

Pirqa Aboth
(Sayings of the Fathers)

Translated by Michael L. Rodkinson

Chapter 1

1. Moses received the Law on Sinai and delivered it to Joshua; Joshua in turn handed it down to the Elders (not to the seventy Elders of Moses' time but to the later Elders who have ruled Israel, and each of them delivered it to his successor); from the Elders it descended to the prophets (beginning with Eli and Samuel), and each of them delivered it to his successors until it reached the men of the Great Assembly. The last, named originated three maxims: "Be not hasty in judgment; Bring up many disciples; and, Erect safe guards for the Law."

2. Simeon the just was one of the remnants of the Great Assembly. His motto was: "The order of the world rests upon three things: on law, on worship, and on bestowal of favors."

3. Antigonus of Socho, who received it from Simeon the just, was in the habit of saying: "Be not like slaves who serve their master for the sake of the compensation; be like such servants as labor for their master without reward; and let the fear of Heaven be upon you."

4. Jose b. Joezer of Zereda and Jose b. Johanan of Jerusalem received from them. Jose b. Joezer used to say: "Let your house be the meeting place of the wise; sit gladly at their feet, and drink in their words with avidity."

5. Jose b. Johanan of Jerusalem was in the habit of saying: "Let your house be so wide open that the poor may enter it as were they

inmates there; and do not hold too much discourse with woman." The sages have cautioned against talking too much with one's own wife. An inference can then be made with regard to talking with the wife of a neighbor. Hence the wise man said The man who does talk overmuch with woman causes evil unto himself, makes himself insusceptible of the words of the Thora, and in the end will be an heir to Gehenna."

6. Joshua b. Pera'hia and Nithai the Arbelite received from them. The former used to say: "Get yourself a wise teacher, acquire a comrade, and judge every one by his good qualities (i.e., from his favorable side)."

7. Nithai the Arbelite was accustomed to say: "Keep aloof from a wicked neighbor, associate not with a sinner, and never consider yourself exempt from God's chastisement."

8. Jehudah b. Tobai and Simeon b. Shata'h received from them. The former was wont to say: "Make not yourself as those who predispose the judges, and while the litigants stand before you let them be in your eyes as guilty; and when dismissed from before you let them be in your eyes as righteous, provided that they have received the verdict upon them." Simeon b. Shata'h used to say: "Interrogate the witnesses very closely, and be careful with your words, lest they be put by them on the track of falsehood."

9. Shemayah and Abtalion received from them. The former was in the habit of saying: "Love work and hate to attain superiority, and see to it that your name be not known to the government."

10. Abtalion was wont to say: "You wise, be guarded in your words; lest you load upon yourselves the penalty of exile and be exiled to the place of evil waters; and the disciples that come after you may drink and die, and the name of Heaven be profaned."

11. Hillel and Shammai received from them. Hillel said: "Be a disciple of Aaron, love peace, pursue peace, love all men too, and bring them nigh unto the Law."

12. He also used to say: "A name made great is a name destroyed; he who increases not, decreases; and he who will not learn from his masters is not worthy to live; and he who uses his knowledge as a crown perishes."

13. He also used to say: "If I do not look to myself, who will do so? But if I look only to myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"

14. Shammai was in the habit of saying: "Fix a time for study; promise little, and do much; receive every one with friendly countenance."

15. Rabban Gamaliel said: "Make to yourself a master, and free yourself of doubt, and tithe not much by estimation."

16. Simeon his son was wont to say: "All the days of my life have been passed among the sages, and I have never found anything better for a man than silence; and the discussion of the law is not of such import as is the practice thereof. He who talks much cannot avoid sin."

17. He also said: "Three things support the world—law, truth, and peace—as it is written [Zechariah, viii. 16]: 'Truth and the judgment of peace, judge in your gates.'"

Chapter 2

1. Rabbi (Jehudah the Prince) was in the habit of saying: "In choosing the right path, see that it is one which is honorable to yourself and without offence to others. Be as scrupulous about the lightest command as about the weightiest, for no man knows the result of his actions. Weigh the present temporal disadvantages of a dutiful course against the reward of the future, and the present desirable fruits of a sinful deed against the injury to your immortal soul. In general, consider three things and you will never fall into sin: remember that there is above you an all-seeing eye, an all-hearing ear, and a record of all your actions."

2. Rabban Gamaliel, the son of R. Jehudah the Prince, was wont to say: "Beautiful is the study of the Law when conjoined with a worldly avocation, for the efforts demanded by both stifle all inclination to sin. But study which is not associated with some worldly pursuit must eventually cease, and may lead to iniquity. All who occupy themselves with communal affairs should do it in the name of Heaven, for the merit of their fathers sustains them and their righteousness stands forever. And you yourselves shall have reward reckoned unto you, as if you had done it."

3. ["Be cautious with those in authority, for they let not a man approach them but for their own purposes; and they appear like friends when it is to their advantage, and stand not by a man in the time of his need.]

4. He also used to say: "Do His will as if it were your own, that He may do your will as

if it were His. Annul your will before His, that He may annul the will of others before your will.”

