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CHAPTER II.

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."

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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." [1](#)

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

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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 J. 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 loseth not a drop; Joshua b. Hananiah--happy is she that bare 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."

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

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the same as if he borroweth from the Omnipotent, as it is written [Ps. xxxvii. 2 1]: "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."

Tosephta--Aboth of R. Nathan.

1"*An envious eye*," etc. How so? It means one shall look upon the house of his neighbor with the same eye as he looks upon his own; and as one is anxious that there be no bad repute against his wife and children, so should he be anxious in regard to his neighbor's or his children's.

Another explanation of this passage is: One shall not be envious of the erudition of his neighbor. It happened to one who was envious, that his days were shortened, and he departed prematurely from this world in consequence thereof.

"*Sinful propensities*." How so? It is said that the evil propensities are thirteen years older than the good propensities, as they begin to grow with the child in the mother's womb, so that he defiles the Sabbath and commits other transgressions, and there is nothing in his mind to remonstrate with him. But when he is thirteen years old, the good thoughts are born. If he defiles the Sabbath, they tell him: Scoundrel, is it not written [Ex. xxxi. 14]: "Every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death." If he is about to commit adultery, they say to him:

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[*paragraph continues*] Scoundrel, is it not written [Lev. xx. 16]: "Then shall the adulterer be put to death, together with the adulteress." When one becomes excited and is about to commit incest, all the members of his body are willing, for the evil thoughts reign over all the two hundred and forty-eight members; but when he is about to perform a meritorious deed, all his members begin to pain him, for the evil thoughts within him reign over all the two hundred and forty-eight members of his body; and the good thoughts are compared to one who is imprisoned, as it is written [Eccl. iv. 14]: "For out of the prison cometh the one to reign," which refers to the good thoughts.

[There are others who say that it refers to Joseph the upright. This wicked woman (his mistress) used to persecute him with her words. She said: "I will imprison thee." He answered: "The Lord looseneth the prisoners." She said: "I will dig out thy eyes." He answered: "The Lord causeth the blind to see." She said: "I will bend thy stature." He answered: The Lord raiseth up those who are bowed down."

And in reality there is no wonder that Joseph the upright refused to listen to her, as the same happened to R. Zadoq, as it was said: To R. Zadoq, who was great in his generation, while he was in captivity, a certain matron sent a beautiful female slave; but as soon as he noticed her he turned around to the wall, so as not to see her, and absorbed himself with the Torah all night. In the morning she went to complain to her mistress, and said: "Death is preferable to me than to be with this man." The matron sent for him and asked: "Why hast thou not treated this woman as men usually treat women?" He answered: "I could not do otherwise. I belong to a great family

of priests. I have entirely ignored her, so as not to be tempted to have intercourse with her, and add bastards to Israel." When she heard this, she gave orders concerning him, and then dismissed him with great honor. Neither is there any wonder for the refusal of R. Zadoq, as R. Aqiba was greater in his act; and to him happened the following:

R. Aqiba, while at one time in a certain country, was calumniated before the Sultan (and was imprisoned). He sent to him two beautiful women, who were washed, anointed, and adorned as brides. They were hugging him all night, each one inviting him to herself. He, however, repulsed them. They complained before the Sultan, and said: "Death is preferable to us than to be with that man." He sent for him and asked;

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[paragraph continues] "Why hast thou not treated these women as men treat even homely women--are they not human beings as thyself? Hath not thy Creator also created them?" He answered: "I could not do otherwise: their odor seemed to me to be that of putrefied carcasses."

And even R. Aqiba is not to be admired for his act, for R. Eliezer the Great exceeded him by the following act: He brought up his own sister's daughter, and for thirteen years slept with her in one bed. When she became of marriageable age, he told her to get married. She, however, replied: "Am I not thy servant? Use me as a slave to wash thy disciples' feet." He again told her: "I am too old. Get married to one suitable to thy age." She answered: "Have I not already told thee I am thy servant, and to use me as a slave to wash thy disciples' feet?" When he heard this, he proposed to her and married her.]

Said R. Reuben b. Aztrobl: How difficult it is for one to avoid the evil propensities which are within him from the minute of his birth! As it is written [Gen. iv. 7]: "Sin lieth at the door." So we see that a young animal is always careful not to approach harmful things, as fire or a well, because it has no evil propensities, while a human child must always be guarded against putting his hand into fire, and other harmful things, because he has a desire to do those things, and this is due to the evil propensities born with him.

Said R. Simeon b. Elazar: "What are the evil thoughts to

be compared to? To a piece of iron which is placed in the fire;

so long as it is there, various vessels can be formed out of it.

The same is the case with evil thoughts: there is no other preventive but the Torah, which is likened to fire. As it is written [Prov. xxv. 21, 22]: "If thy enemy be hungry, give him bread

to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink; for though thou gatherest coals of fire upon his head, yet will the Lord repay it unto thee." Do not read •••••• ••• (repay unto thee), but •••••••• •••(make thee at peace).

