteworthy disciples who had very different character traits.

One was Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenus who never forgot anything of his learning.

◆ Another was Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah who was so wise and moral that it brought great praise on his family, for surely he learned his love of learning and good behavior from home. When his mother was pregnant with him, she would go to the Study Halls and beg for mercy that her child would be a Sage. ◆ Another was Rabbi Yossi HaCohen who was remarkably virtuous. ◆ Another was Rabbi Shimon ben Nesanael who had great fear of sinning. ◆ Another was Rabbi Elazar ben Arach who was constantly churning out more and more Torah wisdom, like a never-ending spring. ◆ Our Sages have stated: "Between Sinai and Oker Harim, Sinai is preferred." This means the person who has a breadth of Torah knowledge is preferred over the one who has great analytic skills in Torah.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai thought that Rabbi Eliezer ben Horkenus was greater than all the rest combined, while Abba Shaul thought that it was Rabbi Elazar (ben Arach) who was the greatest.

NINE

He⁹⁴ said to them, "Go out and see which is the straight way to which a person should adhere. Rebbe Eliezer said, "A good eye⁹⁵". Rebbe Yehoshua said, "A good friend⁹⁶". Rebbe Yosse said, "A good neighbor⁹⁷". Rebbe Shimon said, "Seeing what will be⁹⁸, i.e. common sense". Rebbe Elazar said, "A good heart." He said to them, I prefer the words of Rebbe Elazar ben Arach over your words for his insight encompasses those you suggested⁹⁹. He said to them, "Go see what is the bad way from which a person should distance himself." Rebbe Eliezer said, "A bad eye." Rebbe Yehoshua said, "A bad friend". Rebbe Yosse said, "A bad neighbor¹⁰⁰". Rebbe Shimon said, "Borrowing without repaying, regardless if he borrows from a person or he borrows from the Holy One¹⁰¹, blessed be He, as it says (Psalms 37), '*Evil is the borrower who does not repay*¹⁰², and he who deals generously and is a giver is righteous'." Rebbe Elazar said, "A good heart". He said to them, "I prefer the words of Rebbe Elazar ben Arach since they encompass all your words."

ט אָמַר לָהֶם, צָאוּ וּרְאוּ אֵיזוֹהִי דֶרֶךְ יִשְׁרָה שְׂיִדְבֵּק בָּהּ הָאָדָם. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר, עֵינַי טוֹבָה. רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אוֹמֵר, חֵבֵר טוֹב. רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אוֹמֵר, שָׁכֵן טוֹב. רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן אוֹמֵר, הָרוּאָה אֶת הַנוֹלָד. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר, לֵב טוֹב. אָמַר לָהֶם, רוּאָה אֲנִי אֶת דְּבָרֵי אֱלִיעֶזֶר בֵּין עַרְךָ מִדְּבָרֵיכֶם, שֶׁבְּכָלֵל דְּבָרָיו דְּבָרֵיכֶם. אָמַר לָהֶם צָאוּ וּרְאוּ אֵיזוֹהִי דֶרֶךְ רָעָה שְׂיִתְרַחֵק מִמֶּנָּה הָאָדָם. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר, עֵינַי רָעָה. רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אוֹמֵר, חֵבֵר רָע. רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אוֹמֵר, שָׁכֵן רָע. רַבִּי שְׁמַעוֹן אוֹמֵר, הַלּוּהַ וְאֵינוֹ מִשְׁלָם. אֶחָד הַלּוּהַ מִן הָאָדָם, כְּלוּהַ מִן הַמָּקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (תהלים לז) לֹוּהַ רָשָׁע וְלֹא יִשְׁלָם, וְצַדִּיק חוֹנֵן וְנוֹתֵן. רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר אוֹמֵר, לֵב רָע. אָמַר לָהֶם, רוּאָה אֲנִי אֶת דְּבָרֵי אֱלִיעֶזֶר בֵּין עַרְךָ מִדְּבָרֵיכֶם, שֶׁבְּכָלֵל דְּבָרָיו דְּבָרֵיכֶם:

⁹⁴ Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.

⁹⁵ One who is never jealous of anyone, and he gives of his own to others.

⁹⁶ One should acquire a good friend for himself.

⁹⁷ One should search out for a good neighbor.

⁹⁸ Think of the consequences of your actions and you will be more careful with what you do.

⁹⁹ Everything is dependent upon having a good heart.

¹⁰⁰ One whom you should avoid.

¹⁰¹ One who borrows from a person is like he is borrowing from God.

¹⁰² When he borrowed, he did not calculate how he was going to pay his debt. Consequently, he gets into trouble.

PIRKEI AVOS - SYNTHESIZED

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai asked these students what they thought is the preeminent nature that a person should adhere to in his life.

Rabbi Eliezer:

A person should not be jealous of anyone else, he should be satisfied with what he has, and he should look upon everyone and everything in a favorable light. ♦
Never place obstacles into the path of the happiness and prosperity of your neighbor and gladly do whatever may promote his welfare.

Rabbi Yehoshua:

A person should make sure that he has a good friend who can admonish him when necessary, and exhort him to do good, but also that he himself should act as a good friend to others to do the same for them.

Rabbi Yosse:

One should have a good neighbor, because a neighbor is close-by day and night, unlike a friend who is only there some of the time. He should also learn to be a good neighbor himself by teaching himself how to act in a neighborly and friendly manner. ♦ One should only live in the neighborhood of good people.

Rabbi Shimon:

One should be responsible and always consider the short and long-term consequences of his actions and words. ♦ Such a person will never be guilty of frivolous and reckless behavior.

Rabbi Elazar:

One should have a good heart, for all dispositions come from the heart. If one is good, it is because he has a good heart. ♦ One should only will good for others. ♦ One with a good heart is incapable of desiring evil and is ready for every good endeavor. His heart is receptive only to the good and directed to the good alone.

To this Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai agreed saying, “What Rabbi Elazar said includes what all the others have said”. ♦ Generous and benevolent people are beneficial to everyone.

PIRKEI AVOS - SYNTHESIZED

Then Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai asked them what is negative from which a person should distance himself?

Rabbi Eliezer:

A bad eye. ♦ Such a person experiences distress when others prosper and rejoices when others suffer loss and sorrow, grief and misery.

Rabbi Yehoshua:

A bad friend. ♦ Those characterized with a bad eye or heart or bad friends or neighbors are dangers to our moral purity. We are not only forbidden to associate with them, we must distance ourselves from them.

Rabbi Yosse:

A bad neighbor.

Rabbi Shimon:

The one who does not repay his loans, for a person who borrows with no intent of repaying is an evil thief. ♦ He is the opposite of the one who sees the consequences of his actions. He should have calculated if he would have the means to repay his debts on time. ♦ He should also have been concerned about how his defaulting would impact the lender and those dependent on him.

Rabbi Elazar:

A bad heart.

To this Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai agreed saying, “What Rabbi Elazar said includes what all the others have said”.

TEN

They each said three things. Rebbe Eliezer said, "Your fellow's honor should be as dear to you as your own, do not be quick to anger, repent the day before your death, and warm yourself by the fire of the sages¹⁰³, but be careful not to burn yourself with their hot coals¹⁰⁴ for their bite is the bite of a fox¹⁰⁵, their sting is the sting of the scorpion, their hiss is the hiss of a snake, and all their words are like fiery coals".

יְהִי כְבוֹד חֲבֵרְךָ חָבִיב עֲלֶיךָ
 דְּבָרִים. רַבִּי אֶלְיָעֶזֶר אָמַר,
 וְאֵל תְּהִי נֹחַ לְכַעֲסוֹם.
 וְהוּי מִתְתַּדָּךְ.
 וְהוּי מִתְחַמֵּם כְּנֹגֵד אֹרֶן שֶׁל
 חֲכָמִים, וְהוּי זְהִיר בְּגַחְלָתָן
 שֶׁלֹּא תִכְנֹה, וְשִׁנְשִׁיכְתָן נְשִׁיכַת
 שׁוּעָל, וְעִקִּיצְתָן עִקִּיצַת עֶקְרָב,
 וְלַחִישְׁתָן לַחִישַׁת שָׂרָף, וְכָל
 דְּבָרֵיהֶם כְּגַחְלֵי אֵשׁ:

Each of these students had three sayings they were wont to say.

Rabbi Eliezer:

Honor your fellow as you would honor yourself; do not be quick to anger; and repent the day before your death. Not knowing when you might die, repent every day. ♦ Although anger is a perfectly normal human trait, being angry is characteristic of fools. ♦ To this he added two more things: warm yourself with the fire of the Sages, but don't get too close to them for you may come to burn yourself. This means don't think that you know so much as to be able to argue with them. You probably don't, and they will cut you down to size quickly. ♦ The Sages' words are a fiery force. Many an ancient precept or ordinance may seem "burned out", obsolete and extinct, but they hold within them an eternal flame which will burn the hand that would touch them with irreverence. ♦ Torah scholars are as dangerous as foxes whose bites are sharp and deep, poisonous as scorpions, and astute as snakes. Their words are like burning coals.

¹⁰³ Become close to the sages to listen to their words. From this point on, more is added to these three initial things.

¹⁰⁴ Be careful that you show them no disrespect.

¹⁰⁵ A bite which is difficult to heal.

ELEVEN

Rebbe Yehoshua said, "A bad eye, evil passions and misanthropy remove a person from this world".

יֵאָדָם רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֹמֵר, עֵיִן
הָרַע, וְיִצָּר הָרַע, וְשִׂנְאָת
הַבְּרִיּוֹת, מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הָאָדָם
מִן הָעוֹלָם:

Rabbi Yehoshua:

A bad eye, an evil inclination, and misanthropy remove a person from this world.
◆ What is a “bad eye”? This is either someone who is never satisfied with what he has and always wants more or it is someone who is jealous of others and schemes to harm them. ◆ Why do these things “remove a person from this world”? Because hatred brings one to perform evil deeds. ◆ Lust kills.

TWELVE

Rebbe Yosse¹⁰⁶ said, "Your fellow's money should be as dear to you¹⁰⁷ as is your own. Prepare yourself for learning Torah, because Torah is not inherited¹⁰⁸. All your deeds should be done for the sake of Heaven".

יב רבי יוסי אומר, יהי קמון
 חבֵרְךָ חביב עליך כשֵׁלֶךְ.
 וְהִתְקַן עֲצֻמָּךְ לְלִמּוּד תּוֹרָה,
 שְׂאִינָה יִרְשָׁה לְךָ. וְכֹל מַעֲשֶׂיךָ
 יִהְיוּ לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם:

Rabbi Yosse:

Treat your fellow's money as if it were your own; everyone must learn his own Torah because Torah wisdom is not inherited; and do everything for the sake of Heaven and in purity. "Everything" includes eating, drinking and having relations. ♦ What does it mean to "treat your fellow's money as if it were your own"? This means don't charge interest, be fraudulent or dishonest in business. ♦ It is not enough merely not to be envious of the wealth of our fellow-man or to view it with unconcern, we should be happy when he prospers, we must not stand by idly if we can guard him from injury, and we should rejoice at any opportunity we may have to help him improve his lot.

¹⁰⁶ Rebbe Yosse the Kohen.

¹⁰⁷ You are careful not to lose it.

¹⁰⁸ You must learn it on your own.

THIRTEEN

Rebbe Shimon¹⁰⁹ said, "Be careful with saying Krias Shema and prayer. When you pray, do not pray in a perfunctory manner¹¹⁰, but do so compassionately and with supplications before the Holy One, blessed be He, as it says (Joel 2), '*For He is merciful and forbearing, He is patient, withholding His anger. He is full of loving-kindness, and forgiving of badness.*' And do not hold yourself evil in your own eyes¹¹¹".

יג רבי שמעון אומר, הוי זהיר בקריאת שמע ובתפלה. וכשאתה מתפלל, אל תעש תפלתך קבע, אלא רחמים ותחנונים לפני המקום ברוך הוא, שנאמר (יואל ב) כי חנון ורחום הוא ארך אפים ורב חסד ונחם על הרעה. ואל תהי רשע בפני עצמך:

Rabbi Shimon:

Be meticulous to say the Shema and the various Prayers in their correct times, and recite them with the properly prescribed texts. ♦ When you pray, pray with compassion and as a supplication, and not like it was some obligatory burden. ♦ Never consider yourself a sinner who God abandons. That is, never give up hope that God will answer your prayers and have mercy on you. Your soul is holy and pure, and no one inherits the sins of his forefathers. ♦ This is a world where we can save ourselves from sin by prayer and repentance. ♦ Rather, consider yourself average, for someone who holds himself to be evil will not see the malevolence of his sins or he may despair about the efficacy of his repentance and not even try to repent.

¹⁰⁹ Ben Nesanael.

¹¹⁰ Do not pray simply because you are required to.

¹¹¹ Do not consider yourself an evil person, so that you will not come to do evil, and even if others do not know you as an evil-doer. Alternatively, do not do evil even if no one else sees you. Act in private as you do in public.

FOURTEEN

Rebbe Elazar¹¹² said, "Be diligent in your Torah learning, know how to respond to the heretic¹¹³, and know before whom it is that you toil. He¹¹⁴ is trustworthy with His workers, and He pays them for their efforts."

יֵד רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר אוֹמֵר, הָיִי שְׂקוּד לְלַמּוֹד תּוֹרָה, וְדַע מִה שֶׁתִּשָּׁיב לְאַפִּיקוֹרוֹס. וְדַע לְפָנָי מִי אֶתָּה עֹמֵל. וְנֶאֱמָן הוּא בְּעַל מְלֶאכֶתְךָ שִׂישְׁלָם לְךָ שֶׁכָּר פֶּעֲלֶתְךָ:

Rabbi Elazar:

Be persistent and diligent in your Torah-learning, including Talmud and Halacha, until you know all its principles, details and Laws. ♦ Know how to respond to the heretic. ♦ Only the one who continuously and thoroughly studies Torah, and delves into it with devotion will clearly see the speciousness and invalidity of the scorners' allegations and arguments and know that they are founded on ignorance and distortion of the facts. ♦ Know before whom you toil, and who the real boss is. ♦ Don't worry, for He will pay your salary.

¹¹² Ben Arach.

¹¹³ Who engages you in disputations.

¹¹⁴ God.

FIFTEEN

Rebbe Tarfon said, "The day¹¹⁵ is short, the task¹¹⁶ is great, and the workers are lazy. Yet the reward is great, and the Boss is demanding."

טו רבי טרפון אומר, היום קצר והמלאכה מרבה, והפועלים עצלים, והשכר הרבה, ובעל הבית דוחק:

Although life in this world is short and we have so much Torah to learn and observe, we are lazy. Remember, however, that our final reward is great, and God is very demanding. ♦ All people are indolent by nature, some more than others.

¹¹⁵ Life.

¹¹⁶ Learning Torah.

SIXTEEN

He¹¹⁷ was wont to say, "It is not for you to finish the job nor are you free to avoid it^{118 119}. If you learned a lot of Torah, you shall receive a great reward. He is trustworthy to pay the wages for your work. Know, too, that the righteous ones shall only receive their full payment in the future¹²⁰."

טז הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, לֹא עָלֶיךָ הַמְּלָאכָה לְגַמּוֹר, וְלֹא אֶתָּה בֶּן חוֹרִין לְבָטֵל מִמֶּנָּה. אִם לָמַדְתָּ תוֹרָה הַרְבֵּה, נוֹתְנִים לָךְ שְׂכָר הַרְבֵּה. וְנֶאֱמָן הוּא בְּעַל מְלֹאכְתְּךָ שִׁישְׁלֵם לָךְ שְׂכָר פְּעֻלָּתְךָ. וְדַע, מִתֵּן שְׂכָרְךָ שֶׁל צַדִּיקִים לְעֵתִיד לָבוֹא:

Do not despair given the immense task of learning and observing so much Torah since you are not expected to complete this task, only that you must be constantly engaged in it. You cannot shirk this responsibility. ♦ The good that God wants to see accomplished on Earth is not all meant for one individual to complete. Any human being can contribute only one fraction to the whole. It is only through the united efforts of all that the salvation to come into flower on Earth can be brought about. Everyone must make his contribution. ♦ You will receive reward for whatever Torah you learn and for the amount of effort you exert in thwarting your evil inclination which seeks to divert you from your mission. ♦ You will also be punished for the time you wasted when you could have learned Torah. ♦ The ultimate reward for the righteous, however, will not be given in this world, but is held for them in the World to Come.

¹¹⁷ Rebbe Tarfon.

¹¹⁸ Therefore, do not despair in not being able to complete the task of Torah.

¹¹⁹ Do not say, 'Since I am willing to forfeit my reward, I will not have to learn'.

¹²⁰ The World to Come.



CHAPTER 3



ONE

Akavia ben Mehalalel said, "Contemplate three things and you shall not come to sin. Know from where you came, know to where you are going, and know before whom it is that you shall have to give an accounting. 'From where you came' – a putrid drop. 'To where you are going' – to a place of filth, decay and maggots. 'To whom you shall have to give an accounting' – to the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."

א עֲקִבְיָא בֶן מְהַלְלָאֵל אוֹמֵר, הִסְתַּכַּל בְּשִׁלְשָׁה דְבָרִים וְאַיִן אֲתָה בָּא לְיָדֶי עֲבָרָה. דַּע, מֵאַיִן בָּאתָ, וּלְאַן אֲתָה הוֹלֵךְ, וּלְפָנֵי מִי אֲתָה עֹתִיד לִתֵּן דִּין וְחֲשׁבוֹן. מֵאַיִן בָּאתָ, מִטְּפָה סְרוּחָה, וּלְאַן אֲתָה הוֹלֵךְ, לְמָקוֹם עֶפֶר רְמָה וְתוֹלְעָה. וּלְפָנֵי מִי אֲתָה עֹתִיד לִתֵּן דִּין וְחֲשׁבוֹן, לְפָנֵי מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא:

Constantly be cognizant of three things and you will not come to sin, for you will then be infused with a great sense of humility: ♦ Human life, including yours, began with but a putrid drop of semen. ♦ The end for everyone is death. ♦ You will be buried deep in the ground and eaten by worms and maggots. ♦ You personally will be held fully accountable for your words and deeds by the King of Kings, God.

TWO

Rebbe Chanina¹²¹, Sgan Hakohanim¹²² said, "Always pray for the welfare of the government¹²³ for if it were not for fear of it, the people would eat each other up alive." Rebbe Chananyah ben Tardion said, "Two people who sit together and do not exchange words of Torah between them are a caucus of clowns, as it says (Psalms 1), '*Do not sit among a gathering of mockers*'. However, if two sit together and words of Torah are exchanged between them, the Divine Presence hovers over them, as it says (Malachi 3), '*When those who fear God speak each with his fellow, God listens attentively, and He hears, and He writes this in the Book of Remembrance before Him, of those who fear God and contemplate His Name.*' From here we learn of two, but from where do we learn that the Holy One, blessed be He, fix the wages fore even for one person who sits and engages in Torah? It says (Lamentations 3), '*Although he may sit alone, he may feel at ease, since he (knows that he) shall receive his due*".

ב רבי חנינא סגן הכהנים
אומר, הוי מתפלל בשלומה
של מלכות, שאמלא מוראה,
איש את רעהו חיים בלעו.
רבי חנניא בן תרדיון אומר,
שנים שיושבין ואין ביניהן
דברי תורה, הרי זה מושב
לצים, שנאמר (תהלים א),
ובמושב לצים לא ישב. אבל
שנים שיושבין ויש ביניהם
דברי תורה, שכינה שרויה
ביניהם, שנאמר (מלאכי ג), אז
נדברו יראי יי איש אל רעהו
ויקשב יי וישמע ויכתב ספר
זכרון לפניו ליראי יי
ולחשבי שמו. אין לי אלא
שנים. מנין שאפלו אחד שיושב
ועוסק בתורה, שהקדוש ברוך
הוא קובע לו שכר, שנאמר
(איכה ג), יושב בדרך וידם כי
נטל עליו:

¹²¹ Alt. Rebbe Chanania.

¹²² The Kohen who was responsible for supervising the other Kohanim and their Service in the Temple.

¹²³ Their peace is your peace.

