

פרקי אבות · מהדורת קורן

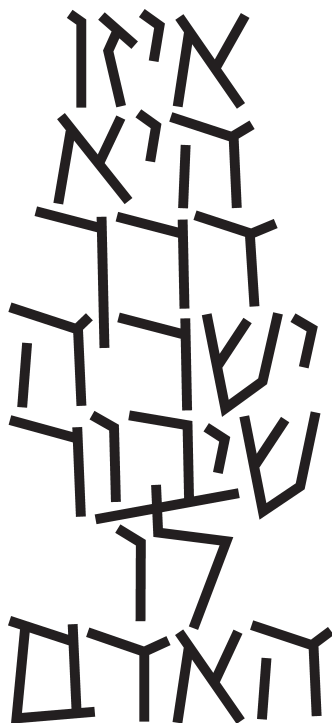
The Koren Pirkei Avot



קורן ירושלים

פרקי אבות · מהדורת קורן

THE KOREN PIRKEI AVOT



WITH TRANSLATION BY

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

AND COMMENTARY BY

Rabbi Marc D. Angel

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In loving appreciation of our fathers

Meir Ouaknine

מאיר בן חיים ואעקנין

.

Paul David Neuwirth

פרץ בן דב בעריל



Nataly and Stephen Neuwirth

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

Why is *Pirkei Avot* – the *Ethics of the Fathers* – so widely studied? Of all the books of the Mishna, it is the one that directly touches scholars and lay people alike; it requires little background, yet it offers the collected wisdom of our sages in a manner more accessible than any other book.

In every generation, our rabbis have come to discuss and analyze *Pirkei Avot* anew, assisting the contemporary reader. The *Koren Pirkei Avot* features the work of two of this generation's leading Jewish thinkers: the fine translation of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, alongside the deep and insightful commentary of Rabbi Marc D. Angel.

It is always a privilege to collaborate on a project with those who share our values and commitment to Judaism, classic and contemporary. We are indebted to Nataly and Stephen Neuwirth for their support of Rabbi Angel's work in general, and of this volume in particular. On behalf of Rabbi Angel, as well as our staff here at Koren, we thank you both; on behalf of the readers of this work, we are forever in your debt.

Koren has a small but hugely dedicated editorial and creative staff. We'd especially like to acknowledge our editor Rachel Meghnagi and designers Esther Be'er and Dena Landowne Bailey for putting this volume together with care and creativity.

We hope the study of the Koren edition of this foundational text will enable us to fulfill the command: "It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to stand aside from it" (*Avot* 2:21).

Matthew Miller, Publisher
Jerusalem 5775 (2015)

Note to the Reader

Due to the frequency of sages' names mentioned in this volume, the title Rabbi has been abbreviated to R. and the prefix ben or bar, meaning "son of," has been abbreviated to b. where appropriate, in the hope that this provides the reader with a smoother reading experience.

INTRODUCTION

The Talmud (*Pesahim* 50a) reports a remarkable incident. R. Yosef, son of R. Yehoshua b. Levi, became very ill. It was thought that his soul had visited the World-to-Come in his near-death experience. When he revived, his father asked him what he had seen in the next world. R. Yosef replied: “I saw a topsy-turvy world; the high ones are low and the low ones are high.” R. Yehoshua responded: “My son, you saw things clearly.”

R. Yosef had been surprised to find that people who were most esteemed in this world were least esteemed in the World-to-Come; and those who seemed to be unimportant in this world were considered very significant in the next world.

Earthly life is filled with illusions. The true value of individuals is seldom perceived correctly. It is popularly thought that the most powerful, influential, and wealthy people are the ones who are most successful. But in the eyes of God – the One who fully comprehends each person’s value – this frequently may not be the case. God has His own standards for judging human beings, and these standards are not related to the earthly signs of success. Rather, God values the souls of those who live good, righteous, and pious lives. These souls often belong to those who are not deemed to be successful by materialistic human standards. In the World-to-Come, where absolute truth prevails, the illusions are broken; clarity is achieved; the true value of individuals is demonstrated.

