Chapter 1

MISHNA A. 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 safeguards for the Law.”

MISHNA B. 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.”

MISHNA C. 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.”

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

MISHNA F. Joshua b. Perahia and Nithai the Arbelite received from them. The former used to say: “Get thee a wise teacher, acquire a comrade, and judge every one by his good qualities (i.e., from his favorable side).”

MISHNA G. Nithai the Arbelite was accustomed to say: “Keep aloof from a wicked neighbor, associate not with a sinner, and never consider thyself exempt from God’s chastisement.”

MISHNA I. 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.”
MISHNA K. Hillel and Shammasi 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.”

MISHNA L. He [Rabbi Hillel] 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 tiara perishes.”

MISHNA M. 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?”

MISHNA N. Shammasi was in the habit of saying: “Fix a time for study; promise little, and do much receive every one with friendly countenance.”

MISHNA O. Rabban Gamaliel said: “Make to thyself a master, and free thyself of doubt, and tithe not much by estimation.”

MISHNA P. 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.”

MISHNA Q. 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 ye in your gates.’”

Chapter 2

MISHNA A. Rabbi (Jehudah 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 offence 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, an all-hearing ear, and a record of all thine actions.”

MISHNA B. 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 ye yourselves shall have reward reckoned unto you, as if ye had wrought it.”

MISHNA C. “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.”

MISHNA D. He also used to say: “Do His will as if it were thy own, that He may do thy will as if it were His. Annul thy will before His, that He may annul the will of others before thy will.”

MISHNA E. Hillel was in the habit of saying: “Do not isolate thyself from the community and its interest. 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 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 thou wilt then never have the leisure.”

MISHNA F. He also said: “The boor can never fear sin, the ignorant can never be truly pious. Whoso 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 thou be the man.”

MISHNA G. Moreover, he saw a skull which floated on the face of the water, and he said to it: “Because thou drownedst they drowned thee, and in the end they that drowned thee will be drowned.”

MISHNA H. 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 gotten to himself words of Law has gotten to himself the life of the world to come.”

MISHNA I. Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai received it from Hillel and Shammai. He was wont to say: “If thou hast learned much, do not boast of it, for it is for that that thou wast created.”

MISHNA K. 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 that borrowed and repayeth not; he that borrows from a man is the same as if he borroweth from the Omnipotent, as it is written [Ps. xxxvii. 21]: “The wicked borroweth and repayeth not, but the righteous is beneficent and giveth.”, 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.”

MISHNA L. Each of these disciples had three maxims. R. Eliezer: “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.” (He also said:) “Warm thyself before the light of the wise, but beware of their embers, perchance thou mayest be 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.”

MISHNA M. R. Joshua: “An envious eye, sinful propensities, and misanthropy drive a man out of the world.”

MISHNA N. R. Jose: “Thy neighbor’s property must be as sacred as thine own. Set thyself to learn the Law; for it is not an heirloom unto thee. Let noble purpose underlie thine every action.”

MISHNA O. 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 bethinketh himself of the evil.’ Never think thyself too great a sinner to approach Him.”

MISHNA P. R. Elazar: “Be most zealous in the pursuit of study; be prepared always to answer a scoffer; remember in whose service thou laborest.” (He also added:) “Know who is thy Master, that he may be trusted to recompense thee for thy work.”

MISHNA Q. 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.”

MISHNA R. 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. If thou hast learned much Law thou wilt be given much reward; and faithful is the Master of thy work, who will pay thee the
reward of thy work; and know also that the gift of the recompense of the righteous is for the world to come.”

Chapter 3

MISHNA A. Aqabia b. Mahalallel used to say: “Consider three things, and thou wilt not fall into transgression: know whence thou comest, whither thou art going, and before whom thou art about to give account and reckoning; know whence thou comest—from a fetid drop, and whither thou art going—to worm and maggot; and before whom thou art about to give account and reckoning: before the King of the kings of kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.”

MISHNA B. 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 sitteth 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 hath laid it upon him.”

MISHNA J. 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.”

MISHNA K. 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.”
MISHNA N. 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.”

MISHNA R. “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).

MISHNA T. 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.”

Chapter 4

MISHNA A. Ben Zoma was in the habit of saying: Who is a wise man? He who learns from everybody, as it is written [Pss. 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 that ruleth his spirit, than the conqueror of a city.’ Who is a rich man? He who is satisfied with his lot, as it is written [Pss. cxxviii. 2]: ‘For thou eatest the labor of thy hands: then wilt thou be happy, and it shall be well with thee.’ ‘Wilt thou be happy’ in this world, ‘it shall be well with thee’ 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.”

MISHNA B. Ben Azai was in the habit of saying: “Hasten to fulfil the commandment of little importance as if it were of much importance, and flee from all manner of sin, for the fulfilment 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 likewise said: “Despise no man, and consider nothing as too far removed to come to pass; for there is no man but hath his day, and no event that may not come.”

MISHNA F. R. Jose said: “Whosoever honors the Torah is himself held in honor, and whosoever dishonors the Torah is himself dishonored with men.”

MISHNA I. R. Jonathan said: “Whosoever fulfils the Law in poverty will at length fulfil it in wealth, and whosoever neglects the Law in wealth will at length neglect it in poverty.”
MISHNA J. 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 thou idlest away thy time without study of the Law, thou wilt have many idlers against thee; and if thou laborest in the Law, He hath much reward to give unto thee.”

MISHNA K. R. Eliezer b. Jacob said: “He who performs one precept has acquired unto himself one advocate, and he who commits one transgression has gotten to himself one accuser. Repentance and good deeds are as a shield against punishment.”

MISHNA L. R. Jehudah the Sandlar said: “Whatsoever 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.”

MISHNA M. R. Elazar b. Shamna said: “Let the honor of thy disciple be as dear unto thee as the honor of thine associate; and the honor of thine associate as the fear of thy master; and the fear of thy master as the fear of Heaven.”

MISHNA N. R. Jehudah said: “Be careful in thy study, for error in study counts for an intentional sin.”

MISHNA O. 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 excelleth them all.”

MISHNA P. R. Nehorai said: “Betake thyself to a place of Torah, and say not that it will come after thee, because thine associates will confirm it unto thee, and (moreover) lean not unto thine own understanding.”

MISHNA Q. R. Janai said: “Neither the security of the wicked nor the afflictions of the righteous are within the grasp of our understanding.”

MISHNA R. R. Mathia b. ‘Heresh was in the habit of saying: “Be beforehand in saluting every man! Be the lion’s tail rather than the fox’s head!”

MISHNA S. R. Jacob said: “This world is, as it were, the antechamber of the world hereafter; therefore, prepare thyself in the antechamber, that thou mayest be admitted into the banqueting hall!”

MISHNA T. 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.”
MISHNA U. R. Simeon b. Elazar said: “Do not seek to appease thy 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.”

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

MISHNA Z. Rabbi Eliezer the Kapar said, “Envy, sensuality, and ambition destroy life.”

MISHNA AA. He likewise said: “Those born unto 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 counsellor, 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 thy passions, that the grave will be a place of refuge for thee. For without thy consent wert thou created, wert born into the world without thy choice; thou art now living without thine own volition, without thine approval thou wilt have to die; so likewise without thy consent thou wilt have to render account before the Supreme King, the Holy One, blessed be He!”