PIRKEI AVOS - SYNTHESIZED

Pray for the peace of the ruling authorities for it is they who instill fear in the population in order to maintain public order. ♦ For if the government could not exercise its authority, the hand of everyone would be lifted up against all the others and all of society would disintegrate. ♦ **The truly righteous empathize with the sorrows of all human beings and pray for their peace and welfare**

If two sit and do not discuss Torah, they sit in a place of mockers. Whereas, if the two discuss Torah, God's Holy Presence is found between them. ♦ **God bestows charm on those who remain silent to the harassment of scoffers.** ♦ **One who squanders his time and doesn't learn Torah, ridicules its value.** ♦ These scornors are foes of God's Law who, by glibness of speech, undermine the respect and reverence in which the Torah should be held. ♦ **God will also reward the one who sits alone engaged in Torah, for this is as if the entire Torah was (created) just for him.**

THREE

Rebbe Shimon said, "Three who ate at one table and did not exchange words of Torah are compared with those who ate sacrifices for the dead (i.e. idols), as it says (Isaiah 28), '*For all the tables were entirely filled with vomit*¹²⁴.' However, when three eat at one table and speak Torah, it is like they are eating at God's table¹²⁵, as it says (Ezekiel 41), '*And he spoke to me saying, This is the table before God.*'"

ג רבי שמעון אומר, שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאילו אכלו מזבחי מתים, שנאמר (ישעיה כח), כי כל שלחנות מלאו קיא צאה בלי מקום. אבל שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ואמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאילו אכלו משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא, שנאמר (יחזקאל מא), וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה':

If three sit at the table and do not discuss Torah, it is as if they are dedicating their efforts to worthless idolatry, for the Name of God is never mentioned. ♦ Meals, instead of being part of the spiritual and moral aspects of living, become only acts of animal gratification. ♦ If, however, they were engaged in Torah, it would be as if they were eating in the presence of God Himself.

¹²⁴ A reference to idolatry.

¹²⁵ Like the altar before God.

FOUR

Rebbe Chanina ben Chachinai said, "The one who stays awake at night, the one who walks on his way alone and the one who empties his heart for vanity¹²⁶, gives up his life."

ד רבי חנינא בן חכניאי
אומר, הנעור בלילה והמהלך
בדרך יחידי והמפנה לבו
לבטלה, הרי זה מתחייב
בנפשו:

The one who ponders useless matters at night or the one who walks alone at night in dangerous places without thinking Torah thoughts, and the one who daydreams about worthless subjects, puts his life in danger. ♦ Instead of utilizing those quiet moments for serious meditation and reflection, he wastes them on frivolous and idle thoughts. He is sinning against his own soul.

¹²⁶ Without Torah.

FIVE

Rebbe Nechunya ben Hakanna said, "Anyone who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah will have the burden of the government¹²⁷ and the yoke of daily drudgery¹²⁸ removed. Anyone who casts off the yoke of Torah, will be burdened with the yokes of government and daily drudgery."

ה רבי נְחוּנְיָא בֶּן הַקָּנָה
 אומר, כָּל הַמְקַבֵּל עָלָיו עַל
 תּוֹרָה, מֵעֲבִירִין מִמֶּנּוּ עַל
 מְלָכוֹת וְעַל דְּרֹךְ אֲרָץ. וְכָל
 הַפּוֹרֵק מִמֶּנּוּ עַל תּוֹרָה, נוֹתֵן
 עָלָיו עַל מְלָכוֹת וְעַל דְּרֹךְ
 אֲרָץ:

Anyone who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah has the burden of the government removed from him. ♦ However, the one who removes the yoke of Torah puts upon himself the burden of the government, and the burden of making a living. ♦ That is, he will not feel oppressed by those burdens.

¹²⁷ Toiling for them or giving them money.

¹²⁸ He will not have to work hard for a living. Others will toil for him.

SIX

Rebbe Chalafta ben Dosa from Kfar Chanania¹²⁹ said, "If ten sit and engage in Torah, the Divine Presence will be present among them, as it says (Psalms 82), *'God is present among the congregation of the Lord'*¹³⁰.' And from where do we learn that this will also occur among five? It says, (Amos 9), *'And His band'*¹³¹ *on Earth is the foundation*.' And from where do we learn three? It says, (Psalms 82), *'From in the midst of the judges'*¹³² *He shall judge*.' And from where do we learn two? It says (Malachi 3), *'Then those who fear God shall speak one with another, and God shall pay attention, and listen, etc.'* And from where do we learn even one? It says (Exodus 20), *'Anywhere I where I permit My Name to be remembered, I shall come to you and bless you.'*"

ו רבי חלפתא בן דוסא איש
 כפר חנניה אומר, עשרה
 שיושבין ועוסקין בתורה,
 שכינה שרויה ביניהם, שנאמר
 (תהלים פב), אלהים נצב בעדת
 אל. ומנין אפלו חמשה, שנאמר
 (עמוס ט), ואגדתו על ארץ
 יסדה. ומנין אפלו שלשה,
 שנאמר (תהלים פב), בקרב
 אלהים ישפט. ומנין אפלו
 שנים, שנאמר (מלאכי ג), אז
 נדברו יראי ה' איש אל רעהו
 ויקשב ה' וישמע וגו'. ומנין
 אפלו אחד, שנאמר (שמות כ),
 בכל המקום אשר אזכיר את
 שמי אבוא אליך וברכהתיך:

If ten sit together and are engaged in Torah, God's Holy Presence resides among them. This is true even for five, three, two or one. Five refers to three judges and the two litigants. Three refers to the three judges alone. ♦ Any group of ten men, united in accordance with the spirit of Judaism for truly Jewish causes, constitutes a congregation and represents, on a small scale, the entire Jewish community.

¹²⁹ A town situated between the Upper and Lower Galilee.

¹³⁰ There is no congregation of less than ten (Sanhedrin 1:6).

¹³¹ A band is held by the five fingers.

¹³² The Hebrew term אלוקים is also used for judges, nominally three (in a Beis Din). Alternatively, with three judges and two witnesses, God's Holy Presence is in attendance.

SEVEN

Rebbe Elazar from Bartosa¹³³ said, "Give to Him of His, since you and all of yours are His¹³⁴. So it says with David (I Chronicles 29): *'All is from You, and from Your hand, we gave to You.'*"
 Rebbe Shimon¹³⁵ said, "If one was learning while he going on his way, and stops his learning to say, 'O, how pleasant is this tree' or 'how fine is this field', of him it is written that he causes his own demise."

ז רבי אלעזר איש ברתותא
 אומר, הן לו משלו, שאתה
 ושלך שלו. וכן בדרוד הוא
 אומר (דברי הימים א כט) כי מן
 הכל ומידך נתנו לך. רבי
 שמעון אומר, המהלך בדרך
 ושונה ומפסיק ממשנתו ואומר,
 מה נאה אילן זה ומה נאה
 ניר זה, מעלה עליו הכתוב
 כאילו מתחייב בנפשו:

Always give of yourself and your property for matters of Heaven, because you and everything you own, including your soul, are His and come from Him. ♦
 All you have and all you have achieved are a result of the strength and means received from God. All you have was given to you only for the purpose of employing it to do the Will of God.

The one who was learning Torah while traveling through a perilous place and interrupts to admire a tree or a field, endangers his life, since it is just his Torah-learning which is what is protecting him there. More broadly, Torah protects us from danger. ♦ The physical beauties of nature all recede in the shadows of the higher beauty of God's Teaching. The beauty and dignity of a human soul that is guided and enlightened by the spirit of God is a beauty and dignity that surpasses all Earthly beauty by far.

¹³³ Possibly a Galilean village.
¹³⁴ Everything is His.
¹³⁵ More correctly, Rebbe Yaakov.

EIGHT

Rebbe Dostai son of Rebbe Yannai in the name of Rebbe Meir said, "Regarding anyone who forgets even one thing of his learning, it is written that he causes his own demise, as it says (Deut. 4), *'Be careful and take great care of your life lest you forget any of the matters you saw with your eyes'*. If his learning was difficult for him, we have learned (ibid.), *'And lest these be diverted from your heart all the days of your life.'* From here we learn that he is not guilty with his life until he deliberately removes it from his heart¹³⁶."

ח רבי דוסתאי ברבי ינאי
 משום רבי מאיר אומר, כל
 השוכח דבר אחד ממשנתו,
 מעלה עליו הכתוב כאילו
 מתחייב בנפשו, שנאמר (דברים
 ד), רק השמר לך ושמר נפשך
 מאד פן תשכח את הדברים
 אשר ראו עיניך. יכול אפלו
 תקפה עליו משנתו, תלמוד
 לומר (שם) ופן יסורו מלבבך
 כל ימי חייך, הא אינו מתחייב
 בנפשו עד שישב ויסירם
 מלבו:

Someone who forgets anything from his learning, since he did not review his learning, sins against his soul. He may also come to permit the forbidden and, thus, cause others to sin, as well.

¹³⁶ He is only guilty if he erases his learning from his mind intentionally.

NINE

Rebbe Chanina ben Dosa said, "Anyone whose fear of sinning takes precedence over his desire for wisdom, shall have his wisdom endure. Anyone whose wisdom takes precedence over his fear of sinning, shall not have his wisdom endure." He was wont to say, "Anyone whose deeds¹³⁷ are greater than his wisdom¹³⁸, shall have his wisdom endure. Anyone whose wisdom is greater than his deeds¹³⁹, shall not have his wisdom endure."

ט רבי חנינא בן דוסא אומר,
 כל שיראת חטאו קודמת
 לחכמתו, חכמתו מתקיימת. וכל
 שחכמתו קודמת ליראת חטאו,
 אין חכמתו מתקיימת. הוא היה
 אומר, כל שמעשיו מרבין
 מחכמתו, חכמתו מתקיימת. וכל
 שחכמתו מרבה ממעשיו, אין
 חכמתו מתקיימת:

The one whose fear of sinning is foremost in his mind will have his Torah wisdom preserved, while the one whose wisdom is more important to him than his fear of sinning will not have his wisdom preserved.

It is also true that if a man's deeds exceed his Torah wisdom, his wisdom will endure, whereas if his wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom will not endure.

¹³⁷ Mitzvoths.

¹³⁸ His knowledge of Torah.

¹³⁹ He does not put his learning into practice.

TEN

He¹⁴⁰ was wont to say, "If people are pleased with him, God is at ease with him, too. But, if people are displeased with him, so is God." Rebbe Dosa ben Harkinos said, "Morning sleep, mid-day wine¹⁴¹, childish (children's) talk¹⁴² and attending the synagogues of the simple, ignorant masses¹⁴³ removes a man from this world."

י הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, כֹּל שֶׁרוּחַ הַבְּרִיּוֹת נוֹחָה הַיָּמֵנוּ, רוּחַ הַמָּקוֹם נוֹחָה הַיָּמֵנוּ. וְכֹל שֶׁאֵין רוּחַ הַבְּרִיּוֹת נוֹחָה הַיָּמֵנוּ, אֵין רוּחַ הַמָּקוֹם נוֹחָה הַיָּמֵנוּ. רַבִּי דוֹסָא בֶּן הַרְכִּינֹס אוֹמֵר, שֵׁנָה שֶׁל שַׁחֲרִית, וַיֵּין שֶׁל צִהָרִים, וְשִׂיחַת הַיְלָדִים, וְיִשְׁבֵּת בְּתֵי כְּנִסְיֹת שֶׁל עַמֵּי הָאָרֶץ, מוֹצִיאֵין אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעוֹלָם:

God likes amenable people, whereas He is uncomfortable with those who are generally disliked. ♦ A Jew who is honest is praised for his Torah-learning and his parents are praised for raising such a trustworthy son. ♦ God created men for a single, universal union of human beings beneath the reign of the Father of all Mankind. Unkind and hostile conduct toward other men is displeasing to God and is in direct contradiction to the goals intended by God to be attained through Mankind's life together.

Sleeping late in the morning because of late-night escapades, drinking wine in the middle of the day when he should be most alert and mentally clear, engaging in childish conversations, and frequenting the synagogues of ignorant people where they speak of trivial matters, removes a person from this world. ♦ He is thoughtlessly squandering the most precious gift that has been given to man - time.

¹⁴⁰ Rebbe Chanina ben Dosa.

¹⁴¹ Typically, they did not eat in the afternoon.

¹⁴² Talking with children.

¹⁴³ Who do not come there to pray or learn, but engage in idle talk.

ELEVEN

Rebbe Elazar the Modaite¹⁴⁴ said, "The one who desecrates holy things, the one who disgraces the holidays, the one who humiliates his fellow-man in public, the one who denies the covenant of Abraham, our Patriarch¹⁴⁵, may he rest in peace, and the one who interprets Torah in contradiction to the Halacha¹⁴⁶, even though he may have Torah knowledge and good deeds to his credit, has no share in the World to Come.

יֵאָמֵר, הַמְחַלֵּל אֶת הַקְּדוּשִׁים, וְהַמְבַזֶּה אֶת הַמוֹעֲדוֹת, וְהַמְלַבֵּין פְּנֵי חֵבְרוֹ בְּרַבִּים, וְהַמְפַר בְּרִיתוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ עָלֵינוּ הַשְּׁלוֹם, וְהַמְנַלֶּה פְּנִים בַּתּוֹרָה שְׁלֹא כַהֲלָכָה, אֶף עַל פִּי שֵׁשׁ בְּיָדוֹ תּוֹרָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים, אֵין לוֹ חֵלֶק לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא:

The one who desecrates that which is holy, such as desecrating the Sabbath in public or by working on Chol Hamoed, thus treating these as ordinary days, and the one who humiliates someone in public, and the one who denies the covenant of Abraham by concealing it, and the one who intentionally misinterprets or misquotes the Torah and the Halacha, even though they may have acquired Torah and have done good deeds, have no place in the World to Come, unless they fully repent before their deaths. ♦ They are guilty of contributing to undermining the future of God's kingdom on earth.

¹⁴⁴ From the city of Modi'im.

¹⁴⁵ He does not fulfill the Commandment of circumcision.

¹⁴⁶ He makes things up which are contrary to the Halacha. Alternatively, he disparages the Torah.

TWELVE

Rebbe Yishmael said, "Be amiable with a superior and pleasant with the dark-haired ones¹⁴⁷, and receive every person with joy."

יב רבי ישמעאל אומר, הוי קל לראש ונוח לתשחרת, והוי מקבל את כל האדם בשמחה:

Serve your elders and superiors with peace of mind. ♦ Execute the demands of the authorities swiftly. ♦ Be amiable with those of lesser standing or who are younger than you. ♦ Receive everyone with a pleasant demeanor.

¹⁴⁷ People who are sought to work for the ruling authorities [i.e., the young who still have the youthful hair color – RB].

THIRTEEN

Rebbe Akiva said, "Levity and light-headedness accustom a person to promiscuity. Tradition¹⁴⁸ is a protective fence around the Torah. Tithing is a fence for wealth. Vows are a fence for abstinence. The fence for wisdom is silence."

יג רבי עקיבא אומר, שחוק וקלות ראש, מרגילין לערוה. מסורת, סג לתורה. מעשרות, סג לעשר. נדרים, סג לפרישות. סג לחכמה, שתיקה:

Clowning and flippancy bring a person to immorality. ♦ Jestng and levity draw us close to lewdness and unchastity. ♦ The Tradition safeguards the Torah. The Tradition is the standard by which we measure the veracity of our Halachic reasoning and logic. ♦ Tithing safeguards wealth. Seeing that the person shares his assets with the less fortunate shows them that he is just. Not only will the poor not be jealous of him, but they will delight in his successes. ♦ Vowing safeguards abstinence which, in turn, safeguards moral behavior. ♦ Vows strengthen our resolve to abstain from sin in the struggle against evil impulses. ♦ Silence safeguards wisdom. If so for wise people, all the more so for simpletons. ♦ The person who devotes more time to thought than speech will never run the danger of making thoughtless or ill-considered statements. ♦ When you don't know, say, "I don't know". ♦ Remain silent until your teacher finishes so that you can hear his entire analysis and rationale before questioning it.

¹⁴⁸ Including the Oral Torah.

FOURTEEN

He was wont to say, "How priveleged is Man who was created in the Image¹⁴⁹. And it was a special act of favor that he¹⁵⁰ was informed of this, as it says (Genesis 9), '*For in the image of God did He make Man.*' How priveleged are Israel that they are called 'children to God' as it says (Deut. 14), '*You are children to the Lord, your God.*' So special are Israel that they were given this especially desirable medium¹⁵¹ of love when the world was created, as it says (Proverbs 4), '*For I have given you a good portion – My Torah. Do not abandon it.*'"

יָד הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, חָבִיב אָדָם שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצַלְם. חֶבֶה יִתְּרָה נוֹדְעַת לוֹ שֶׁנִּבְרָא בְּצַלְם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (בראשית ט), כִּי בְּצַלְם אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂה אֶת הָאָדָם. חֶבִיבִין יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ בָנִים לַמָּקוֹם. חֶבֶה יִתְּרָה נוֹדְעַת לָהֶם שֶׁנִּקְרְאוּ בָנִים לַמָּקוֹם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (דברים יד), בָּנִים אַתֶּם לַה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. חֶבִיבִין יִשְׂרָאֵל, שֶׁנִּתֵּן לָהֶם כָּלִי חֶמְדָּה. חֶבֶה יִתְּרָה נוֹדְעַת לָהֶם שֶׁנִּתֵּן לָהֶם כָּלִי חֶמְדָּה שְׁבוּ נִבְרָא הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (משלי ד), כִּי לָקַח טוֹב נִתְּתִי לָכֶם, תּוֹרַתִי אֵל תַּעֲזוּבוּ:

How pleasant it is for Man to have been created in the image of God, for just because of this he became obligated to execute God's Will. ♦ It is Man's dignity and nobleness which raises him above all other creatures. ♦ Israel is privileged to be His children and to whom He has revealed His great affection and love. ♦ Israel is singularly cherished since it was specifically to them that God's beloved Torah, the blueprint for the Creation, was given. ♦ Man's task is to bring about moral Good in the world, which can only be attained through the Torah.

¹⁴⁹ Of God.

¹⁵⁰ God informed Adam that he was formed in His image.

¹⁵¹ The Torah.

FIFTEEN

All¹⁵² is foreseen, freedom of choice¹⁵³ has been granted, and according to goodness¹⁵⁴ is the world judged. Everything is in accordance with most¹⁵⁵ works.

טו הכל צפוי, והרשות נתונה,
ובטוב העולם נדון. והכל לפי
רב המעשה:

All is known to God, and nothing done, even in secret, is hidden from Him. Paradoxically, Man has complete free-will to do whatever he wants, to choose right or wrong, to do good or bad. ♦ In fact, if it were not within Man's power to do evil, were sin to hold no charms for him, indeed, Man would then not be human at all. ♦ God judges us for our choices. If, by and large, we do good and observe His commandments, He will be merciful with us.

¹⁵² Rebbe Akiva here continues.

¹⁵³ Although all is foreseen, Man has been granted free-will to choose to do good or evil.

¹⁵⁴ In God's goodness and His mercy.

¹⁵⁵ Man is rewarded by the majority of his good deeds.

SIXTEEN

He¹⁵⁶ was wont to say, "Everything is given on account¹⁵⁷, and a net has been spread over all of life¹⁵⁸. The store is open¹⁵⁹, the shopkeeper extends credit, the ledger is open, and the hand records therein. Anyone who wishes to borrow can come and borrow, but the collectors come out everyday and demand their due, whether they the people are aware of it or not. They¹⁶⁰ have upon what to rely when exacting payment. The law is just, and everything has been prepared for the banquet¹⁶¹."

טז הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, הַכֹּל נָתוּן בְּעֶרְבוֹן, וּמִצּוּדָה פְּרוּסָה עַל כָּל הַחַיִּים. הַחֲנוּת פְּתוּחָה, וְהַחֲנוּנִי מְקִיף, וְהַפְּנִקָּס פְּתוּחָה, וְהַיָּד כּוֹתֶבֶת, וְכָל הָרוּצָה לְלוֹת יָבוֹא וְיִלְוֶה, וְהַגְּבָאִים מְחִזְרִים תְּדִיר בְּכָל יוֹם, וְנִפְרָעִין מִן הָאָדָם מִדַּעְתּוֹ וְשֵׁלָא מִדַּעְתּוֹ, וַיֵּשׁ לָהֶם עַל מַה שְּׂיִסְמוּכוּ, וְהַדִּין דִּין אֱמֶת, וְהַכֹּל מִתְקַן לְסַעוּדָה:

Life is on loan, and God can reclaim it whenever He wants. ♦ We are like fish in a sea and the net of affliction and death has already been spread before us. It can scoop us up at any moment without notice or perception. But since we have free-will and we can choose to do good or bad, and make ourselves wholesome or polluted as we wish, we can escape the net by making the right choices. ♦ We can live a life of moderation or one of lack of restraint. ♦ Life is like an open store. We come in and take what we need and want. The storekeeper trusts his customers, but also records everything they take. Even when he is extremely busy, he still records everything. At the end of the day, everyone has to pay. ♦ Life is like taking an easy loan. We can borrow however much we like. But, the lender's collectors always turn up, usually without any warning, and demand payment. They can be very agonizing. This refers to the agents of God: illness and affliction. ♦ Sometimes the borrower remembers his debts and admits to them. But, sometimes he has long-forgotten them and cries out, "Injustice!". Nevertheless, the lender never forgets and always acts judiciously and righteously. ♦ Those who pay their debts will ultimately be rewarded, if not in this world then in the World to Come, while those from whom payment was not obtained in this world, will be made to pay in the World to Come.