R. Yehoshua asked his son: “Where are we sages in the World-to-Come?” R. Yosef replied: “We are the same there as we are here.” This enigmatic reply may be alluding to the fact that sages have wisdom enough to see through the illusions of this world. They strive to live in accordance with the will of God; they study Torah in order to gain intellectual and spiritual clarity. They are not deceived by the mistaken notions of the masses of humanity. The sages stay focused on eternal values. They see clearly in this world as they will see clearly in the World-to-Come.

Thoughtful human beings seek to live wisely, to see clearly, to penetrate to the deeper truths of life. But the obstacles to a wise life are many. Vanity and falseness are pervasive. Social pressures, intellectual fads, political correctness, public relations blitzes, moral relativism – all impinge on the individual’s ability to think freely and fairly. A characteristic of modernity is the feeling of spiritual malaise. One response to modernity is to join the rat race, to seek “success” at whatever price. Another response is escapism through drugs or alcohol; or through identification with a cult or cult-like authoritarian figure. Since antiquity, human beings have sought truth and the inner freedom to pursue truth. Great sages of ancient civilizations have provided teachings to help guide humanity to harmonious, happy, and wise lives. Among the wisest and most influential teachers were those of ancient Israel. The biblical prophets and poets have left an unparalleled legacy of wisdom and spiritual insight, influencing many billions of people from antiquity to our own days.

After the biblical period, the spiritual genius of Israel continued to manifest itself in the teachings of the rabbis of Talmudic times. These sages elaborated on the Bible’s moral and legal teachings, and produced an impressive literature that included the Mishna and Midrashim. From 142 BCE until the beginning of the first century CE, the sages were led by *Zugot*, two men who served as President and Head of the Court. After the period of *Zugot*, religious leadership devolved on a group of sages known as *Tanna’im*, and their era culminated in the early third century CE with the redaction of the Mishna. Subsequent generations of rabbis to the sixth century CE (known as *Amora’im*) developed the Gemara, discussions based on the Mishna. The Mishna and Gemara together constitute the Talmud.

Pirkei Avot, popularly translated as *Ethics of the Fathers*, is a collection of rabbinic teachings, mainly from the Tannaitic period. It is included at the end of the Talmudic tractates dealing with business law and torts (*Nezikin*). The first chapter presents teachings of the early sages in chronological order; the next four chapters provide assorted teachings; the sixth chapter is a later addition to the original *Pirkei Avot*. This final chapter, transferred to *Pirkei Avot* from the eighth chapter of the tractate *Kalla*, was added due to the widespread custom of studying one chapter of *Pirkei Avot* on each of the six Sabbaths between the festivals of Pesah and Shavuot.

The sages quoted in *Pirkei Avot* represent different generations and historical conditions in the Land of Israel. The *Zugot* functioned during the days of the Second Temple, under Maccabean rule. The early *Tanna'im* lived under Roman rule, when Jewish sovereignty was severely curtailed. When the Romans vanquished the Jews and razed the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, this introduced a new era in Jewish history. Rabban Yoḥanan b. Zakkai reorganized a rabbinic center in Yavneh. Many of the sages cited in *Pirkei Avot* were associated with the Yavneh group, and were either colleagues or students of Rabban Yoḥanan b. Zakkai. The generation after Rabban Yoḥanan b. Zakkai was led by R. Yehoshua, R. Eliezer, Rabban Gamliel, and their peers. When the Roman Emperor Hadrian instituted anti-Jewish policies in 130 CE, this triggered a Jewish rebellion against Roman rule. Shimon bar Kokhba, with the backing of R. Akiva, led a Jewish revolt which lasted for three years, ending in 135 CE. Heavy losses were suffered on both sides, but the vastly larger Roman army ultimately crushed Bar Kokhba's rebellion. During the ensuing Hadrianic persecutions, the Romans executed leading sages including R. Akiva, R. Yishmael, R. Ḥananya b. Teradyon and others. After the failed revolt, sages once again strove to reorganize religious leadership to serve the decimated and scattered Jewish population. Among the leaders of that generation were Rabban Shimon b. Gamliel, R. Meir, R. Shimon bar Yoḥai, and R. Yose b. Ḥalafta. The following generation was led by R. Yehuda HaNasi and his colleagues. R. Yehuda is credited with having redacted the Mishna, the authoritative source of Jewish law and teaching for the coming generations.

