

From the Rabbi



During the summer there is a tradition to study a different chapter of Pirkay Avot (Sayings of the Fathers) each week. As this is the summer edition of Temple Talk, I would like to share with you a sample of wise sayings from this unique tractate of the Mishna.

Pondering this timeless wisdom is meant to be part of our spiritual preparation for the High Holidays. One of the names of Rosh Hashanah is Yom HaDin which means Day of Judgement. It is a day on which we are judged by God and by ourselves. It is a day to respond to the questions: Who are you? What are your priorities? What are you doing as your part of your responsibility to fix our broken world? How are you fulfilling the Golden Rule of the Torah: Love Your Neighbor As You Love Yourself? Are you living up to what God has asked of each of us as taught by the prophet Micah: Do Justice, Love, Kindness and Walk Humbly With God? The summer is a time for rest and relaxation, feeling the warmth of the sun and taking some time to get ready to begin a new year with inner strength, personal pride and a clarity of direction.

Select a master-teacher for yourself

Develop a deep relationship with a friend

When you assess others, tip the balance in their favor

Keep far from an evil neighbor

Be not a partner with an evil person

Never despair of retribution for the wicked

If I am not for myself, who will be for me

If I am only for myself, who am I

If not now, when

Make set times for the study of Torah

Say little, Do much

Greet every person with a cheerful face

Keep in mind what is above you:

An eye that sees, an ear that hears

A book in which all your deeds are recorded

Do not separate yourself from the community

Do not judge your fellow human being till you stand in his place

Do not say: "When I have leisure, I will study" for you may never have leisure

Cherish your colleague's honor as your own

Be not easily provoked to anger

Repent one day before your death

The begrudging eye, the evil impulse

And hatred of one's fellow human beings

Will ruin a person's life

When a person's good deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom will be enduring

But when a person's wisdom exceeds his good deeds,

His wisdom will not be enduring

Do not disdain any person, do not underrate the importance of anything

There is no person who does not have his hour

There is no thing without its place in the sun

Seven characteristics typify the fool and seven the wise person

The wise person does not speak in the presence of one who is wiser

She does not interrupt her friend's words

He does not reply in haste

She asks what is relevant, she answers to the point

He replies to questions in orderly sequence

Of what she has not heard, she says, "I have not heard"

He admits to the truth

The opposite of these typify the fool

Rabbi Gordon Yaffe