¹⁵⁶ Rebbe Akiva.

¹⁵⁷ All man has been giving is on loan, and he will have to make an accounting as to what he did with it all.

¹⁵⁸ Man is trapped like a fish in a net.

¹⁵⁹ The world and all of life's pleasures are available to him.

¹⁶⁰ The collectors. All is written in the ledger.

¹⁶¹ Awaiting the righteous ones in the World to Come.

SEVENTEEN

Rebbe Elazar ben Azariah said, "Without Torah¹⁶², there is no Derech Eretz¹⁶³. Without Derech Eretz, there is no Torah. Without wisdom, there is no fear. Without fear¹⁶⁴, there is no wisdom. Without understanding¹⁶⁵, there is no knowledge. Without knowledge, there is no understanding. Without flour¹⁶⁶, there is no Torah. Without Torah¹⁶⁷, there is no flour." He was wont to say, "The one whose wisdom exceeds his deeds is comparable with a tree which has many branches, but few roots. Comes a wind, and the tree is uprooted and upended, as it says (Jeremiah 17): *'He is like a solitary tree in the desert, and does not see when goodness comes; he lives on the parched soil in the wilderness, a salt-saturated and uninhabitable land.* However, if his deeds exceed his wisdom, we compare him to a tree whose branches are few, but has many roots. Of him it is written there, *'He is like a tree planted by the waters which spreads out its roots toward the stream for water; he does not sense the heat, and his leaves remain fresh; he is not troubled in a year of drought, neither does he cease to bear fruit'*".

יז רבי אלעזר בן עזריה אומר, אם אין תורה, אין דרך ארץ. אם אין דרך ארץ, אין תורה. אם אין חכמה, אין יראה. אם אין יראה, אין חכמה. אם אין בינה, אין דעת. אם אין דעת, אין בינה. אם אין קמת, אין תורה. אם אין תורה, אין קמת. הוא היה אומר, כל שחכמתו מרבה ממעשיו, למה הוא דומה, לאילן שענפיו מרבין ושרשיו מעטין, והרוח באה ועוקרתו והופכתו על פניו, שנאמר (ירמיה יז), והיה כעדר ער בערבה ולא יראה כי יבוא טוב ושכן חררים במדבר ארץ מלחה ולא תשב. אבל כל שמעשיו מרבין מחכמתו, למה הוא דומה, לאילן שענפיו מעטין ושרשיו מרבין, שאפלו כל הרוחות שבעולם באות ונושבות בו אין מזיזין אותו ממקומו, שנאמר (שם), והיה כעץ שתול על מים ועל יובל ישלח שרשיו ולא יראה כי יבא חם, והיה עלהו רענן, ובשנת בצורת לא ידאג, ולא ימיש מעשות פרי:

¹⁶² Without assigning Torah a place of importance.

¹⁶³ Correct and ethical behavior.

¹⁶⁴ Of sin.

¹⁶⁵ Analyses.

¹⁶⁶ Food, sustenance.

¹⁶⁷ What is life without Torah?

PIRKEI AVOS - SYNTHESIZED

Without Torah, there is no “Derech Eretz” - an orderly way of life – and there is no civilization or society. Without “Derech Eretz”, there is no Torah. ♦ Torah cannot truly exist in person who does not have exemplary personal attributes, faultless morality, and impeccable behavior. ♦ Without wisdom, there is no fear of Heaven. Without fear of Heaven, there is no wisdom. ♦ Without understanding, that is, the ability to analyze issues and draw inferences and conclusions, there is no knowledge. Without knowledge, that is, the ability to synthesize concepts, there is no understanding. ♦ Without sustenance, there is no Torah. Without Torah, there is no sustenance.

We can compare the one whose wisdom exceeds his deeds to a tree with many branches, but few roots. One swift wind and he is toppled. While the one whose deeds exceed his wisdom can be compared to a tree with few branches but many roots. No wind in the world can uproot him.

EIGHTEEN

Rebbe Eliezer ben Chisma said, "The laws governing Kinin¹⁶⁸ and Niddah¹⁶⁹ are the really, true essences of the Halacha, whereas astronomy and numerologies are mere tantalizations to wisdom."

יח רבי אליעזר בן חסמא
אומר, קנין ופתיחי נדה, הן הן
גופי הלכות. תקופות
וגמטריאות, פרפראות להקמה:

The minutiae of the Halacha are the essence of the Halacha. It is the observance of these details for which one receives reward. ♦ However, subjects such as star-gazing (tracking the Zodiac, calculating the equinoxes) and numerology are of lesser importance. Entertaining, but not very useful in and of themselves for most people, although they can bring a person to the more serious topics of Halacha. ♦ Nevertheless, both these topics do require an understanding of mathematics which sharpens the mind.

¹⁶⁸ The stringent laws governing bird-sacrifices and doubts about them.

¹⁶⁹ The menstruant.



CHAPTER 4



ONE

Ben Zoma said, "Who is wise? He who learns from all people, as it says (Psalms 119), '*From all my teachers, I have gained understanding; while Your testimonies are my pursuits.*' Who is courageous? He who controls his impulses, as it says (Proverbs 16), '*Better is the one who holds back his anger than the strong man; better the one who rules over his spirit than the one who captures a city.*' Who is rich? He who is content with his portion¹⁷⁰, as it says (Psalms 128), '*When you enjoy the work of your hands, you shall be content, and it shall be good for you.*' 'Well with you' – in this world; 'good for you' in the World to Come. Who is respected? He who respects other people, as it says (I Samuel 2), '*Those who honor me, I honor, but those who despise me, shall be held in contempt.*'"

א בן זומא אומר, איזהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם, שנאמר (תהלים קיט), מכל מלמדי השכלתי כי עדותיה שוהה לי. איזהו גבור, הכובש את יצרו, שנאמר (משלי טז), טוב ארך אפים מגבור ומשל ברוחו מלכד עיר. איזהו עשיר השמח בחלקו, שנאמר (תהלים קכח), גיע בפיה כי תאכל אשריה וטוב לך. אשריה, בעולם הזה. וטוב לך, לעולם הבא. איזהו מכבד, המכבד את הבריות, שנאמר (שמואל א ב), כי מכבדי אכבד ובזי יקלו:

Who is wise? The one who learns from everyone, including those who are lesser than he. ♦ Who is called wise? The one who loves and pursues wisdom. ♦ Pursue knowledge with the same vigor as you would if you were trying to retrieve a valuable object you lost. ♦ For any person can be more expert than he in at least one calling or pursuit and thus give him valuable practical information which he may then utilize for his study of the Law of God. ♦ Who is strong? The one who is

¹⁷⁰ He makes no effort to chase wealth.

PIRKEI AVOS - SYNTHESIZED

in control of his desires, and the one who does not anger. ♦ He who can subdue his passions is mightier than the bravest of warriors. ♦ **Who is rich? The one who is content with his portion** because the lust for money can never be satisfied. ♦ **Who is honorable? The one who respects others.** ♦ **God honors those who honor Him.**

TWO

Ben Azzai said, "Always run to do a simple Mitzvah (as you would to a more serious one), and flee from sin. For one Mitzvah tows with it another Mitzvah, and a sin drags with it another sin. For the reward of a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah, and the payment for a sin is a sin."

ב בֶּן אֲזַי אָמַר, הָרֵץ לְמִצְוָה קָלָה (כְּבִחְמוּרָה), וּבֹרַח מִן הָעֲבֵרָה. שְׂמִצְוָה גּוֹרֶרֶת מְצֹוֶה, וְעֲבֵרָה גּוֹרֶרֶת עֲבֵרָה. שְׂשֹׁכֵר מְצֹוֶה, מְצֹוֶה. וְשֹׁכֵר עֲבֵרָה, עֲבֵרָה:

Rush to perform an easy Mitzvah as you would a more difficult one, and flee from sin, because the reward for a Mitzvah is the opportunity to perform another Mitzvah, while the punishment for one sin is another sin. ♦ Sinning dulls the keen edge of moral judgment and weakens resistance to future evil. ♦ Committing sins is easy for people, and people enjoy most sins. ♦ Distancing from God may accelerate as one moves away from Him.

THREE

He was wont to say, "Do not disgrace anyone nor deem anything worthless since there is no one who does not have his moment nor is there anything that does not have its place."

ג הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אֵל תִּהְיֶה בִּז
לְכֹל אָדָם, וְאֵל תִּהְיֶה מִפְּלִיג
לְכֹל דְּבָר, שְׂאִין לָךְ אָדָם
שְׂאִין לוֹ שְׂעָה וְאִין לָךְ דְּבָר
שְׂאִין לוֹ מְקוֹם:

Never disgrace another person, and never divide people into higher and lower sects, because there is no person who does not have his moment, and there is no thing that does not have its place.

FOUR

Rebbe Levitas of Yavne said, "Be of exceedingly humble spirit since the 'hope' of every human is the maggot." Rebbe Yochanan ben Beroka said, "Anyone who disgraces the Name of Heaven in secret shall be paid back in public; whether he desecrated the Name intentionally or even by accident."

ד רבי לויטס איש יבנה
 אומר, מאד מאד הוי שפל
 רוח, שתקות אנוש רמה. רבי
 יוחנן בן ברוקא אומר, כל
 המחיל שם שמים בסתר,
 נפרעין ממנו בגלוי. אחד שוגג
 ואחד מזיד בחלול השם:

Unlike all other attributes where a person should attempt to find the middle ground, regarding humility, one must be exceptionally humble and modest, for nothing is more despicable and repugnant than pride, conceit and arrogance. Since egotism is a common problem, we must be very wary of it. ♦ What are we, after all? In the end, the worms are waiting for us, and we will decay.

Whoever disgraces the Name of Heaven in private by secretly sinning surmising that no one will find out about it, will ultimately be exposed. ♦ Actually, people like to boast to others of their sins as an arrogant show of defiance of Heaven. ♦ It makes no difference if his desecration is intentional or not, because no one is excused from being cognizant of the fact that there is a God who is everywhere and who sees and hears everything.

FIVE

Rebbe Yishmael his son¹⁷¹ said, "Anyone who learns Torah to teach it, shall be given the opportunity to both learn and teach. Anyone who learns in order to put it into practice, shall be given the opportunity to learn, teach, observe¹⁷² and do." Rebbe Tzodok said¹⁷³, "Do not make them¹⁷⁴ a coronet in order to elevate¹⁷⁵ yourself nor a spade with which to dig." And so would Hillel say, "He who makes use of the crown of Torah shall pass away." From here we learn that anyone who personally benefits from the words of Torah removes his existence from the world.

ה רבי ישמעאל בנו אומר, הלומד תורה על מנת ללמד, מספיקין בידו ללמוד וללמד. והלומד על מנת לעשות, מספיקין בידו ללמוד וללמד לשמור ולעשות. רבי צדוק אומר, אל תעשים עטרה להתגדל בהם, ולא קרדם לחפור בהם. וכך היה הלל אומר, ודאשתמש בתגא, חלף. הא למדת, כל הנהנה מדברי תורה, נוטל חייו מן העולם:

Whoever learns in order to teach, will be given the opportunity to both learn and teach. However, the one who learns in order to do, will be given the opportunity to learn, teach, observe and do; and he will be protected from sinning.

(Never set yourself apart from the community and do not act as counsel to the judges.) Never learn Torah so that people will call you rabbi or for the honor or to be able to rule over others. Nor should you learn Torah because you think that that will lead to a good job.

Anyone who ascends by means of the Crown of Torah does the opposite from the intention of God. God intended Man to be subservient to Torah, not that Torah be subservient to Man. ♦ From this we learn that anyone who benefits from the Torah removes himself from this world.

¹⁷¹ [His son or the son of Rabbi Yosse – RB].

¹⁷² The Mitzvoths.

¹⁷³ [Some additions of the Mishna add: כוערכי הדיינין ואל תעש עצמך כוערש מן הציבור – Do not set yourself apart from the community and do not act as a counsel of the judges. –RB].

¹⁷⁴ Words of Torah.

¹⁷⁵ Boast about.

SIX

Rebbe Yosse said, "Anyone who honors the Torah shall himself be honored by people. Anyone who desecrates the Torah shall himself be debased by other people."

ו רַבִּי יוֹסֵי אָמַר, כָּל הַמְּכַבֵּד
אֶת הַתּוֹרָה, גּוֹפּוֹ מְכַבֵּד עַל
הַבְּרִיּוֹת. וְכָל הַמְּחַלֵּל אֶת
הַתּוֹרָה, גּוֹפּוֹ מְחַלֵּל עַל
הַבְּרִיּוֹת:

Whoever honors the Torah will himself be honored by others. ♦ Anyone who disgraces the Torah, will be disgraced. ♦ How should you honor the Torah? By escorting the Sefer Torah when it is being carried to and from the Ark, handling it with reverence, and listening intently when it is being read. Also, by showing that every letter of it has meaning, and that there is meaning even where the letters are missing.

SEVEN

Rebbe Yishmael his son said, "The one who hides himself from the judgment unyokes himself from enmity¹⁷⁶, thievery¹⁷⁷ and false oaths¹⁷⁸, while the one who boasts¹⁷⁹ of his decision-making is a fool, wicked and has a haughty spirit."

ז רַבִּי יִשְׁמָעֵאל בְּנוֹ אָמַר,
הַחֹשֶׂה עֲצָמוֹ מִן הַדִּין, פּוֹרֵק
מִמְנוֹ אֵיבָה וְגִזְלִים וְשִׁבוּעֵת שְׂוֵא.
וְהִגֵּס לְבוֹ בְּהוֹרָאָה, שׁוֹטֵה רָשָׁע
וְגַם רוּחַ:

He who shuns judicial office rids himself of hatred, robbery and perjury. ♦ The judge who brings the litigants to amicable compromise avoids having the losing litigant hate him for finding him guilty, stealing wrongfully by compelling him to pay, and causing unnecessary oath-taking. ♦ Here we are referring to one unfit to administer justice. ♦ Also, judges who issue complicated and convoluted judgments are fools, apathetic, and arrogant. ♦ This could also apply to those people who conceitedly deliver verdicts for themselves without going to a legitimate court for judgment.

¹⁷⁶ From the one he found guilty.

¹⁷⁷ For he may have found guilty the innocent one [who now has to pay his fellow], and would then himself be a thief.

¹⁷⁸ Obliging someone to take an oath. The man may then perjure himself and swear falsely.

¹⁷⁹ He is arrogant.

EIGHT

He was wont to say, "Do not judge by yourself for there is no single judge but One. Do not say¹⁸⁰, 'Accept my opinion' since they have free-will, and are not bound by you¹⁸¹."

ח הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, אֵל תִּהְיֶה דִּין יְחִידִי, שְׂאִין דִּין יְחִידִי אֵלָּא אֶחָד. וְאֵל תֵּאמַר קִבְּלוּ דַעְתִּי, שְׂהִן רְשָׁאִין וְלֹא אֶתְּהוּ:

Never be haughty, even if you are an expert in a topic nor think that you can adjudicate without consultation with others. For the only One Judge we have is God. ♦ A judge must never compel his fellow judges to accept his reasoning simply because it was he who invited the others to come together to judge with him. Rather, he must acquiesce to the final ruling of the majority. ♦ Everyone errs, even the greatest and sharpest of sages.

¹⁸⁰ To your fellow judges.

¹⁸¹ If they are the majority, they can compel you to accept their verdict.

NINE

Rebbe Yonoson said, "Anyone who observes the Torah when poor will ultimately observe it when rich, while anyone who fails to observe the Torah when rich will fail to observe it when poor."

ט רבי יונתן אומר, כל המקנים את התורה מעני, סופו לקיימה מעשר. וכל המבטל את התורה מעשר, סופו לבטלה מעני:

Whoever observes the Torah in poverty when he is troubled about his sustenance and is pressed for time and has always to look for work, will ultimately be able to observe the Torah in wealth and comfort. ♦ Anyone who violates the Torah when wealthy when he had the time to learn and observe the Commandments but failed to do so, will end up violating it in poverty and desperation.

TEN

Rebbe Meir said, "Reduce your involvement in business and engage yourself in Torah. Be of a lowly spirit before all men¹⁸². If you neglect and avoid Torah, you shall have a lot of 'avoidings'¹⁸³ to deal with. But, if you toil in Torah, He has much reward awaiting you."

י רבי מאיר אומר, הוי ממעט בעסק, ועסוק בתורה. והוי שפל רוח בפני כל אדם. ואם בטלת מן התורה, יש לך בטילים הרבה פנגודך. ואם עמלת בתורה, יש לך שכר הרבה לתן לך:

Engage in as little commerce and affairs of the world as is necessary. Rather spend most of your time learning Torah. ♦ Accustom yourself to a more modest standard of living than the social circles in which you move. ♦ Know that you can learn from everyone, even from someone who is much less learned than you. ♦ If you relax in your Torah-learning, you will subject yourself to many forces which will pull you further away from this task. But, if you toil in Torah, you will have an enormous reward. ♦ Your reward is commensurate with how hard you toiled in learning, and not for how much you actually learned.

¹⁸² Even someone smaller (lesser) than you.

¹⁸³ You will be confronted with many things which will prevent you from doing your task.

ELEVEN

Rebbe Eliezer ben Yaacov said, "When a person does one Mitzvah, he acquires an advocate, but when he commits a sin, he acquires an accuser. Repentance and good deeds are like shutters before punishments. Rebbe Yochanan HaSandler said, "Any congregation assembled for a holy purpose shall endure¹⁸⁴, while any group brought together not for the sake of Heaven shall not endure."

יֵאָדָם רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר בֶּן יַעֲקֹב
 אֹמֵר, הָעוֹשֶׂה מִצְוָה אַחַת, קוֹנֶה
 לוֹ פְּרֻקְלִיט אֶחָד. וְהַעוֹבֵר
 עֲבָרָה אַחַת, קוֹנֶה לוֹ קְטִיגוֹר
 אֶחָד. תְּשׁוּבָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים,
 כְּתָרִים בְּפָנֵי הַפְּרָעוֹת. רַבִּי
 יוֹחָנָן הַסַּנְדֵּלָר אֹמֵר, כָּל
 כְּנִסְיָה שֶׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, סוֹפָה
 לְהִתְקַיֵּם. וְשֵׁי אֵינָה לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם,
 אֵין סוֹפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם:

For every Mitzvah you perform in this world, you acquire an advocate in the World to Come. For every sin committed, you acquire an accuser. ♦ Repentance and good deeds safeguard against troubles. ♦ Sins are like shutters between Man and God. Repentance opens these barriers.

The decisions and recommendations of any group assembled for the purpose of Heaven will endure, while the pronouncements of gatherings not for the sake of Heaven will not survive. ♦ It is only a matter of time before ignobly-motivated assemblies disintegrate.

¹⁸⁴ Their endeavors will endure.

TWELVE

Rebbe Elazar ben Shamua said, "May the honor of your students be as dear to you as your own; may the honor of your fellow be like the reverence of your rebbe and may the reverence of your rebbe be like the fear of Heaven."

יב רבי אלעזר בן שמוע
אומר, יהי כבוד תלמידך
חביב עליך כשלך, וכבוד
חברך כמורא רבך, ומורא
רבך כמורא שמים:

The honor of your student should be as dear to you as your own honor. ♦ The honor of your friend should be the same as the honor you have for your teacher. ♦ The honor you have for your teacher should be the same as the reverence you have for Heaven. ♦ In our zeal to teach and discipline, we must never allow ourselves to degrade or injure the dignity of a disciple. We must not let the intimacy we have with our equals diminish our honor for them.

THIRTEEN

Rebbe Yehuda said, "Be careful in your learning¹⁸⁵ since any mistake¹⁸⁶ in learning shall be counted as intentional." Rebbe Shimon said, "There are three crowns: the crown of Torah, the crown of the priesthood and the crown of kingship. But the crown of a good name exceeds them all."

יג רבי יהודה אומר, הוי זהיר בתלמוד, ששגגת תלמוד עולה זדון. רבי שמעון אומר, שלשה כתרין הם, כתר תורה וכתר כהונה וכתר מלכות, וכתר שם טוב עולה על גביהן:

Be precise and investigative in your learning, because even inadvertent errors in learning are reckoned as intentional sins. ♦ Improper and superficial study or indifference when studying Torah is sinful.