5. Hillel was in the habit of saying: “Do not isolate yourself from the community and its interest. Do not rely upon your spiritual strength until the day of your death. Pass not judgment upon your neighbor until you have put yourself in his place. Say not a thing which must not be heard, because eventually it will be heard, Say never, ‘Sometime or other, when I enjoy leisure, I will attend to my spiritual advancement’; perhaps you will then never have the leisure.”

6. He also said: “The boor can never fear sin, the ignorant can never be truly pious. Whoever is ashamed to ask will never learn; no irritable man can be a teacher. He whose mind is given to worldly gain will not acquire wisdom. Where a man is needed, endeavor that you be the man.”

7. Moreover, he saw a skull which floated on the face of the water, and he said to it: “Because you drowned [others] they drowned you, and in the end they who drowned you will be drowned.”

8. He furthermore said: “The more feasting the more food for worms; the more wealth the more cares; more women, more witchcraft; more maid-servants, more lewdness; more men-servants, more theft. But the more knowledge the more food for life; the more study the more wisdom; the more reflection the better the counsel; the more charity the more peace. He who earns a good name gains something that can never be taken away. He who has obtained for himself words of Law has obtained for himself the life of the world to come.”

9. Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai received it from Hillel and Shammai. He was wont to

say: “If you have learned much, do not boast of it, for it is for that that you were created.”

10. The above had the following five disciples: R. Eliezer b. Hyrkanos, R. Joshua b. Hananiah, R. Jose the priest, R. Simeon b. Nathaniel, and R. Elazar b. Arach. He used to recount their praises: “Eliezer b. Hyrkanos is a plastered cistern, which loses not a drop; Joshua b. Hananiah—happy is she who bore him; Jose is pious; Simeon b. Nathaniel is a sin-fearer; Elazar b. Arach is a welling spring.”

He used to say: “If all the wise of Israel were in a scale of the balance, and Eliezer b. Hyrkanos in the other scale, he would outweigh them all.” Abba Saul, however, said in his name: “If all the wise of Israel were in a scale of the balance and Eliezer b. Hyrkanos with them, and Elazar b. Arach in the other scale, he would outweigh them all.”

11. He (Johanan b. Zakkai) said to their once: “Go out and find what is the best thing to cultivate.” R. Eliezer said: A generous eye; R. Joshua said: A loyal friend; R. Jose said: A good neighbor; R. Simeon thought: Prudence and foresight; R. Elazar said: A good heart. Thereupon the Master said: “I consider R. Elazar b. Arach’s judgment the best, for in his all of yours are included.”

He said to them again: “Go and find out which is the evil way a man should shun.” R. Eliezer said: An evil eye; R. Joshua said: An evil companion; R. Jose said: An evil neighbor; and R. Simeon said; He who borrowed and repays not; he who borrows from a man is the same as if he borrows from the Omnipotent, as it is written [Ps. xxxvii. 2 1]: “The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous is beneficent and gives.”, R. Elazar said: An evil heart. Thereupon the Master said: “I consider R. Elazar b. Arach’s judgment the best, for in his all of yours are included.”

12. Each of these disciples had three maxims. R. Eliezer: "Your fellowman's honor must be as dear to you as your own. Do not allow yourself to be easily angered. Repent one day before your death." (He also said:) "Warm yourself before the light of the wise, but beware of their embers, in case you are singed; for their bite is the bite of a fox, and their sting the sting of a scorpion, and their hiss is that of a fiery-serpent; and all their words are as coals of fire."

13. R. Joshua: "An envious eye, sinful propensities, and misanthropy drive a man out of the world."

14. R. Jose: "Your neighbor's property must be as sacred as your own. Set yourself to learn the Law, for it is not an heirloom unto you. Let noble purpose underlie your every action."

15. R. Simeon: "Be careful in reading the Shema, and, in prayer; do not look upon the prayer as an obligatory task, but as a privilege granted by mercy and grace before God, for it is written [Joel, ii. 13]: 'For gracious and merciful is he, long-suffering and of great kindness, and he relenting of evil.' Never think yourself too great a sinner to approach Him."

16. R. Elazar: "Be most zealous in the pursuit of study; be prepared always to answer a scoffer; remember in whose service you labor." (He also added:) "Know who your Master is, that he may be trusted to recompense you for your work."

17. R. Tarphon was in the habit of saying: "The day is short, the work is great, the workmen are slothful, the reward is rich, and the Master is urgent."

18. He also said: "It is not incumbent on you to complete the whole task, but you are not

at liberty therefore to neglect it entirely. If you have learned much Law you will be given much reward; and faithful is the Master of your work, who will pay you the reward of your work; and know also that the gift of the recompense of the righteous is for the world to come."

Chapter 3

1. Aqabia b. Mahalallel used to say: "Consider three things, and you will not fall into transgression: know whence you come, whither you are going, and before whom you are about to give account and reckoning; know whence you come—from a fetid drop, and whither you are going—to worm and maggot; and before whom you are about to give account and reckoning: before the King of the kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He."

