

**ETHICS OF THE FATHERS
(PIRKE ABOTH OR TRACTATE ABOTH)**

CHAPTER ONE

1. Moses received the Torah from Sinai and gave it over to Joshua. Joshua gave it over to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets gave it over to the Men of the Great Assembly. They [the Men of the Great Assembly] would always say these three things: Be cautious in judgement. Establish many pupils. And make a safety fence around the Torah.
2. Shimon the Righteous was among the last surviving members of the Great assembly. He would say: The world stands on three things: Torah, the service of G-d, and deeds of kindness.
3. Antigonus of Socho received the tradition from Shimon the Righteous. He would say: Do not be as slaves, who serve their master for the sake of reward. Rather, be as slaves who serve their master not for the sake of reward. And the fear of Heaven should be upon you.
4. Yossei the son of Yoezer of Tzreidah, and Yossei the son of Yochanan of Jerusalem, received the tradition from them. Yossei the son of Yoezer of Tzreidah would say: Let your home be a meeting place for the wise; dust yourself in the soil of their feet, and drink thirstily of their words.
5. Yossei the son of Yochanan of Jerusalem would say: Let your home be wide open, and let the poor be members of your household. And do not engage in excessive conversation with a woman. This is said even regarding one's own wife--how much more so regarding the wife of another. Hence, the sages said: One who excessively converses with a woman causes evil to himself, neglects the study of Torah, and, in the end, inherits purgatory.
6. Joshua the son of Perachia and Nitai the Arbelite received from them. Joshua the son of Perachia would say: Assume for yourself a master, acquire for yourself a friend, and judge every man to the side of merit.
7. Nitai the Arbelite would say: Distance yourself from a bad neighbor, do not cleave to a wicked person, and do not abandon belief in retribution.
8. Judah the son of Tabbai and Shimon the son of Shotach received from them. Judah the son of Tabbai would say: When sitting in judgement, do not act as a counselor-at-law. When the litigants stand before you, consider them both guilty; and when they leave your courtroom, having accepted the judgement, regard them as equally righteous.
9. Shimon the son of Shotach would say: Increasingly cross-examine the witnesses. Be careful with your words, lest they learn from them how to lie.
10. Shmaayah and Avtalyon received from them. Shmaayah would say: Love work, loath mastery over others, and avoid intimacy with the government.
11. Avtalyon would say: Scholars, be careful with your words. For you may be exiled to a place inhabited by evil elements [who will distort your words to suit their negative purposes]. The disciples who come after you will then drink of these evil waters and be destroyed, and the Name of Heaven will be desecrated.
12. Hillel and Shammai received from them. Hillel would say: Be of the disciples of Aaron--a lover of peace, a pursuer of peace, one who loves the creatures and draws them close to Torah.
13. He would also say: One who advances his name, destroys his name. One who does not increase, diminishes. One who does not learn is deserving of death. And one who make personal use of the crown of Torah shall perish.

14. He would also say: If I am not for myself, who is for me? And if I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?
15. Shammai would say: Make your Torah study a permanent fixture of your life. Say little and do much. And receive every man with a pleasant countenance.
16. Rabban Gamliel would say: Assume for yourself a master; stay away from doubt; and do not accustom yourself to tithe by estimation.
17. His son, Shimon, would say: All my life I have been raised among the wise, and I have found nothing better for the body than silence. The essential thing is not study, but deed. And one who speaks excessively brings on sin.
18. Rabbi Shimon the son of Gamliel would say: By three things is the world sustained: law, truth and peace. As is stated (Zachariah 8:16), "Truth, and a judgement of peace, you should administer at your [city] gates."