Our Sages spoke of three crowns – the crown of Torah, the crown of the priesthood, and the crown of kingship. But there is actually a fourth one, the crown of a good name, which exceeds all the others. ♦ All the other three are without value unless they are linked with the crown of a good name. ♦ Not everyone can be a priest or a king, but everyone can learn Torah. ♦ It is of the greatest of achievements for a person to die having earned a “good name” during his life.

¹⁸⁵ Explaining and understanding the Halacha and instruction.

¹⁸⁶ One who errs in instruction because he did know the reason for a Halacha is considered as an intentional violator.

FOURTEEN

Rebbe Nehorai¹⁸⁷ said, "Rather you should be exiled¹⁸⁸ to a place where there is already Torah and do not say that it will follow you¹⁸⁹, and that your associates¹⁹⁰ will establish it in your possession¹⁹¹; and do not rely upon your own understanding¹⁹²."

יֵד רַבִּי נְהוֹרַאי אוֹמֵר, הָיִי גוֹלָה לְמָקוֹם תּוֹרָה וְאַל תֵּאמַר שְׂהִיָּא תְּבוּאָא אַחֲרֵיךָ, שְׂחַבְרֵיךָ יְקַיְמוּהָ בְּיָדְךָ. וְאַל בִּינְתָךְ אֵל תִּשְׁעֵן:

Move only to a place where there is an existing Torah community, one with an indigenous population of Torah scholars, even at the sacrifice of living somewhere you would have a better income. ♦ Don't assume that if you are the first in a new place others will follow and build a community around you, even if you are a top scholar yourself. ♦ Seek out a place where the Torah is diligently studied, even if it means leaving your home that you love. Whatever skill you have will grow and survive only if you associate with people of similar interests. If you lack such companionship, your talent - in this instance the knowledge of Torah - will eventually atrophy.

¹⁸⁷ [Rabbi Elazar ben Arach – Rashi].

¹⁸⁸ Move to a place where there are scholars from whom you can learn Torah.

¹⁸⁹ 'I shall wait for Torah here, and a rabbi will come to me.'

¹⁹⁰ Who left you to learn.

¹⁹¹ [A difficult phrase. R' Pinchas Kahati in his commentary, quoting the Meiri, says that this means that you will have to ask your colleagues, who did go to a place of Torah, your questions since they learned on your behalf, as it were, and they will then have to explain things to you. Rather, you should go to a place of Torah to learn it yourself, directly from the rabbis, and not have to rely on the 'students'. -RB]

¹⁹² Saying that I understand things myself, and I do not need a rabbi.

FIFTEEN

Rebbe Yannai said, "We cannot comprehend why the wicked are calm¹⁹³ nor why the righteous are afflicted¹⁹⁴." Rebbe Masya¹⁹⁵ ben Chorosh said, "Always be the first to greet other people. Rather be a tail to the lions than the head of the foxes."

טו רבי ינאי אומר, אין בְּיָדֵינוּ לֹא מַשְׁלוֹת הַרְשָׁעִים וְאֵף לֹא מִיְסוּרֵי הַצְּדִיקִים. רבי מתנא בן חרש אומר, הוי מקדים בשלום כל אדם. והוי זנב לאריות, ואל תהי ראש לשועלים:

We are unable to fathom why the wicked succeed in this world and continue to flourish, while the righteous suffer. This is surely one of the greatest enigmas of life. ♦ To determine the relationship between the visible fate of a man and his moral worthiness or lack thereof is utterly beyond our power. We do not have sufficient insight either to determine a person's moral worth or worthlessness, or to judge where that which befalls him is indeed a blessing or a calamity.

Always be the first to extend greetings to everyone, but everyone. ♦ Better to be the tail to lions than the head of foxes. That is, it is better for someone to be the follower of great and learned people than the leader of lesser people. After all, the tail of a lion is still part of the lion, while the head of a fox is a part of the fox. ♦ Seek the company of those who are superior to you both spiritually and morally even though you would occupy an inferior position in their midst and would have to submit to their guidance.

¹⁹³ Have it easy.

¹⁹⁴ They suffer.

¹⁹⁵ [or Matisyoh or Matisyohu – RB]

SIXTEEN

Rebbe Yaacov said, "This world can be compared to an antechamber to the World to Come. Therefore, prepare yourself¹⁹⁶ in the antechamber so that you can enter the banquet hall."

טז רבי יעקב אומר, העולם הזה דומה לפרוזדור בפני העולם הבא. התקן עצמך בפרוזדור, כדי שתכניס לטרקלין:

This world is like a corridor leading to the World to Come. Prepare yourself in the hallway in order that you can enter the throne room of the king.

¹⁹⁶ With good deeds.

SEVENTEEN

He¹⁹⁷ was wont to say, "Better one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than a lifetime in the World to Come¹⁹⁸. Better one hour of spiritual contentment in the World to Come than a lifetime in this world."

יז הוא הִיָּה אֹמֵר, יָפָה שָׁעָה אַחַת בְּתְשׁוּבָה וּמַעֲשֵׂים טוֹבִים בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה, מִכָּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְיָפָה שָׁעָה אַחַת שֶׁל קוֹרֵת רוּחַ בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא, מִכָּל חַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה:

Better one hour of repentance and doing good deeds in this world than life in the World to Come. ♦ This world is where we prepare ourselves by faithfully discharging our physical, moral and spiritual tasks. What was not attained here cannot be made up in the Next World. ♦ The World to Come is a place of blissful happiness. All the joys and pleasures which even the longest lifetime on earth could afford cannot outweigh even one single hour of spiritual satisfaction such as is found in the World to Come.

¹⁹⁷ [Rebbe Yaacov - RB].

¹⁹⁸ In the World to Come, no one can repent nor perform good deeds.

EIGHTEEN

Rebbe Shimon ben Elazar said, "Make no attempt to placate your friend in the hour of his anger¹⁹⁹; do not try to comfort a person when his dead lies before him²⁰⁰; do not discuss the matter with someone at the time he made a vow²⁰¹; and do not visit someone at the moment of his defeat²⁰²."

יח רבי שמעון בן אֶלְעָזָר
אומר, אל תרצה את חברך
בשעת כעסו, ואל תנחמונו
בשעה שמתו מטל לפניו, ואל
תשאַל לו בשעת נדרו, ואל
תשתדל לראותו בשעת
קלקלתו:

Make no attempt to pacify an angry man. ♦ Do not console someone who is at the height of his mourning, because at that moment he expects you to mourn with him and not help him rationalize his loss. ♦ Do not try to help someone find a way out of his vow at a time when he is highly intent on fulfilling that vow. Your attempt will only backfire and strengthen his resolve. ♦ Good intentions alone are an insufficient excuse and justification for all things. Consider the timing. ♦ Avoid looking at someone when he is sinning for this will only shame him. ♦ Do not go out of your way to visit someone who suffered something unpleasant if you know that he would rather remain alone and unseen in his distress.

¹⁹⁹ He will reject your attempt to soothe him.

²⁰⁰ Wait until after the burial.

²⁰¹ Even if you try to release him from his vow by finding some sort of loophole for him, at the moment he made it, he will reject your efforts saying he is determined to keep it anyway.

²⁰² Just when he failed, and is most embarrassed.

NINETEEN

Shmuel Hakoton said²⁰³ (Proverbs 24), "*Do not be jubilant when your enemy falters nor rejoice when he fails. God sees you, and this that you do is bad in His eyes, and He shall rescind His anger from your fellow*".

יט שְׂמוֹאֵל הַקָּטָן אוֹמֵר, (משלי כד) בְּנִפְלֵ אוֹיְבֶיךָ אַל תִּשְׂמַח וּבְכַשְׁלוֹ אַל יִגַּל לְבָבְךָ, פֶּן יִרְאֶה יְיָ וְרַע בְּעֵינָיו וְהִשִּׁיב מֵעַלְיוֹ אָפוֹ:

Do not rejoice in your enemy's downfall nor glee in his failings. God sees you, and this is evil in His eyes, and He will be angry with you.

²⁰³ He was accustomed to saying these verses.

TWENTY

Elisha ben Avuyah said, "Teaching a child is compared to writing on a new, blank sheet of paper²⁰⁴, whereas teaching a mature person is like writing on an erased sheet of paper." Rebbe Yose bar Yehuda from Kfar Bavli²⁰⁵ said, "One who learns from children is compared to someone who eats unripened grapes and drinks wine from the winepress, whereas the one who learns from the elders is compared to one who eats fully-ripened grapes and drinks old wine." Rebbe²⁰⁶ said, "Do not look at the jug, but what is in it. There are new containers with old wine, and old ones which are empty".

כ אֲלִישֶׁע בֶּן אֲבוּיָה אָמַר, הַלּוֹמֵד יֶלֶד לְמָה הוּא דוֹמֶה, לְדִיו כְּתוּבָה עַל נִיר חָדָשׁ. וְהַלּוֹמֵד זָקֵן לְמָה הוּא דוֹמֶה, לְדִיו כְּתוּבָה עַל נִיר מְחֻוּק. רַבִּי יוֹסִי בַר יְהוּדָה אִישׁ כִּפּוּר הִבְבִּילִי אָמַר, הַלּוֹמֵד מִן הַקִּטְנִים לְמָה הוּא דוֹמֶה, לְאוֹכֵל עֲנָבִים קְהוּת וְשׁוֹתָה יַיִן מִגְתּוֹ. וְהַלּוֹמֵד מִן הַזְּקֵנִים לְמָה הוּא דוֹמֶה, לְאוֹכֵל עֲנָבִים בְּשׁוּלוֹת וְשׁוֹתָה יַיִן יָשָׁן. רַבִּי אָמַר, אַל תִּסְתַּכֵּל בְּקַנְקָן, אֲלָא בְּמָה שֶׁישׁ בּוֹ. יֵשׁ קַנְקָן חָדָשׁ מְלֵא יָשָׁן, וְיָשָׁן שְׂאֵפְלוֹ חָדָשׁ אֵין בּוֹ:

To what can we compare the teaching of children? To writing on a blank sheet of paper. To what can we compare the teaching of an older person? To writing on a page which had been erased. ♦ Old minds are prejudiced and not easily impressed.

To what can we compare someone who learns from children? To someone who eats unripe grapes and drinks wine directly from the winepress, that is, its processing is incomplete. ♦ To what can we compare someone who learns from an old person? To someone who eats ripened grapes, and drinks mature, mellowed wine.

Don't look at the container, rather look at its contents. There are new containers filled with old wine, and old containers which do not have even a little something new inside. ♦ Rabbi Meir modifies the previous Mishna saying that that rule is not universally applicable. Some young minds are mature, while some old ones are not.

²⁰⁴ It makes a permanent impression.

²⁰⁵ Near Sidon.

²⁰⁶ Rebbe Yehuda HaNassi [or Rebbe Meir – RB].

TWENTY-ONE

Rebbe Elazar HaKapor said, "Envy, lust and a desire for honor remove a person from the world".

כא רבי אֶלְעָזָר הַקָּפֶר אָמַר,
הַקְּנָאָה וְהַתְּאֹהָה וְהַכְּבוֹד
מוֹצִיאִין אֶת הָאָדָם מִן הָעוֹלָם:

Envy of the success of sinners, desire for physical pleasures, and the pursuit of personal honor remove a person from this world. These are the sources for almost all the sins in the world. ♦ Envy leads to thievery, desire for pleasure leads to eating wrong foods and the engaging in immoral sexual unions, and the pursuit of honor leads to pride, disputes, and humiliation.

TWENTY-TWO

He²⁰⁷ was wont to say, "All who are born²⁰⁸ will die, the dead will be resurrected²⁰⁹, and all living beings will be judged. Know, inform²¹⁰ and contemplate that He is God, He is the fashioner, He is the creator, He understands²¹¹, He is the judge²¹², He is the witness, He is the prosecuter, and He will judge. Blessed be He that there is no injustice, no forgetting, no partiality, and no bribery; for everything is His²¹³. Everything is done in accordance with the accounting²¹⁴ and do not trust your inclination²¹⁵, since the grave is surely your refuge. For against your will were you created (and against your will you were born), and against your will you live, and against your will you will die, and against your will will you have to give a full reckoning and accounting before the King of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."

כב הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, הַיְלֹוּדִים לָמוֹת, וְהַחַיִּים לְדִין, וְהַחַיִּים לְהוֹדִיעַ וְלְהוֹדֵעַ שֶׁהוּא אֵל, הוּא הַיּוֹצֵר, הוּא הַבּוֹרֵא, הוּא הַמְבַּיֵן, הוּא הַדֹּיֵן, הוּא הַבֹּעֵל דֵּין, וְהוּא עֹתִיד לְדוֹן. בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שְׂאִין לְפָנָיו לֹא עוֹלָה וְלֹא שְׂכָחָה וְלֹא מִשּׂוּא פָּנִים וְלֹא מִקַּח שוֹחֵד, שֶׁהַכֹּל שְׁלוֹ. וְדַע שֶׁהַכֹּל לְפִי הַחֲשָׁבוֹן. וְאֵל יִבְטִיחֶךָ וְיִצְרֶךָ שֶׁהַשְּׂאוֹל בֵּית מְנוּס לָךְ, שֶׁעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֵתָּה נוֹצֵר, (וְעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֵתָּה נוֹלָד), וְעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֵתָּה חַי, וְעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֵתָּה מֵת, וְעַל כְּרַחֲךָ אֵתָּה עֹתִיד לְתֵן דֵּין וְחֲשָׁבוֹן לְפָנָי מִלְּךָ מַלְכֵי הַמְּלָכִים הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא:

²⁰⁷ Rebbe Elazar HaKapor.
²⁰⁸ Everyone.
²⁰⁹ At the time of the Resurrection.
²¹⁰ Everyone must learn for himself and teach others.
²¹¹ What everyone does.
²¹² The only judge.
²¹³ And with what can you possibly bribe Him?
²¹⁴ Of Mitzvochs and good deeds.
²¹⁵ [Deceiving you that all will be well -RB].

PIRKEI AVOS - SYNTHESIZED

We were all born to die, but those who have died will be resurrected. ♦
Everyone will be judged. ♦ In the end, everyone will know there is the one God who is fashioner, creator, and all-knowing. He is judge, witness, and prosecutor. And He will judge. ♦ A human being may be formed and fashioned but, unlike a vessel, he is never “finished”. ♦ God’s verdict is just. ♦ All is revealed before Him. ♦ No one is absolved of being judged. ♦ He takes no bribes. This refers to someone who might “offer” God the performance of a Mitzvah in return for erasing a sin. Rather, He rewards for each Mitzvah and punishes for each sin. ♦ Everything is His. ♦ All sins, small and large, will be accounted for and the sinner punished. Don’t be tempted by your evil inclination which argues that with death all will be forgiven. ♦ You were created against your will, you were born against your will, you live against your will, you will die against your will, and you will give accounting for your deeds before the King of Kings, blessed be He.



CHAPTER 5



ONE

The world was created with ten sayings²¹⁶. What do we learn from this since the world could have been created in one utterance? It was done this way in order to emphatically penalize the wicked who destroy the world, which was create in ten sayings, and well-reward the righteous²¹⁷ who sustain the world, which was created with ten sayings.

א בַּעֲשָׂרָה מְאָמְרוֹת נִבְרָא
הָעוֹלָם. וּמָה תִּלְמוּד לֹוֹמֵר,
וְהֵלֵא בְּמֵאֵמֶר אֶחָד יִכּוֹל
לְהַבְרִיאוֹת, אֶלָּא לְהַפְרֵעַ מִן
הָרְשָׁעִים שְׂמֵאֲבָדִין אֶת הָעוֹלָם
שֶׁנִּבְרָא בַּעֲשָׂרָה מְאָמְרוֹת, וְלִתֵּן
שָׂכָר טוֹב לְצַדִּיקִים שְׂמִקְיָמִין
אֶת הָעוֹלָם שֶׁנִּבְרָא בַּעֲשָׂרָה
מְאָמְרוֹת:

God created the world with ten utterances such as, “Let there be light”. Ten and not one, so that those who destroy the world will be punished tenfold and the righteous who uphold the world will be rewarded tenfold. ♦ Who destroys the world? Anyone who kills a person. ♦ God made such an effort to create this world, and this one destroys it with one criminal act. ♦ Creation with a single utterance would have fixed Man on the same plane with that of all the other works of creation. Man is the final work of creation, the goal and summit of the whole, in whom all of creation culminates.

²¹⁶ Ten commands.

²¹⁷ In whose merit the world is sustained.

PIRKEI AVOS - SYNTHESIZED

The ten sayings were:

1. Breishis – “Creation!”
2. “Let there be light”.
3. “Let there be a firmament”.
4. “Let the waters gather”.
5. “Let there be vegetation”.
6. “Let there be sources of light”.
7. “Let the waters be swarming with life”.
8. “Let the land bring forth life”.
9. “Let us make Man”.
10. “Behold, I have given you...”

Then God said to all, “Be fruitful and multiply”.

TWO

The reason there were ten generations²¹⁸ from Adam to Noah was in order to inform us of how patient God is, for each generation constantly irritated Him until He finally brought upon them the waters of the flood. There were ten generations²¹⁹ from Noah to Abraham in order to inform us how patient He is, for each generation continuously angered Him, until Abraham came and reaped the reward due all of them.

ב עֲשָׂרָה דוֹרוֹת מֵאָדָם וְעַד
 נח, לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה אַרְךְ אַפַּיִם
 לְפָנָיו, שְׁכַל הַדּוֹרוֹת הָיוּ
 מְכַעֲסִין וּבְאֵין עַד שֶׁהֵבִיא
 עֲלֵיהֶם אֶת מֵי הַמַּבּוּל. עֲשָׂרָה
 דוֹרוֹת מִנּוֹחַ וְעַד אַבְרָהָם,
 לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה אַרְךְ אַפַּיִם
 לְפָנָיו, שְׁכַל הַדּוֹרוֹת הָיוּ
 מְכַעֲסִין וּבְאֵין, עַד שֶׁבָּא
 אַבְרָהָם וְקִבֵּל (עָלָיו) שְׂכָר
 כָּלֵם:

There were ten generations from Adam to Noah in order to teach how patient God was with Man, and how slowly He angered with Man, until He brought the Flood. ♦ His patience allowed them time to repent.

There were ten generations from Noah to Abraham in order to teach how patient God was with them, even though they angered Him. Abraham then came and received all their rewards. That is, Abraham did all the good they should have done in this world and was rewarded in the Next World with the rewards they all should have received. ♦ Abraham saved the world from destruction.

²¹⁸ As enumerated in Genesis Chapter 5.

²¹⁹ As enumerated in Genesis Chapter 11, verses 10-26.

THREE

Abraham, our Patriarch, may peace be upon him, was tested ten times and withstood each one, in order to inform us how beloved was Abraham, our Patriarch, may peace be upon him²²⁰.

ג עֲשָׂרָה נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִתְנָסָה
אֲבִרָהֶם אָבִינוּ עָלָיו הַשָּׁלוֹם
וְעַמֵּד בְּכֻלָּם, לְהוֹדִיעַ כְּמָה
חֶבְתוֹ שֶׁל אֲבִרָהֶם אָבִינוּ עָלָיו
הַשָּׁלוֹם:

Abraham was tested ten times, and passed each one of them. God did this to prove how much he loved Abraham, for then God could reward Abraham ten times.

The ten tests were (the Rambam lists those marked with an *):

1. The furnace he was tossed into in Ur Casdim by Nimrod.
2. Leaving his homeland and family*.
3. The famine*.
4. Marrying Pharaoh's daughter Hagar.
5. The war of the kings*.
6. He was shown prophetically that his descendents would be slaves.
7. His circumcision*.
8. Avimelech's abduction of Sarah*.
9. Evicting Hagar* and Ishmael*.
10. The binding of Isaac*.

Another version substitutes Pharaoh's abducting Sarah*, and lists divorcing Hagar and evicting Ishmael as two separate tests, and does not count the furnace (1.) and the prophecy of slaves (6.).

²²⁰ By God.

PIRKEI AVOS - SYNTHESIZED

The Gra has the following list:

1. When Abraham, our forefather, was born, all the mighty ones in the kingship wished to kill him. So they buried him in the ground for thirteen years, and he did not see sunlight or moonlight that entire time.
2. He was captive for ten years and then thrown into the furnace, as it says, "*As you were taken from Ur Casdim*", meaning the furnace of Casdim.
3. Leaving his home and homeland.
4. The famine.
5. The taking of Sarah.
6. The war of the kings.
7. When God told Abram in a vision not to fear for He is his shield.
8. His circumcision.
9. When he evicted Hagar and Ishmael.
10. The binding of Isaac.