2. R. Haninah, the Segan of the high-priest, said: "Pray always for the welfare of the government; were it not for the fear of it, men would swallow each other alive." R. Haninah b. Phradyon said: "Two that sit together and do not discuss any portion of the Law, their sitting is considered that of scorners, as it is written [Ps. i. 1]: 'And sit not in the seat of scorners'; but two that sit together and are discussing some words of the Law have the Shekhina among them, as it is written [Mal. iii. 16]: 'Then conversed they that feared the Lord one with the other; and the Lord listened and heard it,' etc."

This is as to two. Whence is it deduced of even one who occupies himself with the study of the Law, that the Holy One, blessed be He, fixes his reward? It is written [Sam. iii. 28]: "That he sit in solitude and be silent; because He has laid it upon him."

3. R. Simeon said Three who have eaten at our table, and have not blessed the Lord for

His kindness, are as if they have eaten of the sacrifices of the dead, as it is written [Is. xxviii. 8]: 'For all tables are full of vomit of filthiness, there is no place (clean).' But three who have blessed the Lord when eating at our table, are as if they had eaten of the table of the Omnipotent, as it is written [Ezek. xli. 22]: And he spoke unto me: This is the table that is before the Lord."

4. R. Hanina b. 'Hakhinai used to say: "He who awakens by night, and he who is walking alone on the road and turns aside his heart to idleness, it is his own fault if he incurs trouble for himself."

5. R. Nehunia b. Haqanah said: "Whoever receives upon him the yoke of the Law (i.e., one who devotes himself wholly to study), the community removes from him the yoke of the government and the yoke of worldly cares; but a student who breaks from him the yoke of the Law, the community lays upon him the yoke of the government and the yoke of worldly cares."

6. R. 'Halaphtha of the village of Hananiah said: "When ten sit and are occupied in words of Law the Shekhina is among them, as it is written [Ps. lxxxii. 1]: 'God stands in the Congregation of God.' And whence is it proved of even five? It is written [Amos, ix. 6]: 'And has founded his bundle on the earth' (and a bundle is at least of five). And whence even three? It is written [Ps. lxxxii. 1]: 'In the midst of judges does he judge' (and the number of judges is generally three). And whence even two? It is written [Mal. iii. 16]: 'Then they who favored the Lord spoke often one to another.' (The least number of persons who can speak to each other is two.) And whence even one? It is written [Ex. xx. 24 (21)]: 'In every place where I shall permit my name to be mentioned, I will come unto you and will bless you.'"

7. R. Eliezer of Bartota said: "Render unto God what belongs to Him, for you and all you have are His, as David said [I Chron. xxix. 14]: 'For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.'"

8. R. Jacob said: "One who walks by the way and learns, and breaks off his study and says, 'How beautiful is this tree!' and, 'How fine is this furrow field!' is endangering his own life."

9. R. Dosithai b. R. Janai said in the name of R. Meir: "When a scholar of the sages sits and studies, and subsequently forgets what he studied, Scripture likens him to one who endangers his own life, as it is written [Deut. iv. 9]: 'Only take heed to yourself, and guard your soul, diligently, that you do not forget the things which your eyes have seen and that they depart not from your heart all the days of your life,' etc. It might be thought that he is culpable of forgetting even when his study had grown hard to him, therefore it is written [Deut. iv. 19]: 'And they depart not from your heart all the days of your life,' from which it is to be inferred that he is not guilty unless he intentionally leads such a life as to forget them."

10. R. Hanina b. Dosa said: "He in whom fear of sin precedes his wisdom, (may be sure that) his wisdom will endure; and he in whom wisdom precedes his fear of sin, (may be sure that) his wisdom will not endure."

He also used to say: "He whose works are in excess of his wisdom, (it is certain that) his wisdom will endure; and he whose wisdom is in excess of his works, (it is certain that) his wisdom will not endure."

He also said: "He who has earned man's esteem and love, will also receive the favor of Heaven; but he who is not worthy of such esteem, cannot expect to find favor with God."

11. R. Dosa b. Horkhinas said: “Sleeping away the morning, carousing at noonday, childish trifling, and the company of the vulgar waste a man’s life away.

12. R. Elazar the Modai said: “He who profanes things sacred and condemns the festivals; he who causes his neighbor to blush in public, and annuls the covenant of Abraham our father, and acts barefacedly against the Torah, even though he is possessed of Torah and good deeds, he has no share in the world to come.”

13. R. Ishmael said: “Be pliant with your chief (although he is not deserving) and yielding to the impressment, and receive every man with cheerfulness.”

14. R. Aqiba said: “Mockery and frivolity are the forerunners of immorality. Tradition is the rampart about the Law; tithes (charity) are the rampart of wealth; good resolutions are the preservative of abstinence; and the safeguard of wisdom is—silence.”

15. He used to say: “Beloved is man, that he was created in His image, and, moreover, that he was notified that he was so created, as it is written [Gen. ix. 6]: ‘For in the image of God made he man.’”

16. “Beloved are Israel, that they are called children of God; moreover, that it was made known to them that they are so called, as it is written [Deut. xiv. 1]: ‘You are the children of the Lord your God.’”

17. “Beloved are Israel, that there was given to them a precious article; moreover, that it was made known to them that there was given to them the precious article” [as it is stated elsewhere that with this the world was created, as it is written [Prov. iv. 2]: “For good information do I give you; my teaching must you not forsake”].