Pirkei Avot reflects the wisdom of the sages based on their understanding of the teachings of Torah, and on their personal intellectual strivings. These chapters provide an array of viewpoints, all rooted in the authors' commitment to Torah as the word of God. *Pirkei Avot* offers instruction on how to live wisely, how to focus on ultimate reality, how to see through the illusions and shadows of worldly existence.

This collection of ancient rabbinic teachings has ongoing significance for all human beings striving for intellectual clarity and moral perfection.

Rabbi Marc Angel
New York, 5775 (2015)

Sages cited in Pirkei Avot:

The sages quoted in *Pirkei Avot* may be divided into five general groupings. The first includes those who flourished prior to the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE:

Shimon HaTzaddik	Hillel
Antigonos of Sokho	Shammai
Yose b. Yo'ezer	Rabban Gamliel I
Yose b. Yoḥanan	Rabban Shimon b. Gamliel
Yeshoshua b. Peraḥya	Akavya b. Mahalalel
Nittai the Arbelite	Ḥanina
Yehuda b. Tabbai	Tzaddok
Shimon b. Shataḥ	Ben Bag-Bag
Shemaya	Ben Heh-Heh
Avtalyon	

The second group consists of sages associated with the Yavneh school, beginning 70 CE through the early second century CE:

Rabban Yoḥanan b. Zakkai	Neḥunya b. HaKanna
Eliezer b. Hyrcanus	Elazar of Bartota
Yeshoshua b. Ḥananya	Ḥanina b. Dosa
Yose HaKohen	Dosa b. Harkinas
Shimon b. Netanel	Elazar the Moda'ite
Elazar b. Arakh	Elazar b. Ḥisma
Rabban Gamliel II	Levitas
Elazar b. Azarya	Shmuel HaKatan

The third group includes those who flourished in the early second century CE through the Bar Kokhba rebellion which was crushed in 135 CE:

Akiva	Yose
Tarfon	Yonatan
Ḥanina b. Teradyon	Nehorai
Ḥalafta b. Dosa	Matya b. Ḥarash
Yishmael	Elisha b. Avuya
Shimon b. Zoma	Yose b. Kisma
Shimon b. Azzai	Yoḥanan b. Beroka

The fourth group consists of sages who flourished during the period following the Bar Kokhba rebellion through the late second century CE:

Shimon bar Yoḥai	Yoḥanan HaSandlar
Meir	Elazar b. Shammua
Ḥanina b. Ḥakhinai	Yehuda b. Ilai
Yaakov	Yose bar Yehuda
Dostai	Yishmael b. Yoḥanan
Eliezer b. Yaakov	

The fifth group consists of sages who flourished from the late second century CE through the early third century CE:

Yehuda HaNasi	Elazar HaKappar
Rabban Gamliel b. Yehuda	Yehuda b. Tema
Yishmael b. Yose	Yehoshua b. Levi
Shimon b. Elazar	Shimon b. Menasya

פרקי אבות

PIRKEI AVOT

CHAPTER I

All Israel have a share in the World-to-Come, as it is said: *Sanhedrin*
 90a
Is. 60
 “Your people are all righteous;
 they shall inherit the land for ever;
 they are a shoot of My own planting,
 a work of My own hands, that I may be glorified.”

1. Moses received the Torah at Sinai
 and handed it on to Joshua;
 Joshua to the elders;
 the elders to the prophets;
 and the prophets handed it on to the Men of the
 Great Assembly.
 They (the Men of the Great Assembly) said three things:
 Be careful in judgment;

Assembly were the repositories of the Torah’s teachings; they decided questions of law; they were a combination of legislature and supreme court.

הָיוּ מְתוּנִים בְּדִין *Be careful in judgment:* The opening teaching of *Pirkei Avot* instructs caution in judgment. Intellectual humility is the first step to wisdom and fairness. People often err by passing judgment precipitously without giving due deliberation to all aspects of the matter at hand. They rely on their intuition, on their first impressions. The Men of the Great Assembly, in their commitment to truth, insist on due deliberation.

Dr. Daniel Kahneman, the Israeli Nobel Prize winner in economics in 2002, coined the phrase “illusion of validity.” In his landmark research, he found that people tend to think that their judgments are valid even when based simply on first impressions or relatively short observations. Dr. Kahneman demonstrated that people are often badly mistaken. Not only are their initial reactions misleading, but judgments are highly influenced by personal inclinations and by the language or circumstances in which problems are posed. The best hope for arriving at truth is to overcome the illusion of validity, and carefully study as much objective data as is available (Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 2011).