FOUR

Ten miracles in Egypt and ten on the sea were performed on behalf of our forefathers. The Holy One, blessed be He, brought ten plagues down on the Egyptians and ten on the sea. With ten trials did our forefathers try God, blessed be He, in the wilderness, as it says (Numbers 14), "*And they tested me ten times, and they did not listen to My voice.*"

ד עֲשָׂרָה נִסִּים נִעֲשׂוּ
 לְאַבְוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם וְעֲשָׂרָה עַל
 הַיָּם. עֲשָׂר מִכּוֹת הָבִיא הַקָּדוֹשׁ
 בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל הַמִּצְרַיִם
 בְּמִצְרַיִם וְעֲשָׂר עַל הַיָּם. עֲשָׂרָה
 נִסְיוֹנוֹת נִסּוּ אַבְוֹתֵינוּ אֶת
 הַמָּקוֹם בְּרוּךְ הוּא בַּמִּדְבָּר,
 שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (במדבר יד), וַיִּנְסוּ אֹתִי
 זֶה עֲשָׂר פְּעָמִים וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ
 בְּקוֹלִי:

There were ten miracles in Egypt and ten on the sea. ♦ The ten miracles on the sea were:

1. The sea split.
2. The waters formed a protective tent for the people.
3. The sea-floor dried and hardened so that the people could pass without sinking in mud.
4. When the pursuing Egyptians came, the sea-floor reverted to a slippery mire.
5. The sea-floor became like small, decorative tiles.
6. The sea-walls became hard like stone.
7. There were twelve separate gaps, one for each tribe.
8. The sea-walls were transparent and jewel-like; the light of the Pillar of Fire was visible to all.
9. The waters were sweet and drinkable.
10. The waters they did not drink froze in place.

PIRKEI AVOS - SYNTHESIZED

God brought ten plagues on the Egyptians in Egypt and ten plagues on the sea.

◆ The ten miracles in Egypt were that we were saved from the ten plagues. ◆

The ten plagues in Egypt were:

1. Blood.
2. Frogs.
3. Lice.
4. Beasts.
5. Disease.
6. Boils.
7. Hail.
8. Locusts.
9. Darkness.
10. The death of the first-born.

The ten plagues on the sea were:

1. The horses and their riders were thrown into the waters.
2. Pharaoh's chariots and the host were cast in the sea.
3. The choicest Egyptians drowned.
4. The flood-waters covered them.
5. They sunk into the depths like a stone.
6. God's Right Hand shattered them.
7. Those who rose up against God were thrown down.
8. God sent forth His glowing wrath and consumed them like straw.
9. The sea enveloped them.
10. They sank like lead in mighty waters.

The ten times our forefathers tested God because of their lack of trust in Him in the desert where, given its natural desolation, they assumed that God had abandoned them. In accordance with the Rambam, these were at:

1. The Reed Sea regarding their leaving a comfortable life in Egypt for the desert (Ex. 14:11).
2. Marah in the wilderness where the waters were bitter and undrinkable (Ex. 15:24).
3. The Sin Desert, also about leaving Egypt for the desert (Ex. 16:2).
4. (Ex. 16:20) and
5. (16:27) regarding the Manna.
6. Refidim regarding a lack of drinking water (Ex. 17:2).
7. Chorev (with the Golden Calf).
8. Taberah (Numbers 11:1) and

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9. Kivros HaTaava (11:4) complaining about the good food they miss from Egypt.
10. The Paran Desert upon hearing the report of the spies (Numbers 14:2).

Unlike other codes of religious law, the Jewish “religion” and Jewish Law did not originate *within* the people but were handed to it from *without* – from God.

FIVE

Ten miracles were performed for our forefathers in the Temple. No woman ever miscarried because of the aroma of the sacrificial meat; no holy sacrificial meat ever had a foul smell; no fly was ever seen in the Temple butchery; the High Priest never experienced a nocturnal emission on Yom Kippur; rains never extinguished the burning pyre on top of the Altar; no wind ever overpowered the smoke column rising from the Altar; no disqualification was ever found in the Omer²²¹ or with the Two Loaves²²² or with the Shewbread²²³; people would stand closely bunched up, yet still had plenty of room to bow down; no snake or scorpion ever injured anyone in Jerusalem; and no one ever said to his fellow, "This place is too crowded for me to stay overnight in Jerusalem".

ה עֲשָׂרָה נִסִּים נִעֲשׂוּ
 לְאַבוֹתֵינוּ בְּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ. לֹא
 הָפִילָה אִשָּׁה מֵרִיחַ בֶּשֶׂר
 הַקֹּדֶשׁ, וְלֹא הִסְרִיחַ בֶּשֶׂר
 הַקֹּדֶשׁ מֵעוֹלָם, וְלֹא נִרְאָה זְבוּב
 בְּבֵית הַמִּטְבָּחִים, וְלֹא אָרַע
 קָרִי לְכֹהֵן גָּדוֹל בְּיוֹם
 הַכַּפּוּרִים, וְלֹא כָבוּ גַשְׁמִים אֵשׁ
 שֶׁל עֲצֵי הַמַּעֲרָכָה, וְלֹא נִצְתָּה
 הָרוּחַ אֶת עַמּוּד הָעֶשֶׂן, וְלֹא
 נִמְצָא פָסוּל בְּעֹמֶר וּבִשְׁתֵּי
 הַלֶּחֶם וּבְלֶחֶם הַפָּנִים, עוֹמְדִים
 צְפוּפִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים רְוָחִים, וְלֹא
 הִזִּיק נֶחֱשׁ וְעַקְרָב בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם
 מֵעוֹלָם, וְלֹא אָמַר אָדָם לְחֵבְרוֹ
 צַר לִי הַמָּקוֹם שְׂאֵלַיִן
 בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם:

²²¹ Offered on the 16th of Nissan.

²²² Offered on Shavuos.

²²³ Arranged each Shabbos.

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Our forefathers were blessed with ten miracles in the Temple:

1. No woman ever miscarried due to the smell of the sacrificial meat.
2. The sacrificial meat never putrefied. This may refer to certain portions of the sacrifices waiting on the top of the Altar for two or three days to be burned due to a large backlog.
3. No fly was ever seen in the butcher's quarters.
4. In the first Temple, no Kohen Godol on Yom Kippur was ever disqualified due to seminal impurity.
5. No rain ever quenched the flames of the pyre on the Altar.
6. No wind ever distorted the straight column of the rising smoke above the Altar.
7. No disqualification was ever found in the Omer offering or with the two loaves or with the showbread.
8. Although the people were crowded in the Temple courtyard, they always had enough room to prostrate themselves.
9. No one in Jerusalem was ever injured by a snake or scorpion bite.
10. No one ever complained that he did not have lodging in Jerusalem.

These miraculous occurrences bore testimony to the constant presence of God both in the Holy City and in the Sanctuary, safeguarding the sacred rites performed in these holy places.

SIX

Ten things were created before Shabbos²²⁴ at twilight. The opening of the Earth, the opening of the well, the mouth of the donkey, the rainbow, the Manna, the staff, the Shamir worm, writing, script²²⁵, and the Tablets of the Law. Some say, also injurious things²²⁶, Moses' grave, Abraham, our forefather's, ram, and some say even the tongs²²⁷ which made the tongs.

וַעֲשָׂרָה דְּבָרִים נִבְרְאוּ בְּעֶרְבַת שַׁבָּת בֵּין הַשְּׁמָשׁוֹת, וְאֵלוֹ הֵן, פִּי הָאָרֶץ, וְפִי הַבְּאֵר, וְפִי הָאֲתוֹן, וְהַקֶּשֶׁת, וְהַמָּן, וְהַמַּטֵּה, וְהַשְּׁמִיר, וְהַכֶּתֶב, וְהַמְּכַתֵּב, וְהַלְוִיחֹת. וַיֵּשׁ אֲוִמְרִים, אֶף הַמְּזִיקִין, וְקַבְוֶרְתּוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה, וְאֵילוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ. וַיֵּשׁ אֲוִמְרִים, אֶף צָבֶת בְּצִבָּת עֲשׂוּיָהּ:

Ten things were created on the evening of the Sabbath of Creation at twilight:

1. **The abyss which would swallow up Korah and his band.** ♦ Mutiny against Moses or denial of his mission was a criminal act.
2. **Miriam's traveling-well which provided water for Israel in the wilderness.** ♦ Their every drink of water was a testimony to the presence of Divine Providence.
3. **The ability of Balaam's donkey to speak.** ♦ In order to humble that man of brilliant speech who, led by base passion and impudent conceit, sought to misuse his human speech to curse a whole nation.
4. **The rainbow which was a sign from God after the Flood that He would never again destroy the entire world by water.** ♦ This is an eternal symbol of God's patience with human error.
5. **The Manna.** ♦ The Manna bore testimony to the care with which God remembers every living thing, and which was to teach men to trust and cheerfully obey Him.

²²⁴ The first Shabbos of Creation. The facility to bring forth these supernatural things in the future was implanted at that time.

²²⁵ The engraved letters on the Tablets. Some say this means the etching pen.

²²⁶ Shades and spirits.

²²⁷ Which, therefore, had to have been made in Heaven.

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6. **Moses' staff with which he performed his miracles.** ◆
As a visible sign of God's intervention in His own world order to train man and to chastise him for his disobedience and his pusillanimity.
7. **The stone-eating Shamir worm which hewed the jewels of the Ephod and Choshen and the stones for Solomon's Temple.**
8. **The form of the lettering on the Tablets of the Law.** ◆
The miraculous writing and tablets were testaments they were the works of God.
9. **The ability to read the writing on the Tablets from any of its four sides.**
10. **The Tablets themselves.**

Some say that the injurious spirits, Moses' grave, and Abraham's ram were also created then. ◆ Some would like to say that the first pair of tongs was also created then. Since tongs can only be fashioned by forging, there needed to be a primordial pair to hold the red-hot metal in the fire. How else can that tool have been formed? ◆ But, an opinion in the Talmud (Pesachim 54a) says the tongs could have been fashioned in a mold. ◆ The six days of Creation embrace the visible world while the seventh day, the Sabbath, is a memorial to the unseen Creator and serves to train Man to recognize his unseen Lord and of his moral destiny. These items form a transition between the physical world and the Sabbath. ◆ The location of Moses' grave is hidden to us so as to prevent, with all ceaseless pilgrims who would have come, the rise of a cult of quasi-idolatry which would have been most detrimental itself to our spiritual welfare. ◆ The ram is a symbol of Man's selfless sacrifice to God.

SEVEN

Seven things are characteristic of the dumbbell, and seven of the wise man. The wise man does not speak first before someone who is greater in wisdom and experience than he; he does not interrupt his friend when he is speaking; he does not rush to respond²²⁸; he asks to the point²²⁹ and answers to the point; he speaks to the first matter first and the latter matter last; of that which he did not learn he says, "I have not learned that"; and he acknowledges the truth. The opposite of all of these are the traits of a stupid person.

ז שבעה דברים בגלם ושבעה
 בחכם. חכם אינו מדבר בפני
 מי שהוא גדול ממנו בחכמה
 ובמנין, ואינו נכנס לתוך
 דברי חברו, ואינו נבהל
 להשיב, שואל כענין ומשיב
 כהלכה, ואומר על ראשון
 ראשון ועל אחרון אחרון, ועל
 מה שלא שמע, אומר לא
 שמעתי, ומוודה על האמת.
 וחלופיהן בגלם:

Seven characteristics are found in a boor, and seven are found in a wise man.

The wise man:

1. Never speaks before someone who is wiser and more experienced than he.
2. Never interrupts.
3. Always answers deliberately and logically, and indicates when his answers are those he learned from his teacher and when his answers are his own.
4. Always asks to the subject and responds to the issue.
5. Always answers questions in the order asked or he addresses the more important issues first.
6. Is never embarrassed to acknowledge his ignorance of some matter.
7. Always acknowledges the truth, that is, he admits when he was wrong and does not remain stubbornly loyal to his position. ♦ He is ready and willing to concede that he made an error and was wrong.

²²⁸ He contemplates the question before responding.

²²⁹ About the matter at hand.

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Now the boor has the opposite attributes [per RB]:

1. He has to speak first.
2. He constantly interrupts others when they are speaking.
3. He responds without thinking.
4. His answers have nothing to do with the questions.
5. His responses are mixed up.
6. He never admits that he doesn't know.
7. He never admits that he was wrong.

EIGHT

Seven types of punishments came upon the world due to seven sorts of sins. If some people tithed and others do not, there will be a drought – some will be hungry, and some will be satiated. If everyone stops tithing, there will be the hunger of disturbances²³⁰, and a drought. If everyone stops taking Challah²³¹, hunger of annihilation²³² will come. Pestilence comes to the world for those death sentences mentioned in the Torah which are not within the purview of the courts²³³, and due to violations regarding produce of the Sabbatical year²³⁴. Sword comes to the world because of painful court decisions²³⁵ (delays in justice), court injustices²³⁶ (perversion of justice), and because Torah was taught incorrectly and not in accordance with Halacha.

ח שְׁבַע מִיְי פְּרַעַנִיּוֹת בָּאִין לְעוֹלָם עַל שְׁבַע גּוֹפֵי עֵבְרָה. מְקַצְתָּן מְעַשְׂרִין וּמְקַצְתָּן אֵינָן מְעַשְׂרִין, רָעַב שֶׁל בְּצֻרַת בָּאָה, מְקַצְתָּן רְעֵבִים וּמְקַצְתָּן שְׁבַעִים. גָּמְרוּ שְׁלֹא לְעַשֵּׂר, רָעַב שֶׁל מְהוּמָה וְשֶׁל בְּצֻרַת בָּאָה. וְשֶׁלֹּא לְטוֹל אֶת הַחֲלָה, רָעַב שֶׁל כְּלָיָה בָּאָה. דְּבַר בָּא לְעוֹלָם עַל מִיתוֹת הָאֲמוּרוֹת בְּתוֹרָה שְׁלֹא נִמְסְרוּ לְבֵית דִּין, וְעַל פְּרוֹת שְׁבִיעִית. חָרַב בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם עַל עֲנוּי הַדִּין, וְעַל עוֹוֹת הַדִּין, וְעַל הַמּוֹרִים בְּתוֹרָה שְׁלֹא כְּהִלְכָה:

²³⁰ Wars.

²³¹ Everyone stops taking Challah.

²³² People will be so hungry that they will resort to mass killings of other people.

²³³ The courts were unable to judge violators.

²³⁴ People did not make their fields ownerless in the Sabbatical year.

²³⁵ The courts knew the Law, but did not rule.

²³⁶ The courts permitted the forbidden, etc.

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There are seven kinds of punishments which come to this world corresponding to seven types of sins:

1. If some people tithes and some do not, famine will come; some will have food and some will starve.
2. If no one tithes, war will come and everyone will starve or they will eat but not be satiated.
3. If no one takes Challah, a drought will come, and people will starve.
4. If society is filled with people deserving the death penalty, but the courts do not convict or the Laws of the Sabbatical Year are not observed, pestilence will come.
5. If the courts take bribes, or delay or pervert justice, or teachers teach Torah incorrectly by permitting what is forbidden and forbidding what is permitted, war will come. ♦ If the Jewish State carries out its Divine mission, it will have Divine support against all enemy powers and no nation will dare attack it. But if the Jewish State should cast off its task and destiny or put it to wrongful use, it will thereby become a nation at the mercy of fate just like all the other states of the world, and God will withdraw His protection from it. Once Divine protection is denied the Jewish State, hostile powers will not hesitate to wield the sword against it.
6. If people are swearing falsely (perjury) or if there is desecration of the Name of Heaven, such as by intentionally sinning in public, and others learn from this, dangerous beasts will come. ♦ By indifference to the sacred nature of a vow, he will deny his allegiance to God or actually contravene it. The beast will no longer view this man as its superior.
7. If there is idolatry or immorality or murder or people are working their fields during the Sabbatical year, exile will come. ♦ The Land has been turned over to us by the Ruler and Owner with the explicit stipulation that we acknowledge His sovereignty and carry out His Will as laid down in His Law.

NINE

Wild animals²³⁷ come to the world because of vain oaths (perjury), and profanation of the Name²³⁸. Exile comes to the world because of idolatry, immorality, bloodshed and failure to maintain the land fallow²³⁹. Pestilence is more severe during four periods: during the fourth year, the seventh year, at the conclusion of the seventh year, and after the Chag²⁴⁰ every year. During the fourth year, because of failure to observe the laws of tithing for the poor during the third year. During the seventh year, due to failure to observe the laws of tithing for the poor during the sixth year. After the seventh year, because of failure to observe the laws of fruits during the Sabbatical year, and after the Chag each year, because of theft of the gifts²⁴¹ designated for the poor.

ט חֲזִיהָ רָעָה בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם עַל
 שְׁבוּעַת שָׁוְא, וְעַל חִלּוּל הַשֵּׁם.
 גְּלוּת בָּאָה לְעוֹלָם עַל עוֹבְדֵי
 עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה, וְעַל גְּלוּי עֲרִיּוֹת,
 וְעַל שְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים, וְעַל
 הַשְׁמַטַּת הָאָרֶץ. בְּאַרְבָּעָה
 פְּרָקִים הַדֶּבֶר מִתְרַבֵּה.
 בְּרַבִּיעִית, וּבִשְׁבִיעִית, וּבְמוֹצָאֵי
 שְׁבִיעִית, וּבְמוֹצָאֵי הַחֹג שֶׁבְכָל
 שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה. בְּרַבִּיעִית, מִפְּנֵי
 מַעֲשֵׂר עָנִי שֶׁבִשְׁלִישִׁית.
 בִּשְׁבִיעִית, מִפְּנֵי מַעֲשֵׂר עָנִי
 שֶׁבִשְׁשִׁית. וּבְמוֹצָאֵי שְׁבִיעִית,
 מִפְּנֵי פְרוֹת שְׁבִיעִית. וּבְמוֹצָאֵי
 הַחֹג שֶׁבְכָל שָׁנָה וְשָׁנָה, מִפְּנֵי
 גְזַל מִתְּנוּת עֲנִיִּים:

Pestilence occurs during four periods: During the fourth and seventh years of the Sabbatical cycle, at the end of the Sabbatical cycle, and after every Succos. ♦ During the fourth and seventh years, because people did not give the Tithe for the Poor in the third and sixth years. ♦ After the seventh year, because people did not make ownerless their fruits for the poor. ♦ After Succos of each year, because people were not careful in distributing to the poor their due. This is thievery.

²³⁷ [Wild animals and Exile are a continuation of the theme of the previous Mishna, and are printed there in other editions – RB].

²³⁸ This is particularly vile.

²³⁹ Plowing and sowing during the seventh year.

²⁴⁰ Succos.

²⁴¹ לקט שכחה ופאה, פרט ועוללות - gleanings, forgotten sheaves and corners, one or two grapes or clusters of smallish grapes.

TEN

Four characteristics are found amongst men: There are those who say, What is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours. Such a person has an average character²⁴², but some say this is the character of Sodom²⁴³. There are those who say, What is mine is yours, but what is yours is mine. This person is uncultured²⁴⁴. There are those who say, What is mine is yours, and what is yours is yours. Such a person is pious. And there those who say, What is mine is mine, and what is yours is mine. Such a person is wicked.

י אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּאָדָם. הָאוֹמֵר
שְׁלִי שְׁלִי וְשִׁלְךָ שִׁלְךָ, זֶה מִדָּה
בִּינּוֹנִית. וַיֵּשׁ אוֹמְרִים, זֶה מִדַּת
סְדוֹם. שְׁלִי שִׁלְךָ וְשִׁלְךָ שְׁלִי,
עַם הָאָרֶץ. שְׁלִי שִׁלְךָ וְשִׁלְךָ
שִׁלְךָ, חֲסִיד. שְׁלִי שְׁלִי וְשִׁלְךָ
שְׁלִי, רָשָׁע:

Four attributes are found in Man:

1. The one who says what is mine is mine, and what is yours is yours. This is an ordinary attribute because although he does not prevent his fellow from enjoying that fellow's own property or deny him his pleasures, neither does he invite his friend to come and benefit from what he himself has. Moreover, he arrogantly says that he does not want to have any part of his fellow's graciousness or beneficence. Some suggest that this is an evil attribute because maybe his friend needs him and use of his resources.
2. The one who says what is mine is yours and what is yours is mine. This is an ignoble attribute. It indicates a boorish person who does not understand and respect the concept of private property and privacy.
3. The one who says what is mine is yours and what is yours is yours is virtuous. This man is supremely altruistic. ♦ Justice is the foundation of society, and mercy is its finishing touch.
4. The one who says what is yours is mine and what is mine is mine is wicked. Such a person is selfish and egocentric.

