

Jewish Ethics

The Life-Elevating Wisdom of Pirkei Avot

3:1

Unwitting Judgment

Retribution is extracted from a person, with his knowledge and without his knowledge.

(Pirkei Avot 3:16)

Untouchable

The soul is literally a piece of G-d.

(Tanya, Chapter 2)

3:2

Law & Order

The law of the land is the law of the Jew.

(Talmud, Bava Batra 113a)

Divine Reflection

Kingship on earth is a prototype of the Heavenly Kingship.

(Talmud, Berachot 58a)

Rabbi Chanina ben Tradyon

Rabbi Chanina was sentenced to death by the Romans, for teaching Torah and holding public gatherings despite the government's prohibition against it. He was burnt at the stake on the 27th of Sivan, wrapped in the Torah scroll that he had been holding when he was arrested. Tufts of wool soaked in water were placed over his heart so that his death should be prolonged.

His daughter Beruriah cried out, "Father, that I should see you like this!" He answered, "Had I been burnt alone, it would have been difficult for me. Since I am being burnt with a Torah scroll with me, He who avenges the plight of the Torah scroll will avenge my plight."

His students said to him, "Rabbi, what do you see?" He responded, "The parchments are burning, but the letters are soaring on high." He was told to

Intown Jewish Academy ♦ 928 Ponce de Leon Ave ♦ Atlanta, GA 30306
www.IntownJewishAcademy.org ♦ (404) 898-0434 ♦ rabbiari@chabadintown.org

open his mouth to allow the fire in to hasten his death, but he said, "It is better that He who gave [my life] should take it."

(Avoda Zara 17b-18a; Sifra Devarim 307; Semachot 8:12)

3:4

Dangers of an Empty Mind

They took him and cast him into the pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

(Genesis 37:24)

As it says that the pit was empty can I not deduce that there was no water in it? Why does it say that there was no water? There was no water, but there were snakes and scorpions.

(Rashi on verse)

3:7

Omnipresence

There is none else beside Him.

(Deuteronomy 4:35)

Vacuum of Choice

Free will is granted to all men. If one desires to turn himself to the path of good and be righteous, the choice is his. Should he desire to turn to the path of evil and be wicked, the choice is his...

A person should not wonder: How is it possible for one to do whatever he wants and be responsible for his own deeds? Is it possible for anything to happen in this world without the permission and desire of its Creator?...

One must know that everything is done in accord with His will and, nevertheless, we are responsible for our deeds...

Just as the Creator desired that [the elements of] fire and wind rise upward and [those of] water and earth descend downward, that the heavenly spheres revolve in a circular orbit, and all the other creations of the world follow the nature which He desired for them, so too, He desired that man have free choice and be responsible for his deeds, without being pulled or forced. Rather, he, on his own initiative, with the knowledge which G-d has granted him, will do anything that man is able to do.

(Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 5:1-4)

3:8***Forgetting***

Beruriah once saw a student studying Torah silently. She scolded him for not studying our load, saying that only those who study out loud will remember their studies.

Rabbi Eliezer had a student who would study silently. After three years, he forgot what he had learned.

(Talmud, Eruvin 54a)

Life

It is a tree of life for those who hold fast to it.

(Proverbs 3:18)

Present

Blessed are You L-rd, who gives the Torah.

(Blessing over the Torah)

3:9***Pure Character***

One who possesses Torah wisdom but lacks fear of Heaven is like a treasurer who has the key to the inner chambers but lacks the key to the front door.

(Talmud, Shabbat 31a)

Torah wisdom that is not accompanied by fear of sin is like wheat that lacks a preservative, and ultimately rots.

(Ibid.)

3:10***Deed Before Wisdom***

We will do and [then] we will hear.

(Exodus 24:7)

The Greatest Love

Chasidim asked the Alter Rebbe: What is a greater form of Divine worship—loving G-d, or loving our fellow? Loving our fellow, he replied, since in doing so we love the one that our Beloved loves.

(Hayom Yom, 28 Nissan)

3:13***Power of Silence***

The beginning of wisdom is silence.

(Meiri)

Is Abstinence Kosher?

Be holy: Sanctify yourself [also] in regard to what is permitted to you.

(Talmud, Yevamot 20a on Leviticus 19:2)

Is what the Torah has forbidden not enough for you, that you must further deprive yourself?

(Jerusalem Talmud, Nedarim 9:1)

3:17***Purpose***

Mitzvot were only given in order to refine the creatures.

(Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 44)

Philosophy

If a person is not worthy, the Torah becomes a deadly poison for him.

(Talmud, Yoma 72b)



Intown Jewish Academy ♦ 928 Ponce de Leon Ave ♦ Atlanta, GA 30306
www.IntownJewishAcademy.org ♦ (404) 898-0434 ♦ rabiari@chabadintown.org