

Etibical Readings.

SELECTIONS FROM THE SAYINGS OF THE FATHERS. (PIRKE-ABOTH.) *

CHAPTER I.

1. Moses received the Law on Sinai and delivered it to Joshua ; Joshua in turn handed it down to the elders ; from the elders it descended to the prophets, from them to the men of the Great Assembly.** The last-named originated three maxims : Be not hasty in judging ; gather many disciples around thee ; and erect safeguards for the Law.

2. The motto of Simon the Just was : The order of the world rests upon three things : on law, on worship and on charity.

3. Antigonos of Socho 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.

4. Josè ben Joèzer, of Zereda, was wont to say, Let thy house be the meeting-place of the wise : sit gladly at their feet, and drink in their words with avidity.

5. Josè ben Jochanan, of Jerusalem, was in the habit of saying : Let thy house be so wide open that the poor may enter it as were they inmates there.

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** This was the name given to the highest religious Council among the Jews, which governed the nation after its return from the Babylonian captivity

6. Joshua ben Perachya said : Get thee a wise teacher, win a comrade, and judge every man from his favorable side.

7. Nitai of Arbela was accustomed to say : Keep aloof from a wicked neighbor. Associate not with a sinner. Never consider thyself exempt from God's chastisement.

8. Shemayah was in the habit of saying : Love work; seek not to lord it over others ; thrust not thyself upon the society of the great.

9. Hillel said : Be a disciple of Aaron, love peace, pursue peace ; love all men too, and bring them nigh unto the Law.

10. He also was fond of remarking : He who runs after fame will find that it flies from him. Not to grow in knowledge is to decay therein ; not to acquire wisdom when we may, is to sin against our soul. To boast of learning is to detract from it.

11. He used to say again : 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?

12. Shammai was in the habit of saying : Fix a time for study. Promise little and do much. Receive every one with friendly countenance.

13. Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel was wont to say : All the days of my life have been passed among sages, and I have never found anything better for man than—silence ! Also, that not research, but practice, is of the most importance. He who talks much, cannot avoid sin.

14. He also said : Three things support the world, truth, law, and peace : as the Scripture hints, "Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates."

(*Zechariah 8 : 16.*)

CHAPTER II.

1. Rabbi Judah, the Prince, was in the habit of saying: In choosing the right path see that it is one which is honorable to thyself and without offense to others. Be as scrupulous about the lightest command as about the weightiest, for no man knoweth 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 thine immortal soul. In general, consider three things and thou wilt never fall into sin: remember that there is above thee an all-seeing eye, and all-hearing ear, and a record of all thy actions.

2. Rabban Gamaliel, the son of the Prince, Rabbi Judah, 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 all study, to the neglect of the means of gaining an independent livelihood is vanity, and may lead to iniquity. All who occupy themselves with communal affairs should do it in the name of God.

3. Hillel was in the habit of saying: Do not isolate thyself from the community and its interests. Do not rely upon thy spiritual strength until the day of thy death. Pass not judgment upon thy neighbor until thou hast put thyself in his place. Say never, Sometime or other, when I enjoy leisure, I will attend to my spiritual advancement; perhaps thou wilt then never have the leisure.

4. For he also said: The boor can never be religious, the ignorant can never be truly pious. Whoso is ashamed to ask will never learn; no passionate man can

be a teacher. He whose mind is given to worldly gain will not grow in wisdom. Where a man is needed, be thou the man.

5. He, furthermore, said: The more feasting, the more food for worms; the more wealth, the more cares. 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.

6. Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai used to say: If thou hast learned much, do not boast of it, for it is for that that thou wert created.

7. Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai had the following five disciples: Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos, R. Joshua ben Chananyah, R. Jose Haccohen, R. Simeon ben Nathaniel, and R. Elazar Arach. He said to them once: "Go forth and find out what is the best thing to cultivate." R. Eliezer said: A generous eye, R. Joshua said: A loyal friend. R. Josè said: A good neighbor. R. Simeon thought prudence and foresight. R. Elazar said: A good heart. Thereupon, R. Jochanan said: "I consider R. Elazar ben Arach's judgment the best, for in his all of yours are included."

8. Each of these disciples had three maxims. Rabbi Eliezer said: Thy fellowman's honor must be as dear to thee as thine own. Do not allow thyself to be easily angered. Repent one day before thy death.

9. Rabbi Joshua said: An envious eye, sinful propensities and misanthropy rob life of its pleasure and value.

10. Rabbi Josè used to say: Thy neighbor's property must be as sacred as thine own. Let noble purpose underlie thine every action.

11. Rabbi Simeon used to say : Be particular in performing thy devotions at the proper time. Do not look upon prayer as meaningless, obligatory task, but as a voluntary offering to God's mercy and grace. Never think thyself too great a sinner to approach Him.

12. Rabbi Elazar was accustomed to say : Be most zealous in the pursuit of study ; be prepared always to answer a scoffer ; remember in whose service thou labour-est and who is thy Master that will recompense thee for thy work.

13. Rabbi Tryphon 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. He also said : It is not incumbent on thee to complete the whole task, but thou art not at liberty therefore to neglect it entirely.

CHAPTER III.

1. Rabbi Chaninah, an assistant of the high priest, said : Pray for the welfare of the government ; were it not for the fear of it, men would swallow each other alive.

2. Rabbi Eliezer of Bartota said : Render unto God what belongs to Him, for thou and all thou hast are His. As David said : For all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee." (*Chronicles 24 : 14.*)

3. Rabbi Chaninah ben Dosa said : He with whom the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, his wisdom will endure. Likewise; he who is zealous in good works rather than in learning will also endure.

4. 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.

5. Rabbi Dosa ben Hyrkanos said : Sleeping away the morning, carousing at noonday, childish trifling and the company of the vulgar, waste a man's life away.

6. Rabbi Akiba said : Mockery and frivolity are the forerunners of immorality. Tradition is the rampart about the law, charity is the rampart of wealth ; good resolutions are preservative of abstinence, and the safeguard of wisdom is—silence.

7. He also said : Everything is known to God, but man is a free agent ; he is judged for his good, according to the quality of his acts. 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.

8. Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah was wont to say : Without religion there can be no true culture, and without true culture there is no 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.

9. 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, plucks it up and prostrates it. Thus it is said in the Scriptures. (*Jeremiah 17:6*):