²⁴² He is neither righteous nor evil.

²⁴³ Who were exceedingly miserly and misanthropic.

²⁴⁴ He takes no note of what belongs to whom.

ELEVEN

Four types of temperments are found amongst men²⁴⁵. Easy to anger, but easy to appease – such a person's loss is greater than his gain²⁴⁶; hard to anger and a hard to appease – his reward is greater than his loss; hard to anger, but easy to appease – he is virtuous; and, easy to anger, but difficult to appease – he is evil.

יֵאָרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּדַעוֹת. נוֹחַ לְכַעֵס וְנוֹחַ לְרַצּוֹת, יֵצֵא שְׂכָרוֹ בְּהַפְסְדוֹ, קָשָׁה לְכַעֵס וְקָשָׁה לְרַצּוֹת, יֵצֵא הַפְסְדוֹ בְּשְׂכָרוֹ קָשָׁה לְכַעֵס וְנוֹחַ לְרַצּוֹת הַסִּיד. נוֹחַ לְכַעֵס וְקָשָׁה לְרַצּוֹת רָשָׁע:

Four innate dispositions are found amongst men.

1. The one who is quick to anger about everything, but is equally quick to calm down. Since he gets angry all the time, his loss is greater than his gain because as quickly as he became calm, he will soon again anger. Some say the opposite.
2. The one who rarely angers, but if he does he has a hard time in being pacified. His reward is greater than his loss because, in the end, he does control his anger. Some say the opposite.
3. The one who rarely angers, but if he does he immediately returns to a tranquil, peace of mind. He has our highest admiration.
4. The one who angers quickly and has a hard-time calming down and purging his fury. He is depraved.

²⁴⁵ [There is basic disagreement regarding how to read these first two sayings resulting in very different understandings of the intended meaning of this Mishna. See, for instance, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's commentary on this Mishna. –RB].

²⁴⁶ His gain of being quick to be pacified is lost because of his quickness to anger.

TWELVE

Four types of temperments are found among students. Quick to perceive²⁴⁷, and quick to forget²⁴⁸ – his loss is greater than his gain; slow to perceive, but slow to forget – his reward is greater than his loss; quick to perceive and slow to forget – he is wise; and, slow to perceive, and quick to forget – he has a bad portion²⁴⁹.

יב אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּתַלְמִידִים.
מִהָרָה לְשִׁמוּעַ וּמִהָרָה לְאַבֵּד, יֵצֵא
שְׂכָרוֹ בְּהֶפְסְדוֹ. קִשָּׁה לְשִׁמוּעַ
וְקִשָּׁה לְאַבֵּד, יֵצֵא הֶפְסְדוֹ
בְּשִׂכְרוֹ. מִהָרָה לְשִׁמוּעַ וְקִשָּׁה
לְאַבֵּד, חָכָם. קִשָּׁה לְשִׁמוּעַ
וּמִהָרָה לְאַבֵּד, זֶה חֵלֶק רָע:

Four natures are found in students:

1. The one who is quick to learn, but quickly forgets. He loses more than he gains.
2. The one who is slow to learn, but slow to forget. His gain exceeds his loss.
3. The one who is quick to learn and slow to forget. He is blessed with a wonderful gift.
4. The one who is slow to learn and forgets quickly. He has a misfortune.

²⁴⁷ He learns fast.

²⁴⁸ His learning.

²⁴⁹ In life.

THIRTEEN

Four sorts of attitudes exist regarding those who give charity. The one who is willing to give, but begrudges others giving – he has a stingy eye regarding others; others should give, but not him – he is stingy for himself; he is willing to give and others should give, as well – he is virtuous; and, the one who is stingy to give and he doesn't want others to give, either – he is just plain wicked.

יג אַרְבַּע מִדּוֹת בְּנוֹתְנֵי צְדָקָה.
הַרוֹצֵה שְׂיִתֵּן וְלֹא יִתְּנוּ
אַחֲרָיִם, עֵינָו רָעָה בְּשׂוֹל
אַחֲרָיִם. יִתְּנוּ אַחֲרָיִם וְהוּא לֹא
יִתֵּן, עֵינָו רָעָה בְּשׂוֹלוֹ. יִתֵּן
וְיִתְּנוּ אַחֲרָיִם, חֲסִיד. לֹא יִתֵּן
וְלֹא יִתְּנוּ אַחֲרָיִם, רָשָׁע:

There are four types of people regarding the giving of charity:

1. The one who gives, but discourages others to give. He is not good since he does not want others to be rewarded for being charitable.
2. The one who wants and encourages others to give, but he himself does not give. He is stingy.
3. The one who encourages others to give and he himself gives. He is righteous.
4. The one who dissuades or prevents others from giving, and he does not give. He is malevolent.

It is primarily that wealth which is spent on good works that truly becomes the permanent possession of the giver, benefiting him by advancing his eternal salvation.

FOURTEEN

There are four sorts of people regarding going to the Study Hall²⁵⁰. There is the one who goes to learn, but does not put anything²⁵¹ into practice – he, at least, gets a reward for making the effort to go there; he who observes, but does not go²⁵² – he is rewarded for his observance; he who goes and learns, and he observes – he is virtuous; and, he who neither goes to learn nor observes – he is impious.

יֵד אַרְבַּע מְדוֹת בְּהוֹלְכֵי לְבֵית הַמְּדֻרָּשׁ. הוֹלֵךְ וְאֵינּוֹ עוֹשֶׂה, שְׂכָר הַלִּיכָה בְּיָדוֹ. עוֹשֶׂה וְאֵינּוֹ הוֹלֵךְ, שְׂכָר מַעֲשֵׂה בְּיָדוֹ. הוֹלֵךְ וְעוֹשֶׂה, חֲסִיד. לֹא הוֹלֵךְ וְלֹא עוֹשֶׂה, רָשָׁע:

There are four types who go to the Beis Medrash to study Torah.

1. The one who goes regularly and attends Torah lectures, but is unable to learn or did not understand the lesson. This may be the one who goes but does not put his learning into practice. He receives reward for attending the lectures.
2. The one who learns at home, on his own. This may be the one who practices, but makes no effort to learn from rabbis. Such a person lacks one vital element in his comprehensive Torah-learning - the personally-transmitted Tradition which can be obtained only by direct interaction with a teacher. He gets reward for his practice only.
3. The one who goes to the Beis Medrash and puts his learning into practice. He is righteous.
4. The one who does not go to learn and does not improve his behavior. He is bad.

The Beis Medresh was chiefly where the Oral Teaching was communicated.

²⁵⁰ To learn.

²⁵¹ He learned. Some say that he went, but did not learn because he did not understand.

²⁵² Either he practices, but does not learn or he learns at home.

FIFTEEN

Those who sit before the wise men²⁵³ can be divided into four categories. The sponge, the funnel, the strainer²⁵⁴, and the colander. The sponge absorbs everything²⁵⁵. The funnel pours²⁵⁶ from one vessel into another. The strainer pours out the wine and collects the dregs, and the colander removes the flour-dust²⁵⁷ and collects the clean flour²⁵⁸.

טו אַרבע מדות בְּיוֹשְׁבֵי
 לִפְנֵי חֲכָמִים. סֹפֹג, וּמְשִׁיבָה,
 מְשַׁמֶּרֶת, וְנִפְהָ. סֹפֹג, שֶׁהוּא
 סוֹפֵג אֶת הַכֹּל. מְשִׁיבָה, שֶׁמְכַנִּיס
 בָּזוּ וּמוֹצִיא בָּזוּ. מְשַׁמֶּרֶת,
 שֶׁמוֹצִיאָה אֶת הַיַּיִן וְקוֹלְטָה
 אֶת הַשְּׂמֵרִים. וְנִפְהָ, שֶׁמוֹצִיאָה
 אֶת הַקֶּמַח וְקוֹלְטָה אֶת הַסֵּלֶת:

Four types of people sit before the wise men. They are compared to different vessels.

1. The sponge. This is one who absorbs everything, but may not be able to differentiate fact from fiction.
2. The funnel. This is one through whom the lesson just passes through. He understands little, and then only after repetitive lessons.
3. The cask drained of its wine, but which still retains the dregs. He neglects the essential parts of the lesson, but retains the unessential portions.
4. The colander. He captures the essential concepts, and lets pass the unimportant portions.

²⁵³ Regarding their ability to differentiate between the essence and correct parts from the non-essential and incorrect portions of a matter.

²⁵⁴ Filtering the dregs which remain, from the wine which flows forth. [Alter., the cask – RB].

²⁵⁵ The correct and the incorrect.

²⁵⁶ He does not take care to preserve the correct and the essential.

²⁵⁷ Fine, like dust.

²⁵⁸ The essential.

SIXTEEN

Any love which is dependent upon some external matter²⁵⁹ is liable to disappate once the external matter is no longer extant. However, love which is not dependent upon some external matter is permanent. What sort of love is dependent upon an external matter? That would be like the love between Amnon and Tamar²⁶⁰. The type of love which is not dependent upon an external matter is like that that there was between David and Jonathan.

טז כל אהבה שהיא תלויה
בדבר, בטל דבר, בטלה
אהבה. ושאונה תלויה בדבר,
אונה בטלה לעולם. איזו היא
אהבה התלויה בדבר, זו
אהבת אמנון ותמר. ושאונה
תלויה בדבר, זו אהבת דויד
ויהונתן:

Any love which is dependent upon physical attraction or some external matter will vanish if that which it is dependent upon vanishes, such as that between Amnon and Tamar. He loved her simply for her beauty or because he lusted for her. Tanna D'vei Eliyoh says this is like the love between Balaam and Balak. ♦ Any love which is not dependent upon something transitory will never vanish, such as that between David and Jonathan. Their bond and mutual admiration was based on their equal desire and commitment to fulfill God's Will. Tanna D'vei Eliyoh says this is like the love of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

²⁵⁹ Done to derive pleasure from it.

²⁶⁰ Once his lust was satisfied, his attitude changed to hatred.

SEVENTEEN

Any disagreement which is for the Sake of Heaven shall, in the end, endure²⁶¹, whereas any controversy not for the Sake of Heaven shall, in the end, not endure. What is an example of a dispute for the Sake of Heaven? The one between Hillel and Shammai. And what is one not for the Sake of Heaven? That of Korach and his compatriots.

יז כָּל מַחְלוּקַת שְׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, סוּפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם. וְשֵׁי אֵינָה לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, אֵין סוּפָה לְהִתְקַיֵּם. אֵיזוּ הִיא מַחְלוּקַת שְׁהִיא לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, זֹ מַחְלוּקַת הַלֵּל וְשַׁמַּי. וְשֵׁי אֵינָה לְשֵׁם שָׁמַיִם, זֹ מַחְלוּקַת קִרַח וְכָל עֲדָתוֹ:

Any disagreement which is for the sake of Heaven will have enduring results, such as the disagreements between Hillel and Shammai. ♦ Any disagreement which is not for the sake of Heaven will not last, such as that stirred up by Korah and his followers. ♦ Hillel and Shammai and their students had mutual respect. They all were in the pursuit of the truth. This why we still learn of their disputations. ♦ On the other hand, Korah and his gang were envious of Moses and argumentative in order to cause dissent. They were rebellious, conceited, power-hungry and pursued honor. They have long since disappeared.

²⁶¹ The disputants search for the truth enhancing the honor of Heaven.

EIGHTEEN

No sin²⁶² shall be on the hands of those who do things for the benefit of the public²⁶³, whereas anyone who leads the public to sin shall never be given²⁶⁴ the opportunity to successfully repent. Moses²⁶⁵ had merit and caused the masses to merit, therefore, we ascribe their merit to him²⁶⁶, as it says (Deut. 33), *“He did the righteousness of God, and righteous ordinances remained with Israel.”* Jereboam (son of Nevat) sinned and caused others to sin, so their sins are attributed to him, as it says (I Kings 15), *“Regarding the sins of Jereboam who sinned and caused Israel to sin”*.

יח כָּל הַמְזַכֶּה אֶת הָרַבִּים,
אֵין חָטָא בָּא עַל יָדוֹ. וְכָל
הַמְחַטֵּיא אֶת הָרַבִּים, אֵין
מִסְפִּיקִין בְּיָדוֹ לַעֲשׂוֹת תְּשׁוּבָה.
מִשֶּׁה זָכָה וְזָכָה אֶת הָרַבִּים,
זְכוּת הָרַבִּים תְּלוּי בּוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
(דברים לג), צְדָקָת ה' עָשָׂה
וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל. יִרְבְּעֵם
(בְּן נִבְט) חָטָא וְהִחַטֵּיא אֶת
הָרַבִּים, חָטָא הָרַבִּים תְּלוּי בּוֹ,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (מלכים א טו), עַל חַטָּאוֹת
יִרְבְּעֵם אֲשֶׁר חָטָא וְאֲשֶׁר
הִחַטֵּיא אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Anyone who acts for the benefit of the public will not come to sin. This is so that it should not come out that his “students” are in Heaven while he, the teacher, is in Gehinnom. ♦ Anyone who causes the public to sin will not even be given the opportunity to repent. ♦ Moses acted on behalf of the public by teaching them Torah and leading the multitude to righteousness, while Jeroboam ben Nevat sinned and caused others to sin. The sins of the public are attributed to him. ♦ The entire dynasty of Jeroboam perished by reason of the criminal seduction perpetrated by its ancestor.

²⁶² He will not sin and he will not cause others to sin.

²⁶³ And lead them in the proper way.

²⁶⁴ By Heaven, the opportunity to repent.

²⁶⁵ He taught the nation to perform matters of righteousness and justice.

²⁶⁶ His name is mentioned.

NINETEEN

Anyone who exhibits any of these three traits is a pupil of Abraham, our forefather. But, if he has three other traits, it marks him as a one of the disciples of the wicked Balaam. A good eye²⁶⁷, a lowly spirit²⁶⁸ and subdued soul²⁶⁹ mark him as a student of Abraham, our forefather. An evil eye, a haughty spirit²⁷⁰ and an exaggerated soul²⁷¹ make him a student of the wicked Balaam. What is the difference between the students of Abraham, our forefather, and those of the wicked Balaam? The students of Abraham, our forefather, eat in this world, and inherit the World to Come, as it says, (Proverbs 8), *“I have what to bequeath those who love me, and their treasures I shall fill.”* But the disciples of the wicked Balaam shall inherit Gehinnom, and shall descend a bottomless pit, as it says (Psalms 55). *“You, God, shall lower them into a bottomless pit, those murderous people, and their lives shall be cut in half – but I shall trust in You.”*

יט כָּל מִי שֵׁיִשׁ בְּיָדוֹ שְׁלֹשָׁה
 דְּבָרִים הַלָּלוּ, מִתְּלַמִּידוֹ שֶׁל
 אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ. וְשְׁלֹשָׁה דְּבָרִים
 אַחֲרֵיהֶם, מִתְּלַמִּידוֹ שֶׁל בְּלָעַם
 הָרָשָׁע. עַיִן טוֹבָה, וְרוּחַ נְמוּכָה,
 וְנֶפֶשׁ שְׂפֹלָה, מִתְּלַמִּידוֹ שֶׁל
 אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ. עַיִן רָעָה, וְרוּחַ
 גְּבוּהָה, וְנֶפֶשׁ רְחֹבָה, מִתְּלַמִּידוֹ
 שֶׁל בְּלָעַם הָרָשָׁע. מָה בֵּין
 תְּלַמִּידוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ
 לְתַלְמִידוֹ שֶׁל בְּלָעַם הָרָשָׁע.
 תְּלַמִּידוֹ שֶׁל אַבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ,
 אוֹכְלִין בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְנוֹחְלִין
 בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (משלי ח)
 לְהִנְחִיל אֶהְבִּי יֵשׁ, וְאַצְרִיתִיהֶם
 אֲמֵלֵא. אָבֵל תְּלַמִּידוֹ שֶׁל
 בְּלָעַם הָרָשָׁע יוֹרְשִׁין גִּיהֵנוֹם
 וְיוֹרְדִין לְבָאֵר שַׁחַת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
 (תהלים נה), וְאַתָּה אֱלֹהִים
 תּוֹרִידֵם לְבָאֵר שַׁחַת, אֲנָשֵׁי
 דָּמִים וּמְרֻמָּה לֹא יִחָצוּ יְמֵיהֶם,
 וְאֲנִי אֶבְטַח בְּךָ:

²⁶⁷ He is not jealous of the good others have.
²⁶⁸ Humility.
²⁶⁹ Modesty and satisfied with little.
²⁷⁰ Conceited.
²⁷¹ Pursues pleasures.

PIRKEI AVOS - SYNTHESIZED

The one who looks positively on things due to his love of God and people, has a humble spirit and does not pursue his desires but is satisfied with little, is counted as a disciple of Abraham. ♦ However, the one who casts an evil eye on others and views everyone as his competitor and enemy, acts haughtily, and is relentlessly pursuing his every desire or is a misanthrope, is a student of Balaam the wicked.

TWENTY

Yehuda ben Tema said, “Be as robust²⁷² as a leopard, as fleet as an eagle, run like a deer, and be as strong as a lion when doing the will of your Father in Heaven.” He was wont to say, the arrogant²⁷³ go to Gehinnom, and the humble²⁷⁴ to the Garden of Eden. May²⁷⁵ it be the will of the Lord, our God, that His city be rebuilt very soon, in our days, and that He give us a portion in Your Torah.

כ יהודה בן תימא אומר, הוי
עז כנמר, וקל כנשר, ורץ
כצבי, וגבור כארי לעשות
רצון אביה שבשמים. הוא היה
אומר, עז פנים לגיהנם, ובשת
פנים לגן עדן. יהי רצון
מלפניך יי אלהינו שתבנה
עירך במהרה בימינו ותן
חלקנו בתורתך:

Be as strong as a leopard - and not fear asking your teacher about something you don't understand nor be self-conscious about observing the Torah and strong enough to resist attempts to lure you away from good and to induce you to do evil; and light as an eagle – racing to do God's Will, and untiringly reviewing your learning over and over again, soaring up to God; run like a deer - in pursuit of performing the Commandments and away from sinning, knowing neither procrastination nor hesitation; and be as courageous as a lion and conquer your Inclination; mighty, to overcome all obstacles from within and without - all to do the Will of our Father in Heaven.

Conceited people, those who publicly defy God's Commands, will go to Gehinnom, while the bashful, who are compassionate and do acts of loving-kindness, will go to Heaven. ♦ Timidity leads to prudence, guarding a man from errors. ♦ May it be Your will, God of our fathers and forefathers, to quickly build the Temple in our days and for You to give us a portion in Your Torah. ♦ The Torah is the antidote for the Evil Inclination.

²⁷² Courageous.

²⁷³ Impudent.

²⁷⁴ Blushes easily.

²⁷⁵ Here ends the tractate. From here, are additions to the Mishnayos.

TWENTY-ONE

He²⁷⁶ was wont to say, “Five years of age²⁷⁷ for Scripture, ten years old for Mishna, thirteen²⁷⁸ for the Commandments²⁷⁹, fifteen for Talmud, eighteen for the marriage canopy, twenty for pursuing²⁸⁰, thirty for strength²⁸¹, forty for understanding, fifty for counsel, sixty for sagaciousness, seventy for hoariness, eighty for courageousness, ninety for bending²⁸², and a hundred – well that’s like he’s dead, and useless, and has passed from this world.

כא הוא הָיָה אוֹמֵר, בֶּן חָמֵשׁ שָׁנִים לְמִקְרָא, בֶּן עֶשְׂרִי לְמִשְׁנָה, בֶּן שְׁלֹשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה לְמִצְוֹת, בֶּן חֲמֵשׁ עֶשְׂרֵה לְתַלְמוּד, בֶּן שְׁמוֹנֶה עֶשְׂרֵה לְחַפָּה, בֶּן עֶשְׂרִים לְרְדוּף, בֶּן שְׁלֹשִׁים לְכַח, בֶּן אַרְבָּעִים לְבִינָה, בֶּן חֲמִשִּׁים לְעֵצָה, בֶּן שִׁשִּׁים לְזִקְנָה, בֶּן שִׁבְעִים לְשִׁיבָה, בֶּן שְׁמוֹנִים לְגְבוּרָה, בֶּן תְּשַׁעִים לְשׁוּחַ, בֶּן מֵאָה כְּאֵלוֹ מֵת וְעֵבֶר וְכִטֵּל מִן הָעוֹלָם:

The ideal ages to begin Torah education are as follows: At three or four a child should learn to read. At five, we begin to teach him Scriptures. ♦ At ten, Mishna. At thirteen, the Commandments. ♦ At fifteen, Talmud. ♦ The Gemara is that work which “completes” the Torah. ♦ When he turns eighteen, he should go find himself a wife. ♦ At twenty, he must begin pursuing a career or profession in order to support his wife and children. At this age, he becomes personally liable for his sins. He is also old enough to go out to war. ♦ At thirty, a man is at his peak strength. ♦ At forty, he begins to understand. ♦ At fifty, he has enough life-experience that he can now give intelligent counsel and advise. ♦ At sixty, he begins old age. ♦ At seventy, he has basically completed his life’s work and achievements. ♦ At eighty, he attains courageousness. His advice is sage. ♦ At ninety, he is bent over and his physical capabilities are diminished. He can now recount his life’s history. ♦ At one hundred, he has concluded his active life. He will no longer contribute to society. Every day he lives is a gift from God.