18. “Everything is foreseen and free-will is given. And the world is judged by grace; and every one is judged according to the majority of his deeds” (i.e., if one has done more good than evil, he is judged more favorably—Rashi).

19. He (Aqiba) used to say: “All that we possess is merely a trust, and over all life a net is spread out. The storehouse is open, the proprietor sells on credit; the ledger lies ready and the purchaser’s hand makes the entry; whoever wishes may come and borrow, but the collectors are continually going the rounds of the debtors, and obtain payment from them voluntarily or involuntarily; they know whereupon they base their claims, and their court is a tribunal of justice, and everything is prepared for the banquet” (i.e., even the wicked have a share in the world to come—Rashi).

20. R. Elazar b. Azariah was wont to say: “Without knowledge of religion there can be no true culture, and without true culture there is no knowledge of religion. Where there is no wisdom, there is no fear of God; and without fear of God there is no wisdom. Without learning there can be no counsel, and without counsel there will be lack of learning. Where there is a dearth of bread, culture cannot thrive, and lack of culture causes dearth of bread.”

21. He also used to say: “With what is he to be compared, who can boast of more learning than charitable deeds? With a tree of many branches and but few roots—there comes a storm that uproots and prostrates it, as it is written [Jer. xvii. 6]: ‘And he shall be like a lonely tree in the desert, which feels not when the good comes; but abides in the parched places in the wilderness, in a salty land which cannot be inhabited. ‘But what does he resemble, who can show more deeds than learning? A tree of few branches and

many roots: all the storms, and winds may bear down and rage upon it, they cannot move it from its place. As it is written [Jer. xvii. 8]: ‘And he shall be like a tree that is planted by the waters, and by a stream spreads out its roots, which feels not when heat comes, but its leaf remains green, and in a year of drought it is undisturbed by care, and ceases not from yielding fruit.’”

22. R. Elazar b. ‘Hasma said: “‘Qinim’ and ‘Pitteche Niddah’ are essentials of Torah; canons of astronomy and geometry are after-courses of wisdom.”

Chapter 4

1. Ben Zoma was in the habit of saying: Who is a wise man? He who learns from everybody, as it is written [Ps. cxix. 99]: ‘Above all my teachers have I obtained intelligence!’ Who is a hero? He who conquers his passions, as it is written [Prov. xvi. 32]: ‘One that is slow to anger is better than a hero; and he who rules his spirit, than the conqueror of a city.’ Who is a rich man? He who is satisfied with his lot, as it is written [Ps. cxxviii. 2]: ‘For you eat the labor of your hands: then will you be happy, and it shall be well with you.’ ‘Will you be happy’ in this world, ‘it shall be well with you’ in the world to come. Who is honored? He who honors his fellowmen, as it is written [I Samuel ii. 30]: “For those that honor me will I honor, and those that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.”

2. Ben Azai was in the habit of saying: “Hasten to fulfill the commandment of little importance as if it were of much importance, and flee from all manner of sin, for the fulfillment of one precept brings about that of another, and one transgression brings about another; for the reward of virtue is virtue itself, and the reward of sin is sin.” He like-

wise said: “Despise no man, and consider nothing as too far removed to come to pass; for there is no man but has his day, and no event that may not come.”

3. R. Levitas of Jabneh said: “Be exceedingly lowly of spirit, for the hope of man is the worm.” “R. Johanan b. Baroquah said: “Whoever profanes the name of Heaven in secret, they punish him openly. Error, like design, is punishable as to the profanation of His name.”

4. R. Ishmael said: “He who learns in order to teach, they grant him the faculty to learn and to teach; he who learns in order to practice, they grant him the faculty to learn, to teach, to preserve, and to practice.”

5. R. Zadoq was in the habit of saying: “Wear not the law of God as a crown by which to exalt yourself, nor use it as a spade to dig therewith (for wealth).” [And thus was Hillel wont to say: “And he who serves himself with the tiara perishes.”] Thus you are to learn that he who makes use of his learning in the Law to further his own selfish ends loses all merit.

6. R. Jose said: “Whoever honors the Torah is himself held in honor, and whoever dishonors the Torah is himself dishonored with men.”

7. R. Ishmael said: “He who refrains himself from judgment, frees himself from enmity, and rapine, and false swearing; and he who is arrogant in decision is foolish, wicked, and puffed up in spirit.”

8. He used to say: “Judge not alone, for none may judge alone save One; and say not, ‘Accept my opinion,’ for they are free to choose, and not you.”

9. R. Jonathan said: "Whoever fulfils the Law in poverty will at length fulfill it in wealth, and whoever neglects the Law in wealth will at length neglect it in poverty."

10. R. Meir said: "Lessen your business, that you have more time for the study of the Law, and be lowly in spirit unto every man; and if you idle away your time without study of the Law, you will have many idlers against you; and if you labor in the Law, He has much reward to give unto you."

11. R. Eliezer b. Jacob said: "He who performs one precept has acquired unto himself one advocate, and he who commits one transgression has obtained for himself one accuser. Repentance and good deeds are as a shield against punishment."