פרק ראשון

סנהדרין צ: כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא. שנאמר:
 ישעיה ס: ועמד בלם צדיקים, לעולם יירשו ארץ
 נצור מטעי, מעשה ידי להתפאר:

א מֹשֶׁה קִבֵּל תּוֹרַת מֹסִינֵי
 וּמִסֵּרָה לִיהוֹשֻׁעַ
 וִיהוֹשֻׁעַ לְזִקְנִים
 וְזִקְנִים לְנָבִיאִים
 וְנָבִיאִים מִסֻּרָה לְאַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה.
 הֵם אָמְרוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים:
 הוּוּ מִתּוֹנִים בְּדִין

כל ישראל יש להם חלק לעולם הבא *All Israel have a share in the World-to-Come:* When *Pirkei Avot* is read according to the custom of studying one chapter per week on the Sabbaths between Pesah and Shavuot (or between Pesah and Rosh HaShana), each chapter is introduced by the above passage. This places the ritual reading into spiritual context. By studying *Pirkei Avot*, people learn righteousness and will gain a worthy portion in the World-to-Come.

CHAPTER ONE

Transmission of tradition: *Pirkei Avot* opens by placing the rabbinic teachings within their historical context. The sages viewed themselves as direct heirs of the Torah tradition going back to Moses. The transmission of tradition spanned many centuries and included many links. It began with God's revelation at Mount Sinai and continued through the era of the prophets. When prophecy ceased in the fifth century BCE, transmission came to depend entirely on human beings who had no direct access to God through prophecy.

אַנְשֵׁי כְנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָּה *Men of the Great Assembly:* This was a council of sages convened early in the period of the Second Temple and continuing through the early Maccabean period, mid-second century BCE. The Men of the Great

raise up many disciples;
and make a fence for the Torah.

2. Shimon HaTzaddik [the Just] was one of the last survivors of the Great Assembly.

He used to say:

On three things the world stands:
on the Torah,
on divine worship,
and on acts of loving-kindness.

Alexander the Great when the conqueror passed through the Land of Israel. Alexander was deeply impressed by Shimon's spiritual demeanor. Alexander ordered that a statue of himself be placed in the Temple. Shimon explained that Jewish law forbade placing statues in the Temple. As a sign of respect, though, Shimon said that male children born to priests that year would be named Alexander. Thus, Alexander became a "Jewish" name.

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד *On three things the world stands:* Shimon HaTzaddik points to three foundations of proper human life. Torah represents a person's efforts at self-perfection; it entails study, introspection, and a commitment to train oneself in the ways of righteousness. Divine worship represents a person's yearning for relationship with the Almighty. Through worship, one sees life in the context of the divine; one transcends the limited and limiting boundaries of the mundane. Acts of loving-kindness represent a person's interrelationship with other human beings. The goal of life is not to be a recluse, but to participate generously in the well-being of others.

When one lacks these spiritual foundations, one is apt to live a shallow and conformist life. In 1983, Woody Allen produced a film, *Zelig*, about a man who constantly changed his appearance to blend in with the people around him. Who was Zelig? Did he have a personality of his own? Was he simply an inveterate copycat who believed his survival depended on losing himself in the crowd? During the course of a lifetime, any human being might play the role of Zelig. A person may wear many masks. In order to curry favor with others, one adopts their attitudes, opinions, styles, and behavior patterns. In the process, a person becomes inauthentic, a play actor rather than a real self-aware human being. Much human misery is the result of people betraying themselves by adopting artificial personae. They no longer have the ability

וְהַעֲמִידוּ תַלְמִידֵי הַרְבֵּה
וַעֲשׂוּ סֵג לַתּוֹרָה.

ב שְׁמַעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק הָיָה מְשִׁירֵי כְּנִסֵּת הַגְּדוֹלָה.
הוּא הָיָה אוֹמֵר:

עַל שְׁלֹשָׁה דְבָרִים הָעוֹלָם עוֹמֵד
עַל הַתּוֹרָה
וְעַל הָעֵבוּדָה
וְעַל גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים.