CHAPTER TWO

1. Rabbi [Judah HaNassi]* would say: Which is the right path for man to choose for himself? Whatever is harmonious for the one who does it, and harmonious for mankind. Be as careful with a minor mitzvah as with a major one, for you do not know the rewards of the mitzvot. Consider the cost of a mitzvah against its rewards, and the rewards of a transgression against its cost. Contemplate three things, and you will not come to the hands of transgression: Know what is above from you: a seeing eye, a listening ear, and all your deeds being inscribed in a book.
2. Rabban Gamliel the son of Rabbi Judah HaNassi would say: Beautiful is the study of Torah with the way of the world, for the toil of them both causes sin to be forgotten. Ultimately, all Torah study that is not accompanied with work is destined to cease and to cause sin. Those who work for the community should do so for the sake of Heaven; for then merit of their ancestors shall aid them, and their righteousness shall endure forever. And you, [says G-d,] I shall credit you with great reward as if you have achieved it.
3. Be careful with the government, for they befriend a person only for their own needs. They appear to be friends when it is beneficial to them, but they do not stand by a person at the time of his distress.
4. He would also say: Make that His will should be your will, so that He should make your will to be as His will. Nullify your will before His will, so that He should nullify the will of others before your will. Hillel would say: Do not separate yourself from the community. Do not believe in yourself until the day you die. Do not judge your fellow until you have stood in his place. Do not say something that is not readily understood in the belief that it will ultimately be understood [or: Do not say something that ought not to be heard even in the strictest confidence, for ultimately it will be heard]. And do not say "When I free myself of my concerns, I will study," for perhaps you will never free yourself.
5. He would also say: A boor cannot be sin-fearing, an ignoramus cannot be pious, a bashful one cannot learn, a short-tempered person cannot teach, nor does anyone who does much business grow wise. In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man.
6. He also saw a skull floating upon the water. Said he to it: Because you drowned others, you were drowned; and those who drowned you, will themselves be drowned.
7. He would also say: One who increases flesh, increases worms; one who increases possessions, increases worry; one who increases wives, increases witchcraft; one who increases maidservants, increases promiscuity; one who increases man-servants, increases

thievery; one who increases Torah, increases life; one who increases study, increases wisdom; one who increases counsel, increases understanding; one who increases charity, increases peace. One who acquires a good name, acquired it for himself; one who acquires the words of Torah, has acquired life in the World to Come.

8. Rabban Yochanan the son of Zakkai received the tradition from Hillel and Shammai. He would say: If you have learned much Torah, do not take credit for yourself---it is for this that you have been formed.
9. Rabban Yochanan the son of Zakkai had five disciples: Rabbi Eliezer the son of Hurkenus, Rabbi Joshua the son of Chananya, Rabbi Yossei the Kohen, Rabbi Shimon the son of Nethanel, and Rabbi Elazar the son of Arach. He would recount their praises: Rabbi Eliezer the son of Hurkenus is a cemented cistern that loses not a drop; Rabbi Joshua the son of Chananya---fortunate is she who gave birth to him; Rabbi Yossei the Kohen---a chassid (pious one); Rabbi Shimon the son of Nethanel fears sin; Rabbi Elazar ben Arach is as an ever-increasing wellspring. [Rabbi Yochanan] used to say: If all the sages of Israel were to be in one cup of a balance-scale, and Eliezer the son of Hurkenus were in the other, he would outweigh them all. Abba Shaul said in his name: If all the sages of Israel were to be in one cup of a balance-scale, Eliezer the son of Hurkenus included, and Elazar the son of Arach were in the other, he would outweigh them all.
10. [Rabbi Yochanan] said to them: Go and see which is the best trait for a person to acquire. Said Rabbi Eliezer: A good eye. Said Rabbi Joshua: A good friend. Said Rabbi Yossei: A good neighbor. Said Rabbi Shimon: To see what is born [out of ones actions]. Said Rabbi Elazar: A good heart. Said He to them: I prefer the words of Elazar the son of Arach to yours, for his words include all of yours. He said to them: Go and see which is the worst trait, the one that a person should most distance himself from. Said Rabbi Eliezer: An evil eye. Said Rabbi Joshua: An evil friend. Said Rabbi Yossei: An evil neighbor. Said Rabbi Shimon: To borrow and not to repay; for one who borrows from man is as one who borrows from the Almighty, as is stated, ``The wicked man borrows and does not repay; but the righteous one is benevolent and gives" (Psalms 37:21). Said Rabbi Elazar: An evil heart. Said He to them: I prefer the word of Elazar the son of Arach to yours, for his words include all of yours. They would each say three things: Rabbi Eliezer would say: The honor of your fellow should be as precious to you as your own, and do not be easy to anger. Repent one day before your death.** Warm yourself by the fire of the sages, but be beware lest you be burned by its embers; for their bite is the bite of a fox, their sting is the sting of a scorpion, their hiss is the hiss a serpent, and all their words are like fiery coals.
11. Rabbi Joshua would say: An evil eye, the evil inclination, and the hatred of one's fellows, drive a person from the world.
12. Rabbi Yossei would say: The property of your fellow should be as precious to you as your own. Perfect yourself for the study of Torah, for it is not an inheritance to you. And all your deeds should be for the sake of Heaven.
13. Rabbi Shimon would say: Be meticulous with the reading of the Shma and with prayer. When you pray, do not make your prayers routine, but [an entreaty of] mercy and a supplication before the Almighty, as is stated ``For He is benevolent and merciful, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, and relenting of the evil decree" (Joel 2:13). And do not be wicked in your own eyes.