12. R. Jehudah the Sandlar said: "Whichever congregation is for the sake of Heaven will in the end succeed; and that which is not for a divine purpose will in the end not succeed."

13. R. Elazar b. Shamna said: "Let the honor of your disciple be as dear unto you as the honor of your associate; and the honor of your associate as the fear of your master; and the fear of your master as the fear of Heaven."

14. R. Jehudah said: "Be careful in your study, for error in study counts for an intentional sin."

15. R. Simeon was wont to say: "There are three crowns—the crown of the Law, the crown of the priesthood, and the crown of royalty. But the crown of a fair name excels them all."

16. R. Nehorai said: "Exile yourself to a place of Torah, and say not that it will come after you, or that your associates will pre-

serve it for you, and (moreover) lean not unto your own understanding."

17. R. Janai said: "Neither the security of the wicked nor the afflictions of the righteous are within the grasp of our understanding."

18. R. Mathia b. 'Heresh was in the habit of saying: "Be first in saluting every man! Be the lion's tail rather than the fox's head!"

19. R. Jacob said: "This world is, as it were, the antechamber of the world hereafter; therefore, prepare yourself in the antechamber, that you may be admitted into the banqueting hall!"

20. He used to say: "Better is one hour of repentance and good deeds in this world than all the life of the world to come, though one hour of refreshment of spirit in the world to come is better than all the life in this world."

21. R. Simeon b. Elazar said: "Do not seek to appease your friend in the hour of his passion, and do not seek to console him in the hour when his dead is laid out before him; and do not interrogate him in the hour of his vow, and strive not to see him in the hour of his disgrace."

22. Samuel the Little used always to repeat the following passage [Prov. xxiv. 17, 18]: "At the fall of your enemy do not rejoice, and at his stumbling let not your heart be glad, lest the Lord see it, and it be displeasing in his eyes, and he turn away from him his wrath."

23. Elisha b. Abuyah said: "He who learns as a lad, to what is he like? To ink written on fresh paper. And he who learns when old, to what is he like? To ink written on blotted paper."

24. R. Jose b. Jehudah, the villager of Babylon, said: "Whom does he resemble, who learns from the young? Him who eats unripe grapes and drinks the wine fresh from the wine-press! But whom does he resemble, who learns from old men? Him who eats ripe grapes and drinks old wine!"

25. Rabbi was in the habit of saying: "Look not upon the pitcher, but upon what it contains. Many a new pitcher is full of old wine, and many an old one does not even hold new wine."

26. Rabbi Eliezer the Kapar said, "Envy, sensuality, and ambition destroy life."

27. He likewise said: "Those born into the world are destined to die; the dead to live on again; and those who enter the eternal life, to be judged. Therefore let it be recognized, understood, and remembered, that He the Almighty, the Creator, Architect, He is the counselor, He the judge, He the witness, He the accuser. He is always ready to give judgment; blessed be He! for, before Him there is no injustice, no oversight, no regard for rank, no bribery. Know that all will appear in the account! Accept not the assurance of your passions, that the grave will be a place of refuge for you. For without your consent were you created, were born into the world without your choice; you are now living without your own volition, without your approval you will have to die; so likewise without your consent you will have to render account before the Supreme King, the Holy One, blessed be He!"

Chapter 5

1. By ten sayings the world was created; and why so? Could it not have been created by one saying? But it was that vengeance might be taken on the wicked, who destroy the

world that was created by ten sayings; and to give a goodly reward to the righteous, who maintain the world that was created by ten sayings.

2. Ten generations were there from Adam to Noah, to show how great was His long-suffering; for all the generations were provoking him, till He brought the deluge upon them.

3. Ten generations were there from Noah to Abraham, to show how great was His long-suffering; for all the generations were provoking Him till Abraham our father came, and received the reward of them all.

4. With ten temptations was Abraham our father tempted, and he withstood them all, to show how great was the love of Abraham our father.

5. With ten temptations did our ancestors tempt God in the wilderness, as it is written [Num. xxv. 22]: "And have tempted me these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice."

6. Ten miracles were wrought for our fathers in Egypt, and ten by the sea.

7. Ten miracles were performed in the Sanctuary: No woman miscarried from the scent of the holy meat, and the holy meat never stank; and a fly was not seen in the slaughter-house; and an uncleanness befell not the high-priest on the Day of Atonement; and a defect was not found in the sheep, nor in the two loaves, nor in the shew-bread; and rains did not extinguish the fire of the fuel heaped upon the altar, and wind prevailed not against the pillar of smoke; they stood crowded together, but bowed down at ease; and serpent and scorpion harmed not in Jerusalem, and a man never said to his fellow,

“The place is too crowded for me to lodge in Jerusalem,”

8. Ten things were created at twilight of the eve of Sabbath: the mouth of the earth and the mouth of the well, and the mouth of the ass, and the bow, and the manna, and the rod, and the Shomir worm, and the character and the writing, and the tables. And some say the evil spirits also; and the sepulcher of Moses, and the ram of Abraham our father; and some say the first tongs with which subsequently other tongs were made.