Said R. Jehudah the Prince: To the following parable the evil thoughts can be compared: Two men entered a hostelry, and one of them was arrested for robbery. When asked for an

accomplice he said he had one, although he could easily have denied it, yet he said so in order to implicate also his companion and make him share his own fate. The same applies to

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evil thoughts: they are not satisfied with their destruction of the soul, they also destroy the body.

Said R. Simeon b. Johai: From the following is to be deduced that the Israelites will never see Gehenna. The following parable can be applied to this: A king who had a barren field rented it to some persons at a yearly rental of ten measures of wheat. The land was manured, watered, and surrounded with ditches, and generally properly cared for. Still, at the end of the year the lessees paid the king only one measure of wheat instead of ten. When the king asked them for an explanation, they said: "Our lord and king, thou knowest well that the land was barren, and brought thee no revenue at all; now even after so much of our labor invested, it did not produce more than this measure." A similar plea will the Israelites make in the future before the Holy One, blessed be He: "Lord of the Universe! thou knowest how the evil thoughts allure us." As it is written [Ps. ciii. 14]: "For he knoweth our frame" (and on that consideration will be forgiven).

"*And misanthropy.*" This means: One should not say: Love the sages, but hate the disciples; or, Love the disciples, and hate the common people; but, Love every one except the infidels, the enticers, the misleaders, and the informers. So also says David [Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22]: "Behold, those that hate thee I ever hate, O Lord! and for those that rise up against thee do I feel loathing. With the utmost hatred do I hate them: enemies are they become unto me."

It is also written [Lev. xix. 18]: "But thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord." Because I have created him; and if he practiseth what thy people do thou shalt love him, but not otherwise.

R. Simeon b. Elazar said: The above passage was said as a strict admonition: If thou wilt love him, thou art assured of a good reward; otherwise (remember), I am the judge and I will see to it that thou art punished.

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

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[paragraph continues] 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: 1 "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."

Tosephtha--Aboth of R. Nathan.

2"*Thy neighbor's property must be as sacred as thine.*" It means that one should be as careful of his friend's property as he is of his own; and as he is desirous that there shall be no slur cast on his belongings, so shall he desire that there should be none on those of his friend.

Others explain the above thus: When a disciple comes to thee with the request to teach him, if thou art able comply with his request; otherwise, dismiss him at once, and do not accept his money, as it is written [Prov. iii. 28]: "Say not unto thy neighbor, Go, and return, and to-morrow will I give, when thou hast it by thee."

"*Set thyself to learn the Law.*" How so? When Moses

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our master saw that his sons knew not enough of the Law to be able to succeed him, he wrapped himself up and prayed: Lord of the Universe! designate to me the one who should be at the head of the people, as it is written [Numb. xxvii. 15-17]: "And Moses spake unto the Lord, saying, Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation, who may go out before them, and who may come in before them." Said the Holy One, blessed be He: "Moses, take Joshua, appoint an interpreter for him, and at the head of the great men in Israel let him lecture in thy presence." Thereupon Moses said to Joshua: Joshua! these people which I deliver in your care are not to be regarded as he-goats or sheep, but as kids and lambs; for they have not as yet had experience in the commandments, and therefore cannot be considered as such. As it is written [Songs, i. 8]: "If thou knowest this not, O thou fairest of women! go but forth in the footsteps of the flock, and feed thy kids around the shepherds' dwellings."

Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai once went in the market, and he noticed a girl picking up barley from under the feet of the cattle of the Arabians. "My daughter, who art thou?" he asked her, but she made no reply. Again he put the same question to her, but again she was silent. Finally she said: "Wait a little." She enveloped herself with her hair, stepped up to him, and said: "Rabbi, I am the daughter of Nakdimon b. Gurion." "And what has become of thy father's money?" he asked her; and she answered. "Rabbi, on him was verified the saying which was proverbial in Jerusalem: 'One who desires to preserve his wealth, should lessen it (spending it in charities; but as my father did not sufficiently spend in charities, it all vanished).'" "And what has become of that of thy father-in-law?" he again interrogated her; and she answered: "Rabbi, through my father also his was lost." Thereupon said Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai to his disciples: "Whenever I used to read the passage: 'If thou knowest this not, O thou fairest of women! go but forth in the footsteps of the flocks,' I could not make out what punishment was contained therein; but after

what I have seen today, I can safely say that the punishment is meant that Israel must be under the domination of the lowest nation of the heathens; and not merely that, but also must lie among the manure of their cattle."

The same girl then asked him: "Rabbi, dost thou recall that thou hast signed thy name to my marriage contract?" He

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answered: "I do"; and turning to his disciples, he continued: "Verily, I signed my name to the marriage contract of this girl, which was for a million Tyrian dinars. Her father's family never left their house to enter the Temple, until a woollen cloth was spread for them."

It happened that a girl and her ten maids were captured, and a heathen brought her up in his house. One day he gave her a pitcher and told her to bring him some water. One of her maids got up and took it from her. "Why hast thou done this?" he inquired of her; and she answered: "Master, I swear by thy life that I am one of five hundred maids belonging to her mother." When he heard this, he liberated the girl and her ten maids.