²⁷⁶ [Shmuel Hakoton- RB].

²⁷⁷ To begin to learn.

²⁷⁸ When he brings two hairs, and is called a man.

²⁷⁹ To be obligated to perform the Mitzvohs in the Torah.

²⁸⁰ To go earn a living for his wife and children. Some say to pursue the enemy, i.e. join the army.

²⁸¹ He is at peak physical strength and can do hard work.

²⁸² He can no longer do physical work.

TWENTY-TWO

Ben Bag Bag said, “Turn it²⁸³ over and over, for everything is contained within it, and you can view all matters through it. Become old and worn with it, for you have no better pursuit than her.”

כב כן בג בג אומר, הפך בה
 והפך בה, דכלא בה. ובה
 תחזי, וסיב ובלה בה, ומנה לא
 תזוע, שאין לה מדה טובה
 הימנה:

Everything is in the Torah. Learn it repeatedly. And then, learn it again. You will learn from it even as an old man. Do not abandon it. ♦ Do not bother studying other philosophies, ideologies and theologies and so forth, as they are all a waste of your time. ♦ No wisdom in the world is superior to that of the Torah. ♦ The Torah is the one inexhaustible source of all the knowledge of what is good and true and worthwhile.

²⁸³ The Torah.

TWENTY-THREE

Ben Hei Hei said, “The reward is כג בן הא הא אומר, לפום צערא אנרא:
commensurate with the effort.”

The more effort you exert in your learning and the more you sweat, the grander the reward. ♦ The measure of his earnest striving and devotion determine the true worth of both a man and his life.



CHAPTER 6 – BRAISA



שְׁנוּ חֲכָמִים בְּלָשׁוֹן הַמִּשְׁנָה, בְּרוּךְ שֶׁבָּחַר בָּהֶם וּבְמִשְׁנָתָם:

²⁸⁴The Sages taught this in the language of the Mishna. Blessed be He who chose them and their teachings.

ONE

Rebbe Meir said, “Anyone who engages in Torah for Heaven’s sake, merits many things. Not only that, but the entire world is only worthwhile because of him²⁸⁵. He is called a companion²⁸⁶, beloved, lover of God, lover of mankind, makes God glad, makes mankind joyous, it dresses him in humility and awe²⁸⁷, it prepares him to be a righteous person, pious, honest, and trustworthy. It distances him from sinning²⁸⁸, and brings him close to merit. Others benefit from his counsel, and sound wisdom, with understanding and courage, as it says, (Proverbs 8), “*I have counsel and sound wisdom, I am understanding, and I have might*”. It gives him majesty and rule, the ability to analyze the Law, and the secrets of the Torah are revealed to him. He becomes like an over-flowing spring and never-ending river. He shall be modest and persevering, forgiving of insults, exalted above all creation.

א רַבִּי מֵאִיר אָמַר כָּל הָעוֹסֵק
בַּתּוֹרָה לְשִׂמְחָה, זוֹכֵה לְדַבְרֵי הַרְבֵּה.
וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא שֶׁכָּל הָעוֹלָם כְּלוּ
כְּדַאי הוּא לוֹ. נִקְרָא רַע, אָהוּב, אֹהֵב
אֶת הַמָּקוֹם, אֹהֵב אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת, מְשַׂמַּח
אֶת הַמָּקוֹם, מְשַׂמַּח אֶת הַבְּרִיּוֹת,
וּמְלַבְּשֵׁתוֹ עֲנוּה וַיְרָא, וּמְכַשְׂרֵתוֹ
לְהִיּוֹת צַדִּיק חָסִיד יֵשֶׁר וְנֹאֲמָן,
וּמְרַחֲקֵתוֹ מִן הַחֲטָא, וּמְקַרְבֵתוֹ לַיָּדֵי
זְכוּת, וְנִהְיִין מִמֶּנּוּ עֵצָה וְתוֹשִׁיָּה בִּינָה
וְגִבּוֹרָה. לְשֹׁאֲמַר (מְשַׁלִּי ח) לִי עֵצָה
וְתוֹשִׁיָּה אֲנִי בִּינָה לִי גִבּוֹרָה, וְנוֹתֶנֶת
לוֹ מַלְכוּת וּמְשַׁלָּה וְחַקוֹר דִּין,
וּמְגַלִּין לוֹ רְזֵי תּוֹרָה, וְנִעֲשֶׂה כְּמַעֲיָן
הַמְתַּגַּבֵּר וּכְנֹהֵר שְׂאִינוּ פּוֹסֵק, וְהוּי
צָנוּעַ וְאָרֶךְ רוּחַ, וּמוֹחֵל עַל עֲלֻבוֹנוֹ,
וּמְגַדְּלֵתוֹ וּמְרוֹמְמֵתוֹ עַל כָּל הַמַּעֲשִׂים:

²⁸⁴ This chapter is an addendum to Mishna Avos and it is nearly completely like that found in Eliyahu Zuta, Chapter 17 and in Tractate Kalla Rabassi, Chapter 8.

²⁸⁵ Worthy of existing because of him.

²⁸⁶ Albeck reads this, A beloved friend. One who engages in Torah for the sake of Heaven is called a beloved friend.

²⁸⁷ Of God.

²⁸⁸ By performing the Mitzvoths and good deeds.

PIRKEI AVOS - SYNTHESIZED

Anyone who occupies himself with Torah for its own sake is called by many positive appellations. ♦ It is as if the whole world was created just for him. ♦ He is called a friend of God's, beloved, lover of God, lover of Man, one who makes God happy, and makes people happy. ♦ He is clothed in modesty and awe. ♦ He is righteous in his thoughts and deeds. ♦ He is honest, trustworthy, distant from sinning, and meritorious. ♦ He is wise, intelligent and his counsel is bold. ♦ Such a person will be rewarded with majesty and governance. ♦ He will be able to judge. ♦ The mysteries of the Torah will be revealed to him. ♦ He will become like an ever-flowing spring and a vigorous river. ♦ He will be humble, compassionate and forgiving. This will make him great and exalted over all other people. ♦ Torah is to be studied with a pure purpose. ♦ Still, the upright man is preferred over the righteous one.

TWO

Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi said, “Every single day a Heavenly Voice goes out from Mount Horeb declaring ‘Oy to those who insult the Torah. For all those who do not engage themselves in Torah are called ‘reprimanded’, as it says (ibid. 11), “*A beautiful, but tasteless, woman who is like a ring in the nose of a pig*”. And, (Exodus 32), “*The Tablets are a work of God, and the script engraved (Charus) upon them is the script of God.*” Do not read Charus (engraved) on the Tablets, but Cheirus (freedom)²⁸⁹ in order to teach you that there is no one freer than he who involves himself in learning Torah. Anyone who engages in learning Torah becomes exalted, as it says, (Numbers 21), “*And from Mattana to Nachaliel²⁹⁰ and from Nachaliel to Bomos.*”

ב אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי,
בְּכָל יוֹם וַיּוֹם בַּת קוֹל יוֹצֵאת
מִהַר חוֹרֵב וּמִכְרֹזַת וְאוֹמֶרֶת
אֹי לָהֶם לְבָרִיּוֹת מֵעֲלֻבוֹנָה
שֶׁל תּוֹרָה. שָׁפַל מִי שֶׁאִינוֹ
עוֹסֵק בַּתּוֹרָה נִקְרָא נְזוּף,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שם יא) נָזַם זָהָב בְּאֶף
חֲזִיר אִשָּׁה יָפָה וְסָרַת טָעַם.
וְאוֹמֶר (שמות לב), וְהִלַּחַת מֵעֲשֵׂה
אֱלֹהִים הַמָּה וְהַמִּכְתָּב מִכְתָּב
אֱלֹהִים הוּא חָרוּת עַל הַלַּחַת,
אֵל תִּקְרָא חָרוּת אֲלָא חָרוּת,
שֶׁאִין לָךְ בֶּן חוֹרִין אֲלָא מִי
שֶׁעוֹסֵק בְּתִלְמוּד תּוֹרָה. וְכָל מִי
שֶׁעוֹסֵק בְּתִלְמוּד תּוֹרָה הִרִי זֶה
מִתְעַלֶּה, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (במדבר כא)
וּמִנְחֵלִיאל וּמִנְחֵלִיאל
בַּמּוֹת:

A Heavenly voice is heard every day saying: How ugly it is that a Jew fails to learn Torah! What a waste! It is like a woman who was given natural beauty, but lacks moral sense or grace. ♦ The Torah frees Man from the temptations of physical lusts and desires. ♦ The man of Torah controls his inclinations and he is now free to be virtuous without being enticed by his desires. ♦ The angry man forgets his Torah.

²⁸⁹ The freedom of Israel is dependent upon the Tablets.

²⁹⁰ Israel is called His *Nachalah* - inheritance.

THREE

Anyone who learns even one chapter or one Halacha or one verse or one saying or even one letter from his fellow, must bestow upon him honor, since we found that David, King of Israel, learned but two things from Achitophel²⁹¹, and yet called him ‘my master, my commander, my confidant’, as it says, (Psalms 55), “*You are a man equal to me; you are my commander, my confidant*’. This is a matter of inference. What David, King of Israel, who learned but two things from Achitophel and still called him my master, my commander, my confidant, how much more so anyone²⁹² who learns even one chapter, one Halacha, one verse, one saying or one letter must honor the one who taught him this. And there is no honor but for Torah²⁹³, as it says (Proverbs 3), “*The wise²⁹⁴ shall inherit honor*” and (ibid. 28), “*The perfected ones shall inherit good*”. There is nothing truly good but Torah, as it says, “*I have given them a good portion, my Torah; do not abandon it.*”

ג הלומד מחברו פרק אחד או הלכה אחת או פסוק אחד או דבור אחד או אפילו אות אחת, צריך לנהג בו כבוד, שכן מצינו בדרך מלך ישראל, שלא למד מאחיתופל אלא שני דברים בלבד, קראו רבו אלופו ומידעו, שנאמר (תהלים נה), ואתה אנוש בערכי אלופי ומידעי. והלא דברים קל וחומר, ומה דוד מלך ישראל שלא למד מאחיתופל אלא שני דברים בלבד קראו רבו אלופו ומידעו, הלומד מחברו פרק אחד או הלכה אחת או פסוק אחד או דבור אחד או אפילו אות אחת על אחת כמה וכמה שצריך לנהג בו כבוד. ואין כבוד אלא תורה, שנאמר (משלי ג), כבוד חכמים ינחלו, (שם כח) ותמימים ינחלו טוב, ואין טוב אלא תורה שנאמר כי לקח טוב נתתי לכם תורתִי אל תעזבו:

²⁹¹ 1) David wanted the Levites to transport the Ark via wagon (II Samuel 6:3-8), but Achitophel said that they should carry the Ark on their shoulders as Moses had instructed (Numbers 7:9), and 2) Achitophel taught David that it was permitted to write the Name of God on earthenware in order to silence the nether-waters (Succah 53b). Tractate Kallah Rabbassi says that he taught him two different things: 1) that one should not learn Torah alone, but with a friend, and 2) one should go to synagogue with enthusiasm and not contritely.

²⁹² A commoner surely must call his teacher 'rabbi'.

²⁹³ No one is worthy of honor except for the Torah he has learned.

²⁹⁴ The wise in Torah.

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Once a person learns any matter of Torah from someone else, even as simple as how to read one letter correctly, he must give reverence to that person. He becomes his mentor and master. This is all the more true if he learns a wise saying or a Scriptural verse or a Torah Law or a chapter. ♦ Real honor is reserved for Torah scholars. ♦ The true good is Torah. ♦ The Torah holds our true human dignity and our true salvation.

FOUR

So is the way of Torah²⁹⁵: You shall eat bread with salt, and drink water in measured amounts. You shall sleep on the ground, and you shall suffer a life of hardship, and in Torah you shall toil. If you do so, (Psalms 128), “*Happy shall you be, and good will it be for you.*” Happy in this world and good for you in the World to Come.

ד כַּף הִיא דְרֻכָּהּ שֶׁל תּוֹרָה,
פֶּת בְּמֶלַח תֹּאכֵל וּמֵיִם
בְּמִשׁוֹרָה תִשְׁתֶּה וְעַל הָאָרֶץ
תִּישָׁן וְחַיֵּי צַעַר תִּחְיֶה וּבַתּוֹרָה
אַתָּה עֹמֵל, אִם אַתָּה עוֹשֶׂה כֵן,
(תהלים קכח) אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ וְטוֹב לָךְ.
אֲשֶׁרֶיךָ בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה וְטוֹב לָךְ
לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא:

In order to truly gain from Torah study, one must set aside worldly pleasures, such as good food and a comfortable bed, and greatly exert himself in Torah-learning. ♦ Content will such a person be in this world, and good he will have in the World to Come.

²⁹⁵ The way to acquire the knowledge of Torah.

FIVE

Do not seek greatness for yourself nor covet honor. More than your learning, is your doing²⁹⁶. Do not envy the noblemen's tables, for your table is greater than theirs and your crown is greater than their crowns. Your Employer is trustworthy and shall pay you appropriately for your work.

ה אַל תִּבְקֹשׁ גְדֻלָּה לְעַצְמְךָ,
וְאַל תַּחְמוֹד כְּבוֹד, יוֹתֵר
מִלְמוּדְךָ עֲשֵׂה, וְאַל תִּתְאַוֶּה
לְשִׁלְחָנָם שֶׁל שָׂרִים, שֶׁשִּׁלְחָנְךָ
גְּדוֹל מִשִּׁלְחָנָם וְכִתְרְךָ גְּדוֹל
מִכִּתְרָם, וְנִאֲמָן הוּא בְּעַל
מְלֶאכֶתְךָ שִׁישְׁלֶם לְךָ שְׂכָר
בְּעֲלִיתְךָ:

Neither pursue governing over other people nor honor. ♦ Do not allow yourself to become envious when others are honored while you stand aside unnoticed. ♦ Spend more time and effort in doing than in actual learning. ♦ Don't desire the table of kings. For your table in the Next World is greater than is their table in this world. Your crown there is greater than their crown here. For there you shall sit among the righteous and God shall reward you for your good deeds.

²⁹⁶ Your deeds should exceed your learning.

SIX

The Torah is greater than the priesthood and the kingship, for kingship²⁹⁷ is acquired in thirty ways, the priesthood in twenty-four²⁹⁸, but the Torah in forty-eight ways, which are: studying, attentiveness²⁹⁹, ordered speech³⁰⁰, understanding³⁰¹, awe, fear³⁰², humility, joy, purity, serving the wise³⁰³, punctiliousness of colleagues³⁰⁴, incisive talk with students³⁰⁵, stability³⁰⁶, knowledge of Scripture and Mishna³⁰⁷, minimizing involvement with commercial activity and secular affairs³⁰⁸, minimizing pleasures in sleep, in conversation, and in levity, restraint, good-heartedness, trust in the Sages³⁰⁹, acceptance of affliction³¹⁰, knowing one's place³¹¹, being content with one's portion, creating a fence around one's words³¹², not feeling that you are due

ו גדולה תורה יותר מן הכהונה ומן המלכות, שהמלכות נקנית בשלשים מעלות, והכהונה בעשרים וארבע, והתורה נקנית בארבעים ושמונה דברים. ואלו הן, בתלמוד, בשמיעת האזן, בעריכת שפתיים, בבינת הלב, באימה, ביראה, בענוה, בשמחה, בטהרה, בשמוש חכמים, בדקדוק חברים, בפלפול התלמידים, בישוב, במקרא, במשנה, במעוט סחורה, במעוט דרך ארץ, במעוט תענוג, במעוט שנה, במעוט שיחה, במעוט שחוק, בארץ אפים, בלב טוב, באמונת חכמים, בקבלת היסורין, המכיר את מקומו, והשמח בחלקו, והעושה סיג לדבריו, ואינו מחזיק טובה לעצמו, אוהב את המקום, אוהב את הבריות, אוהב את הצדקות, אוהב את המישרים, אוהב את התוכחות, ומתרחק מן הכבוד, ולא מגיס לבו בתלמודו, ואינו שמח בהוראה, נושא בעל עם חברו, ומכריעו לכף זכות, ומעמידו על האמת, ומעמידו על השלום, ומתישב לבו בתלמודו, שואל ומשיב שומע ומוסר, הלומד על מנת ללמד והלומד על מנת לעשות, המחכים את רבו, והמכונים את שמועתו, והאומר דבר בשם אומרו, הא למדת כל האומר דבר בשם אומרו מביא גאלה לעולם, שנאמר (אסתר ב), ותאמר אסתר למלך בשם מרדכי:

²⁹⁷ It has thirty grades.

²⁹⁸ Priestly gifts.

²⁹⁹ To one's rabbi; this the Oral Law.

³⁰⁰ Organizing one's learning and repeating it clearly.

³⁰¹ Learning intelligently.

³⁰² Of God. Awe and fear are the same.

³⁰³ And learning from their actions.

³⁰⁴ Alternatively, בדיבוק – to bond with friends for the purpose of learning and being exacting in the words of Torah.

³⁰⁵ Engaging in sharp exchanges of give and take with students.

³⁰⁶ Of thought/opinion. Some say it is ישיבה – sitting.

³⁰⁷ Reading Scriptures and learning Mishna.

³⁰⁸ Affairs of the world.

³⁰⁹ Believing in their words.

³¹⁰ Not complaining to God about your condition.

³¹¹ One must know his value and place, and not force himself into a place he is not worthy of.

³¹² Careful, unambiguous speech.

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good³¹³, beloved³¹⁴, loves God, loves mankind, loves righteousness³¹⁵, loves integrity³¹⁶, loves reproof, distances himself from honor, does not belittle his learning³¹⁷ (alt. is not conceited because of his learning - Hirsch), takes no joy in ordering others around, shares the burden of his fellow men, prods his fellow towards innocence³¹⁸, draws him to the truth, draws him to peace, comes to terms with his learning (engages in mature reflection when studying – Hirsch), asks and responds, listens and adds³¹⁹, learns in order to teach, learns in order to do, make his master wise³²⁰, orders his lessons³²¹ (retains accurately what has been handed down to him by transmission – Hirsch), attributes what he quotes to the one from whom he heard it. For everyone who identifies his sources brings redemption to the world, as it says (Esther 2), “*Esther spoke to the king in the name of Mordechar*³²².”

Torah is greater than the priesthood and kingship. Kingship is acquired in thirty ways, the priesthood in twenty-four, but the Torah in forty-eight. ♦ These are the moral and spiritual virtues which he who strives after the crown of the Torah must acquire and employ through diligent labor upon his own personality before he can attain the goal of Torah.

The thirty ways which kingship is acquired are by his:

1. Ruling over others.
2. Recruiting male soldiers.
3. Commanding the army.
4. Controlling military resources.
5. Setting military doctrine and being the chief military strategist.
6. Commanding the high officers.
7. Commanding the low-rank officers.
8. Controlling the nation's real-estate.

³¹³ Because of the Torah you learned or your good deeds.

³¹⁴ By people.

³¹⁵ Loves doing acts of righteousness.

³¹⁶ Honesty, straightforwardness.

³¹⁷ Does not equate the value of his (Torah) learning with secular learning.

³¹⁸ He encourages his friend to do the right things.

³¹⁹ To his learning.

³²⁰ By asking intelligent questions.

³²¹ Is precise in the Laws he heard and orders them one with another.

³²² And redemption then came to Israel.

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9. Controlling the nation's harvest and GNP, i.e. the economy.
10. Controlling the weapons industry.
11. Controlling the military vehicle industry.
12. Enlisting the females.
13. Making the girls into pharmacists or perfumers.
14. Making them into cooks.
15. Making them into bakers.
16. Seizing private fields.
17. Seizing vineyards.
18. Seizing olives.
19. Giving them to his servants.
20. Taking private fields.
21. Taking vineyards, which he will tithe for his-
22. Courtesans, and
23. Servants.
24. Taking people's male-servants.
25. Taking their maidservants.
26. Taking the best of their youth.
27. Taking their teachers; all of which he will-
28. Use for his own needs.
29. He will tithe the people's flocks.
30. The populace will be his slaves.