וְהַעֲמִידוּ תַלְמִידֵי הַרְבֵּה *Raise up many disciples*: Transmission of Torah/wisdom is best accomplished when taught to many students rather than confined to an elite group of scholars. The sages had keen awareness that great students may be found in all strata of society, and that everyone should have access to as excellent an education as possible. They taught: “Be mindful of the children of the poor, for from among them will the Torah emerge” (*Nedarim* 81a). Students from humble origins have indeed become the outstanding Torah leaders of their generations. This instruction follows the teaching of the School of Hillel: “One ought to teach everyone, for there were many sinners in Israel who were drawn to the study of Torah, and they produced righteous, pious and worthy descendants” (*Avot DeRabbi Natan*, beginning of ch. 3).

וַעֲשׂוּ סֵג לַתּוֹרָה *Make a fence for the Torah*: There can be a fine line between what is permitted and what is forbidden, between what is legal and what is illegal. A human tendency is to push to the limit of the permissible and the legal; but people may blur and cross the line. The Men of the Great Assembly recommended making a fence around the Torah, that is, creating a larger margin between the permissible and the forbidden, the legal and the illegal. By increasing the cushion between these things, a person is less likely to cross into immoral and illegal behavior.

שְׁמַעוֹן הַצַּדִּיק *Shimon HaTzaddik*: Shimon served as High Priest in the Second Temple in Jerusalem. He was popularly known as “the Just” because his righteousness was so profound. The Talmud reports (*Yoma* 69a) that Shimon met

3. Antigonos of Sokho received [the Torah tradition] from Shimon HaTzaddik.

He used to say:

Do not be like servants who serve their master
on condition of receiving a reward,
but be like servants who serve their master
not on condition of receiving a reward;
and let the fear of Heaven be upon you.

does nothing for appearance' sake but for the sake of having done right?... Reward! do you seek any greater reward for a good man than doing what is right and just?" (*The Golden Sayings of Epictetus*, Harvard Classics, P. F. Collier and Son, New York, 1937, p. 163).

שְׁלֵי אֵל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פְּרוֹס *Not on condition of receiving a reward*: Rabbinic tradition reports that Antigonos had two students, Tzaddok and Boethus, who misinterpreted his teaching. They mistakenly thought that Antigonos believed that there was no ultimate reward and no World-to-Come. Tzaddok and Boethus gained followers for a splinter movement that denied the existence of the afterlife.

וַיְהִי מוֹרָא שְׁמַיִם עֲלֵיכֶם *Let the fear of Heaven be upon you*: Antigonos cautioned against arrogant piety by insisting that one's religious experience must be tempered by fear of Heaven. God knows whether a person's religiosity is pure or tainted; God knows that people often deceive themselves into thinking they are more pious than they actually are. The truly religious person must be humble enough and wise enough to realize that God cannot be deceived.

In his novel *Elmer Gantry*, Sinclair Lewis portrays the life of a highly successful preacher who drew huge crowds to his services. Elmer Gantry was a gifted orator and a clever manipulator of people. Yet, his beliefs and behavior did not coincide with his preachments. As long as people applauded him and gratified his ego, he did not reflect too carefully about how false and hypocritical his life was. Although the public – and Elmer himself – apparently believed in his seeming success, the perceptive person could see right through Elmer's pretenses. Success and happiness bought at the price of personal authenticity is too high a price.

ג אַנְטִיגֶנוֹס אִישׁ סוֹכוֹ קִבֵּל מִשְׁמֵעוֹן הַצְּדִיק.
 הוּא הִיָּה אוֹמֵר:
 אַל תִּהְיוּ בְּעִבְדִים הַמְשֻׁמְשִׁים אֶת הָרֹב
 עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פָּרֶס
 אֲלֵא הֵווּ בְּעִבְדִים הַמְשֻׁמְשִׁים אֶת הָרֹב
 שְׁלֵא עַל מְנַת לְקַבֵּל פָּרֶס
 וַיְהִי מוֹרָא שָׁמַיִם עֲלֵיכֶם.

to distinguish between who they are and who they are pretending to be. The psychiatrist Dr. Arno Gruen has pointed out: “We establish irrational ideals of the ‘real’ man and the ‘right kind’ of woman, which not only separate us more and more from our genuine potentialities, but in the long run also lead us into self-destructiveness” (*The Betrayal of the Self*, Grove Press, New York, 1988, p. 60).

