12 Hillel and Shammai received the tradition from them.  
Hillel taught:  
Be a disciple of Aaron —  
loving peace and pursuing peace,  
loving your fellow creatures  
and attracting them to the study of Torah.

13 This was a favorite teaching of his:  
When you seek fame, you destroy your name.  
Knowledge not increased is knowledge decreased;  
one who does not study deserves to die,  
and one who exploits Torah will perish.

14 This was another favorite teaching of his:  
If I am not for me, who will be?  
If I am for myself alone, what am I?  
And if not now, when?

15 Shammai taught:  
Make the study of Torah your primary occupation;  
say little, do much,  
and greet every person with a cheerful face.

16 Rabban Gamliel taught:  
Select a master-teacher for yourself  
so that you avoid doubtful decisions;  
do not make a habit of tithing by estimate.

17 His son, Shimon, taught:  
Throughout my life, I was raised among the scholars —  
and I discovered that nothing becomes a person more than silence;  
not study, but doing mitzvot is the essence of virtue;  
excess in speech leads to sin.

18 Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel taught:  
The world rests on three things:  
On Justice, on Truth, and on Peace.  
as it is written: “With truth, justice, and peace  
shall you judge in your gates” (Zachariah 8:16).

At the end of each chapter of Pirkei Avot,  
the passage on page 280 is often read.

5 Some transpose the order to correspond with the proof text.
CHAPTER II

1 Rabbi taught:
Which is the path of virtue a person should follow?
That which brings honor to one’s Maker as well as respect from one’s fellow human beings.

Be as attentive to a minor mitzvah as to a major one, for you do not know the reward for each of the mitzvot.

Weigh the loss incurred in performing a mitzvah against the gain; conversely, weigh the gain of an aveirah (sin) against the loss.

Ponder three things and you will avoid committing an aveirah.
Keep in mind what is above you:
An Eye that sees, an Ear that hears,
a Book in which all your deeds are recorded.

2 Rabban Gamliel, son of Rabbi Y’hudah Ha-Nasi, taught:
The study of Torah is commendable when combined with a gainful occupation, for when a person toils in both, sin is driven out of mind.
Study alone, without an occupation, leads to idleness and ultimately to sin.

All who serve on behalf of the community should do so for heaven’s sake.
Their work will prosper because the inherited merit of our ancestors endures forever.

God will abundantly reward them as though they had achieved it all through their own efforts.

3 Another teaching of Rabban Gamliel:
Be wary of the authorities!
They do not befriend anyone unless it serves their own needs.
They appear as friend when it is to their advantage, but do not stand by a person in an hour of need.

4 This was a favorite teaching of his:
Do God’s will as though it were yours, so that God will do your will as though it were His.
Nullify your will for God’s, that God may nullify the will of others for yours.

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6 Rabbi Y’hudah Ha-Nasi, the compiler of the Mishnah.
7 Our text is based on the variant reading יָשִׁיעָה, rather than יָשָׁעָה.
The Gaon of Vilna, in his commentary, cites as a proof text Proverbs 3:4.
5 Hillel taught:
Do not withdraw from the community.
Do not be sure of yourself till the day of your death;
do not judge your fellows till you stand in their situation.
Do not say "It is not possible to understand this,"
for ultimately it will be understood.
Do not say "When I have leisure, I will study,"
for you may never have leisure.

6 This was a favorite teaching of his:
A poor cannot be reverent; an ignoramus cannot be pious; a shy person cannot learn; an ill-tempered person cannot teach; not everyone engrossed in business learns wisdom.
Where there are no worthy persons, strive to be a worthy person.

7 Another comment of Hillel,
upon seeing a human skull floating on the water.
He addressed it thus:
Because you drowned others, they have drowned you; in the end, they who drowned you shall be drowned.

8 Another favorite teaching of his:
More flesh, more worms; more possessions, more worries; more wives, more witchcraft; more maidservants, more lewdness; more menservants, more thievery.

However —
more Torah, more life;
more study with colleagues, more wisdom;
more counsel, more understanding;
more good deeds, more peace.

