PIRKEI AVOT
TEACHINGS OF THE SAGES

This passage is often read before each chapter of Pirkei Avot.

SANHEDRIN X:1
All Israel have a portion in the world-to-come, as it is written:
"Your people shall all be righteous, they shall possess the land
forever; they are a shoot of My planting, the work of My hands
in whom I shall be glorified" (Isaiah 60:21).

CHAPTER 1

1 Moses received Torah from God at Sinai.
He transmitted it to Joshua,
Joshua to the Elders, the Elders to the Prophets,
the Prophets to the members of the Great Assembly.

They formulated three precepts:
Be cautious in rendering a decision,
rear many students,
and build a fence to protect Torah.

2 Shimon Ha-Tzadik was one of the last members
of the Great Assembly.
This was a favorite teaching of his:
The world rests on three things —
on Torah, on service of God, on deeds of love.

3 Antigonus, of Sokho, received the tradition from Shimon Ha-Tzadik.
This was a favorite teaching of his:
Do not be like servants who serve their master
expecting to receive a reward;
be rather like servants who serve their master unconditionally,
with no thought of reward.¹
Also, let the fear of God determine your actions.

4 Yose ben Yozezer, of Tz:redah, and Yose ben Yohanan, of Jerusalem,
received the tradition from him.
Yose ben Yozezer of Tz:redah, taught:
Make your home a regular meeting place for the scholars;
sit eagerly at their feet and thirstily drink their words.

¹ See Avot D'Rabbi Natan, chapter 10, Nusah B,
where the reading is "with expectation of no reward."
5 Yose ben Yohanan, of Jerusalem, taught:
Open wide the doors of your home
and make the poor welcome as members of your household;
do not engage in small talk with your wife. 2
(Now if this be true for one’s wife,
how much more does it apply to the wife of a friend?
Our sages derived a lesson from this:
One who engages in small talk with his wife harms himself;
his neglect of the study of Torah and, in the end, inherit Gehinom.)

6 Y’hoshua ben P’rahayah and Nitai, of Arbel,
received the tradition from them.
Y’hoshua ben P’rahayah taught:
Select a master-teacher for yourself;
acquire a colleague for study;
when you assess people, tip the balance in their favor.

7 Nitai, of Arbel, taught:
Keep far from an evil neighbor;
be not a partner with an evil person;
ever despair of retribution for the wicked.

8 Y’hudah ben Tabai and Shimon ben Shetah
received the tradition from them.
Y’hudah ben Tabai taught:
When serving as a judge,
do not play the role of counsel for either litigant;
when the litigants appear before you, deem them both guilty.
But when they depart, having accepted the verdict,
regard them both as innocent.

9 Shimon ben Shetah taught:
Cross-examine the witnesses thoroughly,
but be careful in your choice of words
lest something you say lead them to testify falsely.

10 Sh’mayah and Avtalyon received the tradition from them.
Sh’mayah taught:
Love work; hate positions of domination;
do not make yourself known to the authorities.

11 Avtalyon taught:
Sages, be careful of what you say lest you be exiled by the authorities.
You may be exiled to a center of heretical sects, 3
and your students (who will follow you there)
may imbibe their teachings and become apostates. 4
You will thus be responsible for the desecration of God’s name.

--- Footnotes ---
2 The term אישה refers to one’s wife. See Genesis 3:13, Ecclesiastes 7:26.
3 שמה is a favorite Rabbinic metaphor for Torah;
� שמה may be a metaphor for heretical teachings.
4 Literally, “they will die.” Apostacy is equated with death.