

Questions on Ptah-Hotep's Instruction:

1. What are some of the examples of the advice that Ptah-Hotep gives?
2. What evidence is there of a religious sanction behind such advice in the sense of a god or gods that will be angry if the advice is not followed or happy if it is followed?
3. Did any of Ptah-Hotep's advice seem different from the kind of ethical advice one might be given nowadays?

"One knows a wise one because of his wisdom, An official is at his good deed (?): his heart is in balance (?) with his tongue, his lips are accurate when he speaks..."<sup>[6]</sup>

The question marks are left for interpretation and different for each translator. The teachings served its purpose to educate and give wisdom to the young adult, to live a good life and it taught men how to be fair and just in the world.

## Selected passages

---

Quotations are taken from Christian Jacq, *The Living Wisdom of Ancient Egypt*.<sup>[8]</sup>

- "Great is the Law (Maat)." (p. 24)
- "All conduct should be so straight that you can measure it with a plumb-line." (p. 27)
- "Injustice exists in abundance, but evil can never succeed in the longrun." (p. 32)
- "Punish with principle, teach meaningfully. The act of stopping evil leads to the lasting establishment of virtue." (p. 32)
- "The human race never accomplishes anything. It's what God commands that gets done." (p. 41)
- "Those whom God guides do not go wrong. Those whose boat He takes away cannot cross." (p. 43)

- "Follow your heart all your life, do not commit excess with respect to what has been ordained." (p. 66)
- "If you work hard, and if growth takes place as it should in the fields, it is because God has placed abundance in your hands." (p. 74)
- "Do not gossip in your neighbourhood, because people respect the silent." (p. 74)
- "Listening benefits the listener." (p. 74)
- "If he who listens listens fully, then he who listens becomes he who understands." (p. 76)
- "He who listens becomes the master of what is profitable." (p. 76)
- "To listen is better than anything, thus is born perfect love." (p. 76)
- "God loves him who listens. He hates those who do not listen." (p. 76)
- "As for the ignorant man who does not listen, he accomplishes nothing. He equates knowledge with ignorance, the useless with the harmful. He does everything which is detestable, so people get angry with him each day." (p. 77)
- "A perfect word is hidden more deeply than precious stones. It is to be found near the servants working at the mill-stone." (p. 78)
- "Only speak when you have something worth saying." (p. 79)
- "As for you, teach your disciple the words of tradition. May he act as a model for the children of the great, that they may find in him the understanding and justice of

every heart that speaks to him, since man is not born wise." (p. 85)

- "A woman with happy heart brings equilibrium." (p. 107)
- "Love your wife with passion." (p. 107)
- "As for those who end up continually lusting after women, none of their plans will succeed." (p. 108)
- "How wonderful is a son who obeys his father!" (p. 112)
- "How happy he is of whom it is said: 'A son is kind-natured when he knows how to listen.'" (p. 112)
- "Do not blame those who are childless, do not criticise them for not having any, and do not boast about having them yourself." (p. 113)
- "May your heart never be vain because of what you know. Take counsel from the ignorant as well as the wise..." (p. 119)
- "So do not place any confidence in your heart in the accumulation of riches, since everything that you have is a gift from God." (p. 126)
- "Think of living in peace with what you possess, and whatever the Gods choose to give will come of its own accord." (p. 127)
- "Do not repeat a slanderous rumour, do not listen to it." (p. 139)
- "He who has a great heart has a gift from God. He who obeys his stomach obeys the enemy." (p. 140)
- "Those who[m] the Gods guide cannot get lost. Those they forbid passage will not be able to cross the river of life." (p. 143)