9. Seven things mark the foolish, and seven there are for the sage. The wise man does not speak before those who surpass him in wisdom and years; he does not interrupt another in his speech, he is not hasty in answering; he does not ask questions rashly; asks with propriety and to the point; speaks first upon the matter first in order, and last upon last; when he does not understand the matter under discussion, he confesses, “I do not understand it”; and admits it when he has been convinced. The opposite of these things mark the foolish.

10. Seven kinds of punishments come on account of seven cardinal transgressions. When some men tithe, and some do not tithe, dearth comes from drought; some of them are hungry, and some of them are satiated. When they have not tithed at all, a dearth comes from tumult and from drought. And when they have not separated the first dough, a deadly dearth comes.

11. Pestilence comes unto the world for the capital crimes mentioned in the Torah, which are not to be brought before the tribunal, and for the seventh-year fruits.

12. The sword comes upon the world for suppression or perversion of judgment, and also for false interpretation of the Law.

13. Noisy beasts come into the world for vain swearing, and for profanation of the Name. Captivity comes upon the world for idolatry, for incest and for shedding of blood, and for not observing the Sabbatical year.

14. At four seasons the pestilence increases: in the fourth year, in the Sabbatical year; at the ending of the latter, and at the ending of the Feast in every year—in the fourth, on account of the poor’s tithe in the third; in the seventh, on account of the poor’s tithe in the sixth; and at the ending of the seventh, on account of the fruit of the Sabbatical year; and at the ending of the feast in every year, on account of the largesses of the poor.

15. Four kinds of views are held by men concerning property. He who says: “What belongs to me shall continue to be mine, and you shall keep your own,” holds the common view. Some consider this the view of the men of Sodom. “Mine shall be yours, and yours shall be mine,” thus say the ignorant. “Mine shall be yours, and you shall also keep your own,” thus says the magnanimous. “yours shall be mine, and mine shall continue to be mine,” are the words of the godless.

16. There are four kinds of dispositions among men. Some are easily enraged, but as quickly soothed—there the fault is neutralized by the merit. Some are slow to anger, but are calmed only with difficulty—there the merit is counterbalanced by the fault. One is slow to anger and easily pacified—he is of a gentle disposition. Another is easily irritated and hard to soothe—he is a wicked man.

17. There are four kinds of pupils: one understands readily but forgets soon—there the advantage is swallowed by the failing; an-

other grasps but slowly, and seldom forgets—there the failing is outweighed by the talent; a third understands readily and is slow to forget—his is a good portion; a fourth understands slowly and forgets quickly—his is a poor endowment.

18. There are four kinds of charity-givers: He who gives but does not care that others should give—his eye is evil towards others (i.e., the charity-giver shall not have the pleasure of doing charity and the poor shall be deprived of it); he who makes others give, but does not give himself, does not make the best use of his own; he who gives, and makes others give, is pious; but he who neither gives nor suffers others to give is a cruel man.

19. There are four kinds of visitors of the house of learning: he who goes and does not practice (i.e., he accepts the lessons without any examination or study of them), the reward of going only remains with him; he who practices (i.e., he who studies at home) and does not go, the reward of practice remains with him; he who does both is pious; he who enrolls among the college visitors, but neither goes nor practices, is wicked.

20. There are four kinds of the disciples of the wise: sponge, funnel, strainer, and sieve; sponge—sucking up all things; funnel—allowing all that is received in the one end to flow out at the other; strainer—letting the wine run through and retaining the dregs; sieve—blowing off the bran and keeping the flour.

21. Love, inspired by ulterior motives, dies out when those motives disappear; but love without such motives never fades.

22. What love is that which is inspired by ulterior motives? E.g. the love of Amnon and Tamar. And what love is without such

motives? E.g., the love of David and Jonathan.

23. Any dispute for the sake of Heaven will have good results, and that which is not for the sake of Heaven will not have the desired result.

24. Which dispute is for the sake of Heaven? E.g., the dispute of Hillel and Shammai. And that which is not for the sake of Heaven? E.g., the dispute of Korah and his followers.

25. Whoever causes many to be righteous, sin prevails not over him; and whoever causes many to sin, they grant him not the faculty to repent.

26. Moses, who was righteous and caused many to become righteous, the righteousness of the many was therefore laid upon him, as it is written [Deut. xxxiii. 21]: “He executed the justice of the Lord, and his judgment with Israel.”

Jeroboam, who on the contrary sinned and caused many to sin, the sin of the many, therefore, was laid upon him, as it is written [I Kings xiv. 16]: “For the sake of the sins of Jeroboam, who did sin, and who induced Israel to sin.”

27. In whomever are the following three things, he is a disciple of Abraham, and in whomsoever are the contrary three things, he is a disciple of Balaam.

28. He who possesses a good eye, a modest spirit, and a humble mind is to be counted the disciple of Abraham our father; an evil eye, a haughty spirit, and a bombastic mind is to be counted the disciple of Balaam. And what difference is there between the disciples of Abraham and those of Balaam? The disciples of Balaam go down to Gehenna, as it is written [Ps. lv. 24]: “But you, O God,

you will bring them down into the pit of destruction: let not the men of blood and deceit live out half their days; but I will indeed trust in you.” But the disciples of Abraham derive benefit in this world and inherit the world to come, as it is written [Prov. viii. 21]: “That I may cause those who love me to inherit a lasting possession; and their treasures will I fill.”