The following happened to another young girl who was captured and brought up in the house of a heathen. One night he had a dream, in which he was commanded to send her away. His wife, however, prevented him from doing so. Again he had a dream, in which he was told that if he would not send away the girl he would die. He did so, but desiring to know what became of her, he followed her. She kept on walking until she became thirsty. She went down to a spring to drink, and placing her hand upon the wall, she was bitten by a snake and died. She floated upon the water until he went down, took her out, and buried her. When he returned home, he said to his wife: "The people to which this girl belonged is punished by no other but their Father in heaven."

"Let noble purpose underlie their every action." It means, for the sake of the Torah, as it is written [Prov. iii. 6]: "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he will make level thy paths."

Said R. Simeon: Be punctual in the reading of Shema, and in prayer; and when thou prayest, let it not be as a conversation, but supplication before the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is written [Jonah, iv. 2]: "That thou art a gracious God, and merciful, long-suffering, and abundant in kindness, and repentant of the evil."

Said R. Elazar (see Mishna, and in addition he said): "Nothing of the Torah shall be forgotten by thee. Know for whom thy exertion is and with whom thou hast made a covenant; and who is thy master, who is surely to be trusted that he will recompense thee for thy work."

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Tosephtha--Aboth of R. Nathan.

1 (As Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai used to recount the praise of his disciples), so was R. Jehudah the Nassi recounted of the following sages: R. Tarphon, R. Aqiba, R. Elazar b. Azariah, R.

Johanan b. Nuri, and R. Jose the Galilean.

He called R. Tarphon "a pile of stones"; others say, "a pile of nuts," which, should one be taken away, the whole pile is stirred and there is a rolling of nuts one upon the other. So it was with R. Tarphon, when a disciple came to him and said. "Teach me," he taught him the Scriptures, Mishna, Midrash, Halakhoth, and Agadoth; and when he left him, he was full of the blessing of the Torah.

He called R. Aqiba "a sealed treasure," and compared him to a workman who, taking his basket, goes outside, and whatever he may chance to find he puts into it. However, when he returns home, he assorts every article. So has R. Aqiba done (when he was studying), and made rules to the Torah to be easily comprehended, as rings are made to vessels to make it easy to take a hold of them.

He called R. Elazar b. Azariah "a huckster's basket," and compared him to a huckster who, taking his basket, goes about the country, and the people come flocking around him inquiring for various articles, and find that he has everything. So it was with R. Elazar b. Azariah, when a disciple came to him, he taught him everything that he desired; and when he left him, he was full of the blessings of the Torah.

He called R. Jose the Galilean "a gatherer of good things with no pride about him," who collected the good manners of all the sages and the Mishnaioth that all the sages have taught.

When R. Jehoshua became of old age, etc. (See Section Moed, Vol. VI., Tract Hagiga, pp. 3 and 4: "It happened that Johanan b. Broka," etc., till paragraph beginning with "It happened once.")

Issi b. Jehudah gave the sages names. To R. Meir he gave the name of "sage and scribe"; to R. Jehudah, "a sage when he desires to be"; to R. Elazar b. Jacob, "a small vessel (not of much knowledge), but very clear"; to R. Jose, "a man of good reasoning in the science of the Law"; to R. Johanan b. Nuri, "a basket of a peddler containing a variety of everything";

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to R. Jose the Galilean, "a gatherer of the very best things, with no pride about him"; to R. Simeon b. Gamaliel, "a vault full of the best purple dye"; to R. Simeon, "learns much and forgets little."

When, later on, R. Simeon met Issi b. Jehudah, he asked him: "Why hast thou attacked me before the scholars?" And he answered: "I have said only that thou learnest much and forgettest little, and even that little is of no importance."

Footnotes

[60:1](#) All commentators concur in the opinion that the above Mishna teaches us nothing else but

a lesson of retaliation; namely, that "the Almighty pays measure for measure," or, in other words, that the punishment fits the crime. I am, however, inclined to believe that if the author of the above Mishna had intended to teach us only the said lesson, he could find better and more striking illustrations than "the skull," etc. I am, therefore, of the opinion that a historical fact is underlying the above Mishna. Hillel lived during the time of Herod and witnessed all the atrocities which that tyrant perpetrated on the people, and more especially on the Rabbis. Hillel was also an eye-witness of the foul murder which Herod had committed by having drowned in a bath his brother-in-law, the high-priest Aristobule III. (See Grätz's History, Vol. III., page 203.) The •••••(skull) of the Mishna does therefore refer to Aristobule, and since Hillel could not openly express his indignation, for fear of the tyrant, he made an indirect allusion to the occurrence.--From the American Israelite, by Rev. Dr. Falk Vedaver.

[62:1](#) Chapter XVI. of the original.

[66:1](#) The text reads "Eliezer," but this must be a misprint, as Elazar was the fifth all the disciples, each of whom had three maxims.

[66:2](#) Chapter XVII. of the original.

[69:1](#) Chapter XVIII. of the original.

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