

These are instructions by the Mayor of the City who is also the Vizier. His name is Ptahhotep and he serves under Pharoah Assa who lives for all eternity. The Mayor of the City, Vizier Ptahhotep, addressed the Supreme Divinity, the Deity as follows:

"God upon the two crocodiles." (Reference to Heru) who is sometimes shown standing on two crocodiles. My God, the process of aging brings senility. My mind decays and forgetfulness of the things of yesterday has already begun. Feebleness has come and weakness grows. Childlike one sleeps all day. The eyes are dim and the ears are becoming deaf. The strength is being sapped. The mouth has grown silent and does not speak. The bones ache through and through. Good things now seem evil. The taste is gone. What old age does to people in evil is every thing. The nose is clogged and does not breath. It is painful even to stand or to sit. May your servant be authorized to use the status that old age affords, to teach the hearers, so as to tell them the words of those who have listened to the ways of our ancestors, and of those who have listened to the Gods. May I do this for you, so that strife may be banned from among our people, and so that the Two Shores may serve you?

Then the majesty of the Deity said to

Ptahhotep, go ahead and instruct him in the Ancient Wisdom. May he become a model for the children of the great. May obedience enter into him, and may he be devoted to the one who speaks to him. No one is born wise.

And so begins the formulation of Mdw Nfr, *good speech*, to be spoken by the Prince, the Count, God's beloved, the eldest son of the Pharoah, the son of his body, Mayor of the City and Vizier, Ptahhotep, instructs the ignorant in the knowledge and in the standards of *good speech*. It will profit those who hear. It will be a loss to those who transgress. Ptahhotep began to speak to "Pharaoh's son" (to posterity).

1. Do not be proud and arrogant with your knowledge. Consult and converse with the ignorant and the wise, for the limits of art are not reached. No artist ever possesses that perfection to which he should aspire. *Good speech* is more hidden than greenstone (emeralds), yet it may be found among maids at the grindstones.
2. If you meet a disputant in the heat of action, one who is more powerful than you, simply fold your arms and bend your back. To confront him will not make him agree with you. Pay no attention to his *evil*

*speech.* If you do not confront him while he is raging, people will call him an ignominy. Your self-control will be the match for his evil utterances.

3. If you meet a disputant in action, one who is your equal, one who is on your level, you will overcome him by being silent while he is speaking evilly. There will be much talk among those who hear and your name will be held in high regard among the great.
4. If you meet a disputant in action who is a poor man and who is not your equal do not attack him because he is weak. Leave him alone. He will confound himself. Do not answer him just so that you can relieve your own heart. Do not vent yourself against your opponent. Wretched is he who injures a poor man. If you ignore him listeners will wish to do what you want. You will beat him through their reproof.
5. If you are a man who leads, a man who controls the affairs of many, then seek the most perfect way of performing your responsibility so that your conduct will be blameless. Great is Maat (truth, justice

and righteousness). It is everlasting. Maat has been unchanged since the time of Asar. To create obstacles to the following of laws, is to open a way to a condition of violence. The transgressor of laws is punished, although the greedy person overlooks this. Baseness may obtain riches, yet crime never lands its wares on the shore. In the end only Maat lasts. Man says, "Maat is my father's ground."

6. Do not scheme against people. God will punish accordingly; If a man says, "I shall live by scheming," he will lack bread for his mouth. If a man says, "I will be rich," he will have to say, "My cleverness has trapped me." If he says, "I will trap for myself" he will not be able to say, "I trapped for my profit." If a man says, "I will rob someone," he will end by being given to a stranger. People's schemes do not prevail. God's command is what prevails. Therefore, live in the midst of peace. What God gives comes by itself.
7. If you are one among guests at the table of a person who is more powerful than you, take what that person gives just as it is set before you. Look at what is before you.

Don't stare at your host. Don't speak to him until he asks. One does not know what may displease him. Speak when he has spoken to you. Then your words will please the heart. The man who has plenty of the means of existence acts as his Ka commands. He will give food to those who he favors. It is the Ka that makes his hand stretch out. The great man gibes to the chosen man, thus eating is under the direction of God. It is a fool who complains about it.

8. If you are a person of trust sent by one great person to another great person, be careful to stick to the essence of the message that you were asked to transmit. Give the message exactly as he gave it to you. Guard against provocative speech which makes one great person angry with another. Just keep to the truth. Do not exceed it. However, even though there may have been an out-burst in the message you should not repeat it. Do not malign anyone, great or small, the Ka abhors it.
9. If you plow and if there is growth in your field and God lets it prosper in your hand, don't boast to your neighbor. One has

great respect for the silent person. A person of character is a person of wealth. If that person robs, he or she is like a crocodile in the middle of the waters. If God gives you children, don't impose on one who has no children. Neither should you decry or brag about having your own children, for there is many a father who has grief and many a mother with children who is less content than another. It is the lonely whom God nurtures while the family man prays for a follower.