Correspondingly, the king has thirty privileges:

1. The king does not judge, and
2. We don't judge him.
3. He does not give testimony, and
4. We can't give testimony about him.
5. He does not do Chalitza, and
6. His wife does not have Chalitza done with her.
7. He does not perform Levirate marriage, and
8. His wife does not have Levirate marriage done with her.
9. No one can marry his widow.
10. He does not exit his palace for the funeral of a relative.
11. The people sit on the ground when consoling him, and he sits on an ottoman.
12. He sends soldiers out to a discretionary war.
13. He can confiscate land for his own needs such as building roads, which
14. He can build as wide as he likes.
15. He receives all the booty from the people, and

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16. He takes his portion first.
17. He may have up to eighteen wives, and
18. He may accumulate only as much money as he needs for supplies and provisions.
19. He may accumulate as many horses as he needs for his chariots.
20. A Sefer Torah is written for him, which
21. He carries with him to war, and
22. When he comes back from war or
23. When he is sitting in judgment or
24. When he is eating.
25. No one may ride his horse.
26. No one may sit on his chair.
27. No one may use his scepter.
28. No one may see him when he is naked.
29. No one may see him while he is having his hair cut.
30. No one may see him while he is in the bathhouse.

The Kohanim acquire their priesthood by receiving twenty-four gifts: ten in the Sanctuary and fourteen outside the Sanctuary.

The ten in the Sanctuary comprise:

1. The animal sin-offering.
2. The bird sin-offering.
3. Certain guilt-offerings.
4. Doubtful guilt-offerings.
5. Public peace-offerings.
6. The leper's oil.
7. Remnants of the Omer.
8. The two loaves.
9. The showbread.
10. Remnants of the meal-offering.

The second group outside the Sanctuary comprises four in Jerusalem which are:

1. The first-born and first-fruits.
2. Portions of the Thanksgiving-offering.
3. Portions of the Nazirite's offering.
4. Consecrated hides.

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This second group also comprises ten outside of Jerusalem which are:

1. The priest's due.
2. The priest's due from the Levite.
3. The Challah.
4. The first shearing.
5. The foreleg, jaw and stomach.
6. The first-born son.
7. The first-born donkey.
8. The homestead field.
9. The "Sdei Cherem" or "Sdei Achuza" (see Erchin Chapters 7 and 8).
10. Returned property stolen from a now-deceased convert who has no heirs.

The Gra has a slightly different list. He says that corresponding to these the Kohen Godol has twenty-four privileges (see Biurei HaGra).

The Torah is acquired in forty-eight ways:

1. **By paying close attention and listening carefully to one's rabbi; and by learning from everyone.** ♦ Even though the Oral Tradition has been put down in writing, it still cannot be passed on properly without also being taught by the written word.
2. **By repeating many times the lesson to himself verbally, until he grasps the learning.** ♦ Proper accurate and logical enunciation and verbalization serves not only as a test of the thought, but also as a means for impressing and retaining in the mind the subject matter.
3. **By deep contemplation.**
4. **By developing awe of Heaven and of his rabbi.**
5. **By having fear of Heaven.** ♦ The student must become aware of the sacred nature and Divine source of the subject. He must not come to violate the dignity of the sacred subject and its bearers.
6. **By being humble.** ♦ Modesty is the loftiest of virtues which faithfully guards and protects against any misstep or error on the path to wisdom and practical observance.
7. **By being joyous, and having purity of heart and intention.** ♦ There is no greater means for spiritual progress and elevation than that serenity and joy of the spirit which will cause a man to rejoice in life with all its tasks and burdens.

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8. **By serving Torah scholars, which is greater than studying with them.**
9. **By adhering to those committed to Torah.** ♦ Isolation is incompatible with Jewish knowledge. It is only by association with living sages, close communion with associates and teaching disciples, that knowledge of Torah can be nurtured and promoted.
10. **By engaging in profound discourse with other students.** ♦ Calm and prudent learning is the mother of true and thorough knowledge.
11. **By establishing set times for learning Torah and Mishna, which are the foundations for all Torah study.**
12. **By minimizing his business activities.** ♦ The Torah seeks to teach us to view and arrange all human affairs on earth in the light of the Teaching of God. Active participation in civic and communal endeavors is a duty, but moderation is essential for there to be the time, mental clarity and emotional calm necessary for the cultivation of Torah wisdom.
13. **By minimizing involvement in mundane affairs.**
14. **By minimizing pleasure.**
15. **By minimizing sleep.**
16. **By minimizing idle talk.**
17. **By minimizing humor.**
18. **By not angering.**
19. **By being kindhearted.** ♦ The search for knowledge is obscured by jealousy and hatred. Because of his envy, he cannot acknowledge facts of truth and right discovered and uttered by others.
20. **By trusting the authenticity of the rabbinic tradition. This means believing that everything our Sages and rabbis have said came directly from Heaven via Moses.**
21. **By accepting one's afflictions.** ♦ Suffering trains both mind and spirit.
22. **By accepting one's limitations and restricted capacity to learn.**
23. **By accepting one's lot in life, and not pursue riches. This also means that everyone must recognize that his real place is in the World to Come.** ♦ God evaluates our achievements solely in terms of the extent to which we have made good use of the faculties with which He has endowed us.
24. **By safeguarding one's tongue from leading him to sin.** ♦ Do not force your views on others; restrain yourself from

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voicing your convictions unless outspokenness is fitting and proper; and qualify all your utterances with the reservation that they are true only to the best of your knowledge.

25. **By not using one's achievements in learning for his own benefit nor take credit for his Torah accomplishments.**
◆ All our attainments are due to Divine Providence and with God's help. Knowing this, we must view our achievements with no other emotion but humility.
26. **By being loved.**
27. **By loving God.**
28. **By loving people, which will result in his being able to bring them close to Torah.**
29. **By doing righteousness.**
30. **By loving honesty and integrity.** ◆ A true disciple of Torah study loves right, duty and fairness and will defend them wherever he may go.
31. **By loving rebuke. For we should understand that reproach makes us better people.**
32. **By distancing oneself from honor and public recognition.**
33. **By taking no pride in your accomplishments in learning.**
34. **By having no enjoyment in ruling over others.**
35. **By carrying your weight in communal needs.**
36. **By judging everyone favorably.**
37. **By inspiring honesty and decency in others.**
38. **By inspiring others to pursue peace.**
39. **By learning with a reasoned mind. One should be levelheaded.**
40. **By not being afraid to ask when you do not know the answer.**
41. **By responding to inquiries when you do know the answer.**
42. **By being attentive.**
43. **By responding wisely and adding pertinent insights.**
44. **By learning in order to teach others.**
45. **By learning in order to do.**
46. **By sharpening his teacher with good questions.**
47. **By having a desire to learn.**
48. **By quoting his sources; otherwise it is like plagiarism. It is this quality which brings redemption to this world.**

SEVEN

Great is the Torah as it gives life, both in this world and the World to Come, to those who put it into practice, as it says (Proverbs 4), “*Life is for those who find it, and it heals all flesh*”, and (ibid. 3), “*It shall be healing for your body, and marrow for your bones*”, and (ibid.), “*It is a tree of life for those who grasp hold of it; those who support it shall be content*”, and (ibid. 1), “*It is a graceful garland upon your head, and necklaces around your throat*”, and (ibid. 4), “*It shall give your head a graceful garland, and a crown of glory*”, and (ibid. 9), “*With Me, your days shall increase, and years shall be added to your life*”, and (ibid. 3), “*Longevity is in its right hand and richness and honor in its left*”, and (ibid.) “*For many days and years of life and peace shall be added to you*”, and (ibid.), “*Its ways are pleasant, and its paths are peace.*”³²³

ז גדולה תורה שהיא נותנת חיים לעשיה בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא, שנאמר (משלי ד), כי חיים הם למוצאייהם ולכל בשרו מרפא, ואומר (שם ג), רפאות תהי לשרף ושקוי לעצמותיה. ואומר (שם), עץ חיים היא למחזיקים בה ותומכיה מאשר. ואומר (שם א), כי לויית חן הם לראשה וענקים לגרגרתיה. ואומר (שם ד), תתן לראשה לויית חן עטרת תפארת תמננה. ואומר (שם ט), כי בי ירבו ימיה ויוסיפו לה שנות חיים. ואומר (שם ג), ארך ימים בימינה בשמאולה עשר וכבוד, ואומר (שם), כי ארך ימים ושנות חיים ושלוש יוסיפו לה ואומר (שם), דרכיה דרכי נועם וכל נתיבותיה שלום:

Torah is great. It gives life to those who observe it in this world, and life in the World to Come. ♦ The Torah’s mandates enable every aspect of Man’s nature to achieve that growth and activation which is his destiny.

³²³ [This last verse is absent in some editions – RB].

EIGHT

Rebbe Shimon ben Yehuda in the name of Rebbe Shimon ben Yochai said, “Adornments, power, wealth, honor, wisdom, old age, hoariness and children are pleasing for the righteous ones and pleasing for the world, as it says (ibid. 16), “*A hoary head is a glorious crown; it is found in the way of righteousness*”, and, (ibid. 20), “*The ornament of young men is their strength, and the glory of the hoary-headed ones is old age*”, and (ibid. 20), “*The crown of the elders is their riches*”, and (ibid. 17), “*Grandchildren are the crown of the old, and the glory of the children is their parents*”, and (Isaiah 24), “*The Moon shall be humiliated and the Sun ashamed when the Lord of Hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and there shall be honor for His elders*”. Rebbe Shimon ben Menasya said, “These are the seven characteristics which the Sages counted for the righteous, and all were present in Rebbe and his sons.

ח רבי שמעון בן יהודה משום רבי שמעון בן יוחאי אומר, הנוי והכח והעושר והכבוד והחכמה והזקנה והשיבה והבנים, נאה לצדיקים ונאה לעולם, שנאמר (שם טז), עטרת תפארת שיבה בדרך צדקה תמצא. ואומר (שם כ), תפארת בחורים כוחם והדר זקנים שיבה. ואומר (שם יד), עטרת חכמים עשרם. ואומר (שם יז), עטרת זקנים בני בנים ותפארת בנים אבותם. ואומר (ישעיה כד), וחפרה הלבנה ובושה החמה, כי מלך יהיה צבאות בחר ציון ובירושלים ונגד זקניו כבוד. רבי שמעון בן מנסיא אומר, אלו שבע מדות שמנו חכמים לצדיקים, כלם נתקיימו ברבי ובבניו:

Energy, wealth, honor, wisdom, advanced age, seniority, and children are pleasant for the righteous and for the world. Rabbi Shimon ben Menasya said that Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi and his children had all seven of these blessings. ♦
Honest, decent grandchildren are the rewarding climax of their grandparents' lives.

NINE

Rebbe Yosse ben Kisma said, "I was once walking on the way when I came across a person who greeted me with 'Shalom', and so I returned with 'Shalom'. He then asked, 'Rebbe. From where do you come?' I told him that I come from a large city filled with wise men and scholars. He then asked, 'Rebbe. Were you to live among us, in our place, I would give you a million gold pieces, expensive gems and jewels.' I responded to him thus, 'Even if you were to give me all the silver and gold and precious gems and jewels in the entire world, I would not live in any place except one of Torah, as it says in the David, King of Israel's Book of Psalms, "*The Torah from Your mouth is better than thousands in gold and silver.*" And not only that, but when a person dies, nothing accompanies him further, not silver, not gold, not precious stones and jewels, only Torah and good deeds, as it says (Proverbs 6), "*When you walk, it shall lead you; when you lie down it shall watch over you and when you awaken it shall address you*". "When you lie down" - in this world; "when you lie down, it shall watch over you" - in the grave; "when you get up, it shall address you" - in the World to Come, and (Chagga'i 2), "*All silver is mine, all gold is mine, so says the God of hosts.*"

ט אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹסֵי בֶן קִסְמָא,
פַּעַם אַחַת הָיִיתִי מְהַלֵּךְ בַּדֶּרֶךְ
וּפָגַע בִּי אָדָם אֶחָד, וְנָתַן לִי
שְׁלוֹם, וְהִחֲזַרְתִּי לוֹ שְׁלוֹם, אָמַר
לִי, רַבִּי, מֵאַיִזָּה מְקוֹם אָתָּה,
אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ, מֵעִיר גְּדוֹלָה שֶׁל
חֲכָמִים וְשֶׁל סוֹפְרִים אָנִי, אָמַר
לִי, רַבִּי רְצוֹנָךְ שֶׁתְּדוּר עִמָּנוּ
בְּמִקְוָמָנוּ וְאָנִי אֶתֶן לְךָ אֶלֶף
אֲלָפִים דִּנְרֵי זָהָב וְאַבְנֵי
טוֹבוֹת וּמְרַגְלִיּוֹת, אָמַרְתִּי לוֹ
אִם אָתָּה נוֹתֵן לִי כָּל כֶּסֶף
וְזָהָב וְאַבְנֵי טוֹבוֹת וּמְרַגְלִיּוֹת
שְׂבָעוּלָם, אֵינִי דָר אֶלָּא בְּמִקְוֶה
תּוֹרָה, וְכֵן כְּתוּב בְּסֵפֶר תְּהִלִּים
עַל יְדֵי דָוִד מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל, טוֹב
לִי תּוֹרַת פִּיךָ מֵאֲלָפֵי זָהָב
וְכֶסֶף. וְלֹא עוֹד, אֶלָּא שְׂבָשְׁעַת
פְּטִירְתּוֹ שֶׁל אָדָם אֵין מְלוּיָן
לוֹ לְאָדָם לֹא כֶּסֶף וְלֹא זָהָב
וְלֹא אַבְנֵי טוֹבוֹת וּמְרַגְלִיּוֹת,
אֶלָּא תּוֹרָה וּמַעֲשִׂים טוֹבִים
בְּלֵבָד, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (משלי ו),
בְּהִתְהַלֵּכְךָ תִּנְחָה אוֹתְךָ
בְּשֹׁכְבְךָ תִּשְׁמֹר עֲלֶיךָ
וְהִקִּיצוֹת הִיא תְּשִׁיחֶךָ,
בְּהִתְהַלֵּכְךָ תִּנְחָה אֶתְךָ, בְּעוֹלָם
הַזֶּה. בְּשֹׁכְבְךָ תִּשְׁמֹר עֲלֶיךָ,
בְּקִבְרְךָ. וְהִקִּיצוֹת הִיא תְּשִׁיחֶךָ
לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא. וְאָמַר (חגי ב), לִי
הַכֶּסֶף וְלִי הַזָּהָב נְאֻם יְהוָה
צְבָאוֹת:

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Once on a journey he met someone who offered him much gold and jewels to move to his town, for Rabbi Yosse ben Kisma was a scholar and the man's town lacked a scholar. Rabbi Yosse ben Kisma refused saying that all the gold and jewels in the world would never get him to live in a city without Torah. Not only that but, he said, it isn't one's gold and jewels which accompany him after he dies. Rather it is his Torah and good deeds.

TEN

Five³²⁴ possessions did the Holy One, blessed be He, acquire for Himself in His world: the Torah is one, the Heavens and Earth are one, Abraham is one, Israel is one, and the Temple is one. Torah we learn from the verse (Proverbs 8), “*God made me, the Torah, at the beginning of His enterprise as the blueprint for the universe, even before engaging in all His other activities of antiquity*”. Heaven and Earth, we learn from the verses (Isaiah 66), “*So says God, The Heaven is my throne, the Earth is my footstool. What sort of house can you possibly build for Me, and what sort of place for Me to rest?*”, and (Psalms 104), “*How grand are Your works, O God, all You have done was with wisdom; Your possessions fill the Earth*”. Regarding Abraham, we learn from the verse (Genesis 14), “*Blessed be Avram to the Most High God, Possessor of Heaven and Earth*”. Israel we learn from the verses (Exodus 15), “*Until Your people pass over, O God, until these people who You have acquired pass over*”, and (Psalms 16), “*The holy ones who are on Earth, are distinguished by merit of the fact that they do all My will*”. The Temple we learn from the verses (Exodus 15), “*The foundation of Your dwelling-place, the*

י חֲמִשָּׁה קְנִינִים קָנָה לוֹ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּעוֹלָמוֹ, וְאֵלוֹ הֵן, תּוֹרָה קְנִין אֶחָד, שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ קְנִין אֶחָד, אַבְרָהָם קְנִין אֶחָד, יִשְׂרָאֵל קְנִין אֶחָד, בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קְנִין אֶחָד. תּוֹרָה מִנִּין, דְּכָתִיב (משלי ח), יְהוָה קָנָנִי רֵאשִׁית דְּרַכּוֹ קֶדֶם מַבְעַלְיוֹ מֵאָז. שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ מִנִּין, דְּכָתִיב (ישעיה סו), כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּסְאִי וְהָאָרֶץ הֶדֶם רַגְלֵי אֵי זֶה בֵּית אֲשֶׁר תִּבְנוּ לִי וְאֵי זֶה מְקוֹם מְנוּחָתִי. וְאוֹמֵר (תהלים קד), מָה רַבּוֹ מַעֲשֵׂיךָ יְהוָה כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂיךָ עָשִׂיתָ מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ קְנִינֶךָ. אַבְרָהָם מִנִּין, דְּכָתִיב (בראשית יד), וַיִּבְרַכְהוּ וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ אַבְרָם לְאֵל עֶלְיוֹן קוֹנֵה שָׁמַיִם וְאָרֶץ. יִשְׂרָאֵל מִנִּין, דְּכָתִיב (שמות טו), עַד יַעֲבוֹר עַמְּךָ יְהוָה עַד יַעֲבוֹר עִם זֶה קְנִינֶךָ, וְאוֹמֵר (תהלים טז), לְקְדוֹשִׁים אֲשֶׁר בָּאָרֶץ הַמָּה וְאֲדִירֵי כָּל חֲפְצֵי בָם. בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ מִנִּין, דְּכָתִיב (שמות טו), מְכוֹן לְשִׁבְתֶּךָ פְּעֻלָּתְךָ יְהוָה מִקְדָּשׁ אֲדָנִי כוֹנֵנוּ יְדִידֶךָ. וְאוֹמֵר (תהלים עח), וַיְבִיֵאֵם אֵל גְּבוּל קִדְשׁוֹ חַר זֶה קְנָתָה יְמִינוֹ:

³²⁴ Five special, beloved possessions.

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sanctuary of the Lord, that You, God, prepared with Your own Hands”, and (Psalms 78), “He brought them to the border of His sacred boundary, which His right hand acquired”.

God has five exclusive possessions in this world:

1. Torah.
2. The heavens and earth.
3. Abraham.
4. Israel.
5. The Temple.

When God apportioned the regions of the earth among men, He retained for Himself, for a special purpose, one land, Eretz Yisroel, the Land of the Jews, which was to serve as the soil for His Law and of His people, who were to live (there) for the fulfillment of His Law.

ELEVEN

All which the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world he did only for His own glory, as it says (Isaiah 45), *“Everything is called by My Name and I have created, fashioned and even made it all for My glory”*, and (Exodus 15), *“God shall reign for all eternity”*.

יֵא כָּל מַה נִּשְׁבְּרָא הַקְּדוֹשׁ
 בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּעוֹלָמוֹ, לֹא בְּרֵאוֹ
 אֱלֹא לְכְבוֹדוֹ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (ישעיה מו),
 כָּל הַנִּקְרָא בְּשִׁמִּי וְלְכְבוֹדִי
 בְּרֵאתִיו יִצְרַתִּיו אֶף עֲשִׂיתִיו.
 וְאוֹמֵר (שמות טו), יְהוָה יִמְלֹךְ
 לְעֹלָם וָעֶד:

God created all of existence solely for His own glory.

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Rabbi Chanania ben Akashya said: The Holy One Blessed be He wanted to merit Israel, so He gave them much Torah and many Mitzvahs as it says, "God desires, for sake of His righteousness, to magnify Torah and make it exalted".

רַבִּי חַנְנִיָּא בֶּן אֶקָּשָׂא אָמַר,
רָצָה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְזַכּוֹת
אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְפִיכָךְ הִרְבָּה
לָהֶם תּוֹרָה וּמִצְוֹת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
יְהוָה חָפֵץ לְמַעַן צְדָקוֹ יַגְדִּיל
תּוֹרָה וַיֵּאדִיר:

By learning Torah and observing the Mitzvahs they will acquire the World to Come.



לע"נ ר' נפתלי הרצקא הלוי בורשטיין זצ"ל