14. Rabbi Elazar would say: Be diligent in the study of Torah. Know what to answer a heretic. And know before whom you toil, and who is your employer who will repay you the reward of your labors.
15. Rabbi Tarfon would say: The day is short, the work is much, the workers are lazy, the reward is great, and the Master is pressing.
16. He would also say: It is not incumbent upon you to finish the task, but neither are you free to absolve yourself from it. If you have learned much Torah, you will be greatly rewarded, and your employer is trustworthy to pay you the reward of your labors. And know, that the reward of the righteous is in the World to Come.

CHAPTER THREE

1. Akavia the son of Mahalalel would say: Reflect upon three things and you will not come to the hands of transgression. Know from where you came, where you are going, and before whom you are destined to give a judgement and accounting. From where you came--from a putrid drop; where you are going--to a place of dust, maggots and worms; and before whom you are destined to give a judgement and accounting--before the supreme King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.
2. Rabbi Chanina, deputy to the kohanim, would say: Pray for the integrity of the government; for were it not for the fear of its authority, a man would swallow his neighbor alive. Rabbi Chanina son of Tradyon would say: Two who sit and no words of Torah pass between them, this is a session of scorners, as is stated, "And in a session of scorners he did not sit" (Psalms 1:1). But two who sit and exchange words of Torah, the Divine Presence rests amongst them, as is stated, "Then the G-d-fearing conversed with one another, and G-d listened and heard; and it was inscribed before Him in a book of remembrance for those who fear G-d and give thought to His name" (Malachi 3:16). From this, I know only concerning two individuals; how do I know that even a single individual who sits and occupies himself with the Torah, G-d designates reward for him? From the verse, "He sits alone in meditative stillness; indeed, he receives [reward] for it" (Lamentations 3:28).
3. Rabbi Shimon would say: Three who eat at one table and do not speak words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten of idolatrous sacrifices; as is stated, "Indeed, all tables are filled with vomit and filth, devoid of the Omnipresent" (Isaiah 28:8). But three who eat at one table and speak words of Torah, it is as if they have eaten at G-d's table, as is stated, "And he said to me: This is the table that is before G-d" (Ezekiel 41:22).
4. Rabbi Chanina the son of Chachina'i would say: One who stays awake at night, or travels alone on the road, and turns his heart to idleness, has forfeited his life.
5. Rabbi Nechunia the son of Hakanah would say: One who accepts upon himself the yoke of Torah is exempted from the yoke of government duties and the yoke of worldly cares; but one who casts off the yoke of Torah is saddled with the yoke of government duties and the yoke of worldly cares.
6. Rabbi Chalafta the son of Dosa of the village of Chanania would say: Ten who sit together and occupy themselves with Torah, the Divine Presence rests amongst them, as is stated: "The Almighty stands in the congregation of G-d" (Psalms 82:1). And from where do we know that such is also the case with five? From the verse, "He established his band on earth" (Amos 9:6). And three? From the verse, "He renders judgement in the midst of the tribunal" (Psalms 82:1). And two? From the verse, "Then the G-d-fearing conversed with one another, and G-d listened and heard" (Malachi 3:16). And from where do we know that such is the

case even with a single individual? From the verse, "Every place where I have My name mentioned, I shall come to you and bless you" (Exodus 20:21).