29. Jehudah b. Tema was in the habit of saying: “Be courageous as the panther, light-winged as the eagle, swift as the deer, and strong as the lion, to execute the will of your Heavenly Father.”

30. He used to say: “Gehenna will be the place for the bold of face, and the Garden of Eden will be that for the shamefaced.”

31. He used to say: “One five years old should study Scripture; ten years—Mishna; thirteen years—should practice the commandments; fifteen years old—should study Gemara; eighteen years old—the bridal; at twenty—pursuits; at thirty—strength; at forty—discernment; at fifty—counsel; at sixty—age; at seventy—hoariness; at eighty—power; at ninety—decrepitude; at one hundred—it is as though he were dead and gone and had ceased from the world.”

32. Ben Bag-Bag said: “Turn it, and turn it again (the Torah), for everything can be found in it. Study it, get old and gray with it, and never depart from it; for there is no better gauge of a moral life than—the Torah.”

33. Ben He-He said: “The reward is commensurate with the affliction.”

Chapter 6

1. R. Meir said: “Whoever is busied in Torah for the love thereof merits many things; and not only so, but he is worth the whole world, as he is called friend, beloved, loves the Omnipotent and mankind; pleases the Omnipotent and mankind. And it clothes him with meekness and fear, and fits him to become righteous, pious, upright, and faithful; and removes him from sin, and brings him toward the side of merit. And they derive from him the benefit of good counsel, and sound wisdom, understanding, and strength, as it is written [Prov. viii. 14]: ‘Mine are counsel and sound wisdom: I am understanding; mine is might.’ And it gives him kingdom and dominion, and faculty of judgment. And they reveal to him secrets of Torah; and he is made, as it were, a spring that ceases not and as a river that flows on increasing. And he becomes modest and long-suffering, and forgiving of insult, and it magnifies him and exalts him over all things.”

2. Said R. Jehoshua b. Levi: “Every day a Heavenly voice goes forth from Mount Horeb, and proclaims as follows: ‘Woe to the creatures for contempt of the Law, for whoever does not occupy himself in the Law is called “blameworthy,”’ as it is written [Prov. xi. 22]: ‘As a golden ring in a swine’s snout, so is a handsome woman who has thrown off discretion’; and it is also written [Ex. xxxii. 16]: ‘And the tables were the work of God, and the writing, was the writing of God, engraved (charuth) upon the tables.’ Do not read charuth, graven, but cheruth, freedom, for there is no free man but him who is occupied in the study of the Law; as whoever is occupied in such study, behold he exalts himself, as it is written [Num. xxi. 19]: ‘And from Mattanah to Nachaliël; and from Nachaliël to Barmoth.’”

3. He who learns from his companion one chapter, or one Halakha, or one verse, or one word, or even one letter is bound to do him honor, for thus we find with David, King of Israel, who learned from Achitophel two things only, and nevertheless he named him his master, his guide, and his acquaintance, as it is written [Ps. lv. 14]: “But it is you, a man my equal, my guide, and my acquaintance.” And is there not an a fortiori conclusion to be drawn from this, that as David, King of Israel, who learned from Achitophel two things only, called him his master, his guide, and his acquaintance, he who learns from his companion one chapter, or one Halakha, or one verse, or even one letter is so much the more bound to do him honor? And honor is nothing but the Torah, as it is written [Prov. iii. 35]: “The wise shall inherit glory”; and also [ibid. xxviii. 10]: “But the men of integrity will inherit what is good”; and good is nothing but the Torah, as it is written [ibid. iv. 2]: “For good information do I give you, my teaching (Torah) must you not forsake.”

4. This is the path of Torah: A morsel with salt shall you eat. You shall drink also water by measure (Ezek. v. 11) and shall sleep upon the ground, and live a life of painfulness, and in Torah shall you labor. If you do thus, “happy shall you be and it shall be well with you” [Ps. cxxviii. 2]. “Happy shall you be” in this world, and “it shall be well with you” in the world to come.

5. Seek not greatness for yourself, and desire not honor. Practice more than you learn, and lust not for the table of kings, for your table is greater than theirs, and your crown greater than their crown, and faithful is your taskmaster, who will pay you the wage of your work.

6. Greater is Torah than the priesthood, and than the kingdom; for the kingdom is ac-

quired by thirty degrees, and the priesthood by twenty-four, and the Torah is acquired by forty-eight. And these are they: by learning, by a listening ear, by orderly speech, by discernment of heart, by reverence, by fear, by meekness, by cheerfulness, by purity, by attendance upon the wise, by discussion with associates, by argumentation of disciples, by sedateness, by Scripture, by Mishna, by moderation of business, limitation of worldly things, by temperance in pleasure, by little sleep, by lessening converse, by reducing merriment, by long-suffering, by a good heart, by faith in the wise, by acceptance of chastisements; he who knows his place, and that rejoices in his portion, and that makes a face to his words, and does not claim merit to himself: he is loved, loves God, loves all creatures, loves righteousness, loves uprightness, loves reproofs, and retires from honor, and does not puff up his heart on account of his learning, and does not rejoice because he is privileged to give decision, bears the yoke with his associates, and inclines him to the scale of Merit, and grounds him upon the truth and upon peace, and concentrates his mind in study, asks and answers, hears and adds thereto; he who learns in order to teach, and learns in order to practice; that makes his master wiser, and that considers what he has heard, and tells a thing in the name of him that said it. Lo, you have learned that whoever tells a thing in the name of him that said it brings redemption to the world, as it is written [Esther, ii. 22]: “And Esther said it to the king in the name of Mordecai.”