10. If you are poor, then serve a person of worth so that your conduct may be well with God. Do not bring up the fact that he was once poor. Do not be arrogant towards him just because you know about his former state. Respect him now for his position of authority. As for fortune, it obeys its own law and that is her will. It is God's gift. It is God who makes him worthy and who protects him while he sleeps, or who can turn away from him.
11. Follow your heart as long as you live. Do no more than is required. Do not shorten the time of "follow the heart", since that offends the Ka. Don't waste time on daily

cares over and beyond providing for your household. When wealth finally comes, then follow your heart. Wealth does no good if you are glum.

12. If you are a wise man, train up a son who will be pleasing to God. If he is straight and takes after you take good care of him. Do everything that is good for him. He is your son, your Ka begot him. Don't withdraw your heart from him. But an offspring can make trouble. If your son strays and neglects your council and disobeys all that is said, with his mouth spouting evil speech, then punish him for all his talk. God will hate him who crosses you. His guilt was determined in the womb. He who God makes boatless cannot cross the water.
13. If you are a guard in the storehouse, stand or sit rather than leave your post and trespass into someone else's place. Follow this rule from the first. Never leave your post, even when fatigued. Keen is the face to him who enters announced, and spacious is the seat of him who has been asked to come in. The storehouse has fixed rules. All behavior is strictly by the rule.

Only a God can penetrate the secure warehouse where the rules are followed, even by privileged persons.

14. If you are among the people then gain your supporters by building trust. The trusted man is one who does not speak the first thing that comes to mind; and he will become a leader. A man of means has a good name, and his face is benign. People will praise him even without his knowledge. On the other hand, he whose heart obeys his belly asks for contempt of himself in the place of love. His heart is naked. His body is unanointed. The great hearted is a gift of God. He who is ruled by his appetite belongs to the enemy.
15. Report the thing that you were commissioned to report without error. Give your advice in the high council. If you are fluent in your speech, it will not be hard for you to report. Nor will anyone say of you, "who is he to know this?" As to the authorities, their affairs will fail if they punish you for speaking truth. They should be silent upon hearing the report that you have rendered as you have been told.

If you are a man who leads, a man whose authority reaches widely, then you should do perfect things, those which posterity will remember. Don't listen to the words of flatterers or to words that puff you up with pride and vanity.

17. If you are a person who judges, listen carefully to the speech of one who pleads. Don't stop the person from telling you everything that they had planned to tell you. A person in distress wants to pour out his or her heart, even more than they want their case to be won. If you are one who stops a person who is pleading, that person will say "why does he reject my plea?" Of course not all that one pleads for can be granted, but a good hearing soothes the heart. The means for getting a true and clear explanation is to listen with kindness.
18. If you want friendship to endure in the house that you enter, the house of a master, of a brother or of a friend, then in whatever place you enter beware of approaching the women there. Unhappy is the place where this is done. Unwelcome is he who intrudes on them. A thousand men are turned away from their good be-

cause of a short moment that is like a dream, and then that moment is followed by death that comes from having known that dream. Anyone who encourages you to take advantage of the situation gives you poor advice. When you go to do it, your heart says no. If you are one who fails through the lust of women, then no affair of yours can prosper.

19. If you want to have perfect conduct, to be free from every evil, then above all guard against the vice of greed. Greed is a grievous sickness that has no cure. There is no treatment for it. It embroils fathers, mothers and the brothers of the mother. It parts the wife from the husband. Greed is a compound of all the evils. It is a bundle of all hateful things. That person endures whose rule is rightness, who walks a straight line, for that person will leave a legacy by such behavior. On the other hand, the greedy has no tomb.
20. Do not be greedy in the division of things. Do not covet more than your share. Don't be greedy towards your relatives. A mild person has a greater claim than the harsh one. Poor is the person who forgets his

relatives. He is deprived of their company. Even a little bit of what is wanted will turn a quarreler into a friendly person.

21. When you prosper and establish your home, love your wife with ardor. Then fill her belly and clothe her back. Caress her. Give her ointments to soothe her body. Fulfill her wishes for as long as you live. She is a fertile field for her husband. Do not be brutal. Good manners will influence her better than force. Do not contend with her in the courts. Keep her from the need to resort to outside powers. Her eye is her storm when she gazes. It is by such treatment that she will be compelled to stay in your house.
22. Help your friends with things that you have, for you have these things by the grace of God. If you fail to help your friends, one will say you have a selfish Ka. One plans for tomorrow, but you do not know what tomorrow will bring. The right soul is the soul by which one is sustained. If you do praiseworthy deeds your friends will say, "welcome" in your time of need.

Don't repeat slander nor should you even listen to it. It is the spouting of the hot bellied. Just report a thing that has been observed, not something that has been heard secondhand. If it is something negligible, don't even say anything. He who is standing before you will recognize your worth. Slander is like a terrible dream against which one covers the face.

24. If you are a man of worth who sits at the council of a leader, concentrate on being excellent. Your silence is much better than boasting. Speak when you know that you have a solution. It is the skilled person who should speak when in council. Speaking is harder than all other work. The one who understands this makes speech a servant.
25. If you are mighty and powerful then gain respect through knowledge and through your gentleness of speech. Don't order things except as it is fitting. The one who provokes others gets into trouble. Don't be haughty lest you be humbled. But also don't be mute lest you be chided. When you answer one who is fuming, turn your face and control yourself. The flame of the