The acquisition of a good reputation brings personal gain, but one who has acquired Torah has acquired eternal life.

9 Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai received the tradition
from Hillel and Shamrai.
This was a favorite teaching of his:
If you have studied much Torah, take no special credit for it since you were created for this very purpose.

10 Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai had five disciples, namely:
Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, Rabbi Y’hosha ben Hananiah, Rabbi Yose Ha-Kohen, Rabbi Shimon ben N’tan’el, Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh.

11 This is how he characterized their merits:
Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus: A plastered wall that never loses a drop;
Rabbi Y’hosha ben Hananiah: Happy the one who gave him birth;
Rabbi Yose Ha-Kohen: A saintly person;
Rabbi Shimon ben N’tan’el: A pious person;
Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh: An ever-flowing fountain.
12 He added this comment about his disciples:
If all the scholars of Israel were in one scale of a balance, and Eliezer ben Hircanus in the other, he would outweigh them all.

Abba Shaul, in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan, quoted him thus:
If all the scholars including Eliezer ben Hircanus were in one scale of a balance, and Elazar ben Arakh in the other, he would outweigh them all.

13 He posed this question to his disciples:
Look about you and tell me — which is the way in life to which one should cleave?

Rabbi Eliezer said: A generous eye;
Rabbi Y’hoshua said: A good colleague;
Rabbi Yose said: A good neighbor;
Rabbi Shimon said: Foresight; ⁸
Rabbi Elazar said: A generous heart.

Said he to them:
I prefer the answer of Elazar ben Arakh, for his view includes all of yours.

14 Rabbi Yoḥanan continued:
Look about you and tell me — which is the way in life that one should avoid:
Rabbi Eliezer said: A begrudging eye;
Rabbi Y’hoshua said: An evil colleague;
Rabbi Yose said: An evil neighbor;
Rabbi Shimon said: One who borrows and does not repay [for borrowing from a person is like borrowing from God; as it is said: “The wicked borrows and does not repay, but the righteous one deals graciously and gives” (Psalm 37:21)];
Rabbi Elazar said: A begrudging heart.

Said he to them:
I prefer the answer of Elazar ben Arakh, for his view includes all of yours.

15 Each of the disciples taught three things.
Rabbi Eliezer taught:
Cherish your colleague’s honor as your own; be not easily provoked to anger; repent one day before your death.
(He is also quoted as saying: Warm yourself at the fire of the scholars, but be wary of their glowing coals lest you be burnt. Their bite is that of a fox; their sting that of a scorpion; their hiss that of a serpent — indeed, all their teachings are like live coals of fire.)

⁸ Literally, “one who sees the consequences of his deeds.”
16 Rabbi Y'hoshua taught:
The begrudging eye, the evil impulse, and hatred of one's fellow human beings will ruin a person's life.  

17 Rabbi Yose taught:
The property of others should be as precious to you as your own. Perfect yourself in the study of Torah — it will not come to you by inheritance; let all your deeds be for heaven's sake.

18 Rabbi Shimon taught:
Be careful when you recite the Sh'ma and the Amidah. When reciting the Amidah do not make your prayer a prescribed routine but a plea for mercy and grace before God; as it is said: “For God is gracious and merciful, patient and abounding in love, taking pity on evildoers” (Joel 2:13). Do not regard yourself as an evil person.

19 Rabbi Elazar taught:
Be diligent in the study of Torah; be armed with knowledge to refute a heretic; be aware for whom you labor, and that your Employer can be relied upon to reward your labors.

20 Rabbi Tarfon taught:
The day is short, the task is great, the workers indolent, the reward bountiful, and the Master insistent!

21 This was a favorite teaching of his:
You are not obliged to finish the task, neither are you free to neglect it. If you have studied much Torah, your reward will be abundant. Your Employer can be relied upon to reward you for your labors. Know, however, that the reward of the righteous is in a future time.

At the end of each chapter of Pirkei Avot, the passage on page 280 is often read.

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9 Literally, “takes a person out of the world.”