7. Great is Torah, that gives life to those who practice it in this world and in the world to come, as it is written [Prov. iv. 22]: “For they are life unto every one of those that find them, and to all his body a healing.” And it is also written [ibid. iii. 8]: “It will be healing to your body, and marrow to your bones.” And it is again written [ibid.

18]: “A tree of life is she to those who lay hold on her, and every one that firmly grasps her will be made happy.” And again [ibid. i. 9]: “For a wreath of grace are they unto your head, and chains for your throat.” And again [ibid. iv. 9]: “She will give to your head a wreath of grace; a crown of ornament will she deliver to you.” And again [ibid. iii. 16]: “Length of days is in her right hand; in her left are riches and honor.” And again [ibid. iii. 2]: “For length of days, and years of life, and peace, will they increase unto you.”

8. R. Simeon b. Menassia said in the name of R. Simeon b. Jo’hai: “Comeliness, and strength, and wealth, and honor, and wisdom, and age, and hoariness, and sons are becoming to the righteous, and becoming to the world, as it is written [Prov. xvi. 31]: ‘An ornamental crown is the hoary head, on the way of righteousness can it be found.’ And it is also written [ibid. XX. 29]: ‘The ornament of young men is their strength; and the glory of old men is a hoary head’; and again [ibid. xvii. 6]: ‘The crown of old men is children’s children; and the ornament of children are their fathers’; and again [Is. xxiv. 23]: ‘And the moon shall be put to the blush, and the sun be made ashamed; for the Lord of Hosts will reign on Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients in glory.’”

S. Simeon b. Menassia said: “Those seven qualities which the wise have reckoned to the righteous were all of them confirmed in Rabbi and his sons.”

9. R. Jose b. Qisma said: “Once I was walking by the way and there met a man, and he gave me ‘Peace!’ and I returned him ‘Peace!’ He said to me: ‘Rabbi, from what place art you?’ I said to him: ‘From a great city of wise men and scribes am I.’ He said to me: ‘Rabbi, should you like to dwell with us in our place? I will give you a thousand thousand dinars of gold, and goodly

stones, and pearls.’ I said to him: I If you should give me all the silver, gold, and goodly stones, and pearls that are in the world, I would not dwell but in a place of Torah, as it is written in the Book of Psalms by the hand of David, King of Israel [Ps. cxix. 72]: “Better is unto me the law of your mouth than thousands of gold and silver.” Moreover, in the hour of a man’s decease, not silver, not gold, nor goodly stones and pearls, accompany the man, but Torah and good words alone, as it is written [Prov. vi. 22]: “When you walk it shall lead you, when you lie down it shall watch over you; when you are awake it shall converse with you.” “When you walk it shall lead you” in this world; “when you lie down it shall watch over you” in the grave; “when you are awake it shall converse with you” in the world to come; and it is also written [Haggai ii. 8]: “Mine is the silver, and mine is the gold, saith the Lord of Hosts.”

Five possessions had the Holy One, blessed be He, in this world, and these are they: Torah, one possession; Heaven and earth, one possession; Abraham, one possession; Israel, one possession; the Sanctuary, one possession. Torah, whence? As it is written [Prov. viii. 22]: “The Lord created 1 me as the beginning of his way; the first of his works from the commencement.” Heaven and earth, whence? As it is written [Is. lxvi. 2] “The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool where is there a house that you can build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?” And it is also written [Ps. civ. 24]: “How manifold are your works, O Lord! in wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your riches.” Abraham, whence? It is written [Gen. xiv. 19]: “And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth.” Israel, whence? As it is written [Ex. xv. 16]: “Till your people pass over, O Lord, till this people pass over which you have pur-

chased.” And it is also written [Ps. xvi. 3]: “In the saints who are on the earth, and in the excellent—in them is all my delight.” The Sanctuary, whence? As it is written [Ex. xv. 7]: “The sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.” And it is also written [Ps. lxxviii, 54]: “And he brought them to his holy territory, even to this mount, which his right hand had acquired.”

Whatever the Holy One, blessed be He, created in this world, He created not but for his glory, as it is written [Ps. xliii. 7]: “Every one that is called by my name, and whom I have created for my glory; whom I have formed; yea, whom I have made.” And it is also written [Ex. xv. 18]: “The Lord will reign for ever and ever.”

R. Hanania b. Aqashia said: “The Holy One, blessed be He, was pleased to give merit to Israel, therefore he multiplied unto them Torah and precepts, as it is written [Is. xlii. 21]: ‘The Lord willed to do this for the sake of his righteousness; therefore he magnifies the law and makes it honorable.’”