Just as the world rests on spiritual foundations, so each individual’s integrity depends on commitment to Torah (self-perfection through thought and study), divine worship (spiritual strivings), and acts of loving-kindness (authentic relationships with fellow human beings).

אַנְטִיגֶנוֹס *Antigonos*: He lived during the third century BCE at a time when Hellenism was a cultural force in the Land of Israel. Greek influence on Jewish life is evident by the fact that Antigonos had a Greek, rather than Hebrew, name. The sages deemed it permissible to adopt Greek names, language, and practices that did not contravene basic Jewish teachings.

אַל תִּהְיוּ בְּעִבְדִים הַמְשֻׁמְשִׁים אֶת הָרֹב *Do not be like servants who serve their master*: Relationship with the Almighty can be based on the loftiest human spirituality; or it can be based on vulgar and self-serving motivations. Antigonos called for the loftiest religiosity. Service to God must be selfless, based on pure love and devotion. He disdained the notion of religion based on the hope of gaining reward in this world or in the World-to-Come. Such religiosity is unsophisticated. Truly religious people serve God purely, without calculations of rewards. Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher of the late first and early second centuries CE, similarly taught: “Know you not that a good man

4. Yose ben Yo'ezer of Tzereda and Yose ben Yoḥanan of Jerusalem received [the tradition] from them.

Yose ben Yo'ezer of Tzereda used to say:

Let your house be a meeting place for sages;
sit in the dust at their feet,
and with thirst, drink in their words.

5. Yose ben Yoḥanan of Jerusalem used to say:

Let your house be open wide;
let the poor join the members of your household;

possible from the wisdom of the teachers; but this does not mean that one should follow teachers blindly. On the contrary, one should always maintain a spirit of inquiry with an analytical mind. Teachers should seek to empower their students by helping them develop their own critical thinking. In his book *The Philosophy of Hebrew Scripture* (Cambridge University Press, 2012) Dr. Yoram Hazony notes that:

... the purpose of the biblical editors, in gathering together such diverse and often sharply conflicting texts, was not to construct a unitary work with an unequivocal message. It was rather to assemble a work capable of capturing and reflecting a given tradition of inquiry so readers could strive to understand the various perspectives embraced by this tradition, and in so doing build up an understanding of their own The reader who takes up the Hebrew Bible is thus invited and challenged to take up a place within this tradition of inquiry, and to continue its elaboration out of his or her own resources. (p. 65)

The Talmudic tradition, too, fosters a spirit of questioning, analysis, and careful reasoning. While students must listen attentively to the words of their teachers, they must never surrender their own intellectual freedom in the process.

וְיִהְיֶה עֲנִיִּים בְּנֵי בֵּיתְךָ. *Let the poor join the members of your household:* One's hospitality should aim at serving others, not glorifying oneself. If a host only invites a select group of wealthy and prominent people, then the hospitality is tainted by motives of self-pride and social climbing. If one is genuinely hospitable, one's house will be open to a wide range of guests including those who are poor. By treating rich and poor with equal generosity and courtesy, the host demonstrates the virtue of hospitality for its own sake.

ד יוסי בן יועזר איש צרדה ויוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים
קבלו מהם.

יוסי בן יועזר איש צרדה אומר:
יהי ביתך בית ועד לחכמים
והוי מתאבק בעפר רגליהם
והוי שותה בצמא את דבריהם.

ה יוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים אומר:
יהי ביתך פתוח לרוחה
ויהיו עניים בני ביתך

THE ZUGOT

With the rise of the Maccabean period (mid-second century BCE), religious leadership devolved upon the *Zugot*, pairs; these two men held the offices of *Nasi* (President) and *Av Beit Din* (Head of the Court). The first mentioned is generally assumed to have been the *Nasi*, and the second to have been the *Av Beit Din*. The five generations of *Zugot* began in 142 BCE and lasted until the deaths of Hillel and Shammai early in the first century CE.

יהי ביתך בית ועד לחכמים *Let your house be a meeting place for sages:* A house must not merely be the private sanctum of a family but should be open to guests. Hospitality is a sign of graciousness and generosity. When sages gather in one's home, there is the additional benefit of learning from their wise conversation. Even children of the household, who do not fully understand the words of the sages, benefit by knowing that these distinguished guests were welcome in their parents' home. They grow up in an atmosphere that values wisdom.

