

IV

17-21

Sayings of the Fathers

17. R. Simeon said, There are three crowns: the crown of learning, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty; but the crown of a good name excels them all.

18. R. Nehorai said, Wander forth to a home of the Torah—and say not that the Torah will come after Thee—for there thy associates will establish thee in the possession of it; and lean not upon thine own understanding.

19. R. Yannaï said, It is not in our power to explain either the prosperity of the wicked or the afflictions of the righteous.

20. R. Mattithya, the son of Cheresh, said, Be beforehand in the salutation of peace to all men; and be rather a tail to lions than a head to foxes.

21. R. Jacob said, This world is like an ante-chamber to the world to come; prepare thyself in the ante-chamber, that thou mayest enter into the hall.

Your own unguided mind may lead to error, heresy, apostasy. The words, "lean not upon thine understanding", are a quotation from Proverbs 8. 5.

19. *Yannaï*. His identity is uncertain. He may be the father of R. Dostai in III, 10; if so, he was a contemporary of R. Meir.

it is not in our power to explain. Man can answer neither the question, Why do the wicked flourish? nor, Why do the righteous suffer? "This saying may be an explanatory comment on the words from Proverbs with which the last mishna closes" (Hoffmann). It might also be translated, "There is not in our hands the security of the wicked, nor the chastisements of the righteous". This would then describe the political status of the Jews in the days of the author: neither hopelessly bad nor wholly good (Graetz).

20. *Mattithya, the son of Cheresh*. A disciple of R. Eliezer, who fled from the Holy Land after the defeat of Bar Cochba, and lived in Rome.

beforehand in the salutation. A counsel of prudence, especially to a Jew in an unfriendly environment.

be rather a tail to lions. Evidently formulated in opposition to a proverb current both in Rome and Palestine: "Better be a head of foxes, than a tail among lions".

21. *Jacob*. See III, 9.

prepare thyself. For life in the Hereafter, by good actions and repentance for misdeeds. "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (Amos 4. 12).

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the hall. The Heb. is a transliteration of a Greek word for a dining

Joseph H. Hertz

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ד

פרקי אבות

זְדוּן: (יו) רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן אוֹמֵר: שְׁלֹשָׁה כְּתָרִים הֵן: כְּתָר הַתּוֹרָה וְכְתָר כְּהֻנָּה וְכְתָר מַלְכוּת. וְכְתָר שֵׁם טוֹב עוֹלָה עַל

נְבִיטָה: (יח) רַבִּי נְהוֹרַי אוֹמֵר: הָיָה גוֹלָה לְמָקוֹם הַתּוֹרָה וְאֶל־תֵּאמַר שֶׁהִיא תְּבוּאָה אֲחֵרִי. שֶׁחֲבָרִי: יְהִימִיָּה בְּיָדָה.

וְאֶל־בֵּינָהּ אֶל־תִּשְׁעוֹן: (יט) רַבִּי יַנַּי אוֹמֵר: אִין בְּיָדֵינוּ לֹא מַשְׁלוֹת הִרְשָׁעִים וְאִם לֹא מִיִּסְרֵי הַצְּדִיקִים: (כ) רַבִּי

מַתִּיתְיָה בְּוִחְרֵשׁ אוֹמֵר: הָיָה מְקוּדִים בְּשִׁלוֹם כְּלֵאָדָם. וְהָיָה זָנֵב לְאֵרִיוֹת וְאֶל־תְּהִי רֹאשׁ לְשָׁעֲלִים: (כא) רַבִּי יַעֲקֹב

אוֹמֵר: הָעוֹלָם הַזֶּה הוֹמָה לְפָרוֹזְדוֹר בְּפָנָי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא.

17. *Simeon*. Ben Yochai, see on III, 4. His saying is among the very greatest in Aboth.

crowns. Symbols of dignity.

learning. lit. "Torah", religious learning.

crown of priesthood. Scripture states, "Thou shalt set the mitre upon his (Aaron's) head, and put the holy crown upon the mitre" (Exodus 29. 6).

a good name. Cf. "a good name is rather to be chosen than great riches" (Proverbs 23. 1) and, "A good name is better than precious oil" (Ecclesiastes 7. 1).

excels them all. Because it alone is the tribute paid to personality and character. "A man attains to priesthood and royalty by heredity, and even learning is not invariably accompanied by nobility of character. Only in the case of a bearer of a good name, do we find outward honour combined with inner worth" (G. Beer).

18. *Rabbi Nehorai*. A name given to several Rabbis. In this instance it is said to be a pseudonym of R. Elazar ben Arach (II, 10).

a home of the Torah. A place where eminent teachers reside, so that one may benefit from their instruction; see VI, 9.

the Torah will come after thee. If the author is R. Elazar ben Arach, he may have had his own experience in mind. On the death of his teacher, Rabban Yochanan, he left his associates and lived in Emmaus which was not "a home of the Torah", and he forgot his learning. To the Jew of to-day, this mishna is a warning to live in, or near, a Jewish community.

for there thy associates. True knowledge is the result of contact with other minds; see I, 16.

upon thine own understanding. To unravel difficulties in one's studies, instead of resorting to guidance from a competent teacher.

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