7. Rabbi Elazar of Bartosa would say: Give Him what is His, for you, and whatever is yours, are His. As David says: "For everything comes from You, and from Your own hand we give to You" (I Chronicles 29:14). Rabbi Yaakov would say: One who walks along a road and studies, and interrupts his studying to say, "How beautiful is this tree!", "How beautiful is this ploughed field!"---the Torah considers it as if he had forfeited his life.
8. Rabbi Dusta'i the son of Rabbi Yannai would say in the name of Rabbi Meir: Anyone who forgets even a single word of this learning, the Torah considers it as if he had forfeited his life. As is stated, "Just be careful, and verily guard your soul, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen" (Deuteronomy 4:9). One might think that this applies also to one who [has forgotten because] his studies proved too difficult for him; but the verse goes on to tell us "and lest they be removed from your heart, throughout the days of your life." Hence, one does not forfeit his life unless he deliberately removes them from his heart.
9. Rabbi Chanina the son of Dosa would say: One whose fear of sin takes precedence to his wisdom, his wisdom endures. But one whose wisdom takes precedence to his fear of sin, his wisdom does not endure.
10. He would also say: One whose deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom endures. But one whose wisdom exceeds his deeds, his wisdom does not endure. He would also say: One who is pleasing to his fellow men, is pleasing to G-d. But one who is not pleasing to his fellow men, is not pleasing to G-d. Rabbi Dosa the son of Hurkinas would say: Morning sleep, noontime wine, children's talk and sitting at the meeting places of the ignoramus, drive a person from the world.
11. Rabbi Elazar of Modi'in would say: One who profanes the kodoshim ("holy things" consecrated for the service of G-d in the Holy Temple), degrades the Festivals, humiliates his friend in public, abrogates the covenant of our father Abraham (i.e., circumcision), or who interprets the Torah contrary to its true intent---although he may possess Torah knowledge and good deeds, he has no share in the World to Come.
12. Rabbi Ishmael would say: Be yielding to a leader, affable to the black-haired, and receive every man with joy.
13. Rabbi Akiva would say: Jestings and frivolity accustom a person to promiscuity. Tradition is a safety fence to Torah, tithing a safety fence to wealth, vows a safety fence for abstinence; a safety fence for wisdom is silence.
14. He would also say: Beloved is man, for he was created in the image [of G-d]; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to him that he was created in the image, as it says, "For in the image of G-d, He made man" (Genesis 9:6). Beloved are Israel, for they are called children of G-d; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to them that they are called children of G-d, as it is stated: "You are children of the L-rd your G-d" (Deuteronomy 14:1). Beloved are Israel, for they were given a precious article; it is a sign of even greater love that it has been made known to them that they were given a precious article, as it is stated: "I have given you a good purchase; My Torah, do not forsake it" (Proverbs 4:2).
15. All is foreseen, and freedom of choice is granted. The world is judged with goodness, but in accordance with the amount of man's positive deeds.
16. He would also say: Everything is placed in pledge, and a net is spread over all the living. The store is open, the storekeeper extends credit, the account-book lies open, the hand writes, and

all who wish to borrow may come and borrow. The collection-officers make their rounds every day and exact payment from man, with his knowledge and without his knowledge. Their case is well founded, the judgement is a judgement of truth, and ultimately, all is prepared for the feast.

17. Rabbi Eliezer the son of Azariah would say: If there is no Torah, there is no common decency; if there is no common decency, there is no Torah. If there is no wisdom, there is no fear of G-d; if there is no fear of G-d, there is no wisdom. If there is no applied knowledge, there is no analytical knowledge; if there is no analytical knowledge, there is no applied knowledge. If there is no flour, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no flour. He would also say: One whose wisdom is greater than his deeds, what is he comparable to? To a tree with many branches and few roots; comes a storm and uproots it, and turns it on its face. As is stated, "He shall be as a lone tree in a wasteland, and shall not see when good comes; he shall dwell parched in the desert, a salt land, uninhabited" (Jeremiah 17:6). But one whose deeds are greater than his wisdom, to what is he compared? To a tree with many roots and few branches, whom all the storms in the world cannot budge from its place. As is stated: "He shall be as a tree planted upon water, who spreads his roots by the river; who fears not when comes heat, whose leaf is ever lush; who worries not in a year of drought, and ceases not to yield fruit" (ibid., v. 8).
18. Rabbi Eliezer [the son of] Chisma would say: the laws of kinin and the laws of menstrual periods---these, these are the meat of Halachah (Torah law). The calculations of solar seasons and gematria are the condiments of wisdom.

* Rabbi Judah HaNassi, compiler of the Mishnah, is referred to in the Talmud as "Rabbi."

** "Rabbi Eliezer would say: Repent one day before your death. Asked his disciples: Does a man know on which day he will die? Said he to them: So being the case, he should repent today, for perhaps tomorrow he will die; hence, all his days are passed in a state of repentance. Indeed, so said Solomon in his wisdom (Ecclesiastes 9:8): ``At all times, your clothes should be white, and oil should not lack from your head' " (Talmud, Shabbat 153a).