והוי מתאבק בעפר רגליהם *Sit in the dust at their feet:* A host might feel superior to the guests, even learned guests. Yose b. Yo'ezer teaches that the host must overcome such feelings and not use this gathering of sages as a means of self-aggrandizement. One should sit humbly and listen to their words; one should not demand honor or special privileges for hosting sages.

והוי שותה בצמא את דבריהם *With thirst, drink in their words:* Judaism fosters respect for sages and respect for learning. The goal is to drink as deeply as

and do not gossip inordinately with women.

This was said about one's own wife;
all the more so does it apply to another man's wife.

Hence the sages say:

A man who talks too much with a woman
brings trouble on himself,
neglects the study of Torah,
and in the end will inherit Gehinnom.

6. Yehoshua ben Peraḥya and Nittai the Arbelite received [the tradition] from them.

Yehoshua ben Peraḥya used to say:

Get yourself a teacher,
acquire a companion,
and give everyone the benefit of the doubt.

pedagogues draw on a wealth of knowledge; they give direction to one's learning; they hone the particular skills and predilections of each student. The best teachers are those who provide the skills for the student to be able to learn independently. Such teachers stimulate the student's intellectual curiosity. Through their encouragement and critiques, fine teachers enable students to achieve far more than they could on their own.

וְקַנְה לְךָ חֵבֵר *Acquire a companion:* How does one “acquire” a companion? Friendship is achieved when one invests time, effort, and kindness in another person. Friendship is the result of mutual understanding and respect. It does not simply happen of itself: one must acquire a friend through loyalty and ongoing empathy. A friend is important not merely to provide sociability or other utilitarian functions. Rather, a friend is primarily important as a fellow human being with whom to share the adventure of life. A friend is important not merely for what he/she can do, but for who he/she is. Until one learns the value of friendship, one lacks a fundamental ingredient in understanding life.

וְהָיוּ דֵן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת *Give everyone the benefit of the doubt:* Yehoshua b. Peraḥya stresses the need for humility and self-doubt. Before judging others negatively, one should first question whether one has a full picture of the situation at hand. Perhaps the other person's behavior is justified. While this

וְאֵל תִּרְבֶּה שִׁיחָה עִם הָאִשָּׁה.
 בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ אָמְרוּ, קַל וְחֵמֶר בְּאִשֶּׁת חֵבְרוֹ.
 מִכָּאֵן אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים:
 כָּל הַמְרַבֶּה שִׁיחָה עִם הָאִשָּׁה
 גּוֹרֵם רָעָה לְעַצְמוֹ
 וּבּוֹטֵל מִדְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה
 וְסוּפוֹ יוֹרֵשׁ גִּיהֶנָּם.
 יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה וְנִתְאִי הָאֲרִבְלִי קִבְּלוּ מֵהֶם.
 יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן פְּרַחְיָה אָמַר:
 עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רַב
 וּקְנֵה לְךָ חֵבֵר
 וְהוּי דָן אֶת כָּל הָאָדָם לְכַף זְכוּת.

וְאֵל תִּרְבֶּה שִׁיחָה עִם הָאִשָּׁה *Do not gossip inordinately with women:* The Torah provides a system of sexual morality. It permits licit relations between husband and wife; it forbids adultery, incest, and general promiscuity. It recognizes the tremendous power of sexual attraction and calls on human beings to stay in control of their desires. Yose b. Yoḥanan warns that idle gossip between a man and a woman can engender inappropriate familiarity and lead to immoral sexual behavior. It should be stressed that his concern is with the potential danger of idle gossip and social small talk. Men and women may engage in conversations on serious topics, since these are not in the category of frivolous chatter.

וּבּוֹטֵל מִדְּבָרֵי תוֹרָה *Neglects the study of Torah:* The rabbis assumed, based on the reality of their time, that most women were not versed in Torah. Thus, a man who conversed with a woman was invariably wasting time that should have been spent on Torah study. (This objection also implies that one should not converse too much with a man who is ignorant of Torah.)

עֲשֵׂה לְךָ רַב *Get yourself a teacher:* While much can be learned on one's own, it is highly important to study under the guidance of suitable teachers. Skilled