

25. If you are mighty, gain respect through
knowledge
And through gentleness of speech.
Don't command except as is fitting,
He who provokes gets into trouble.
Don't be haughty, lest you be humbled,
Don't be mute, lest you be chided.
When you answer one who is fuming,
Avert your face, control yourself.
The flame of the hot-heart sweeps across,
He who steps gently, his path is paved.
He who frets all day has no happy moment,
He who's gay all day can't keep house.
26. Don't oppose a great man's action,
Don't vex the heart of one who is burdened;
If he gets angry at him who foils him,
The *ka* will part from him who loves him.
Yet he is the provider along with the god,
What he wishes should be done for him.
When he turns his face back to you after
raging,
There will be peace from his *ka*;
As ill will comes from opposition,
So goodwill increases love.
27. Teach the great what is useful to him,
Be his aid before the people;
If you let his knowledge impress his lord,
Your sustenance will come from his *ka*.
As the favorite's belly is filled,
So your back will be clothed by it,
And his help will be there to sustain you.
For your superior whom you love
And who lives by it,
He in turn will give you good support.
Thus will love of you endure
In the belly of those who love you,
He is a *ka* who loves to listen.
28. If you are a magistrate of standing,
Commissioned to satisfy the many,
Hew a straight line.
When you speak don't lean to one side,
Beware lest one complain:
"Judges, he distorts the matter!"
And your deed turns into a judgment of you.
29. If you are angered by a misdeed,
Lean toward a man on account of his
rightness;
Pass it over, don't recall it,
Since he was silent to you the first day.
30. If you are great after having been humble,
Have gained wealth after having been poor
In the past, in a town which you know,
Knowing your former condition,
Do not put trust in your wealth,
Which came to you as gift of god;
So that you will not fall behind one like
you,
To whom the same has happened.
31. Bend your back to your superior,
Your overseer from the palace;
Then your house will endure in its
wealth,
Your rewards in their right place.
Wretched is he who opposes a superior,
One lives as long as he is mild,
Baring the arm does not hurt it.
Do not plunder a neighbor's house,
Do not steal the goods of one near you,
Lest he denounce you before you are heard.
A quarreler is a mindless person,
If he is known as an aggressor
The hostile man will have trouble in the
neighborhood.
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33. If you probe the character of a friend,
Don't inquire, but approach him,
Deal with him alone,
So as not to suffer from his manner.
Dispute with him after a time,
Test his heart in conversation;
If what he has seen escapes him,
If he does a thing that annoys you,
Be yet friendly with him, don't attack,
Be restrained, don't let fly,
Don't answer with hostility,
Neither part from him nor attack him;
His time does not fail to come,
One does not escape what is fated.

34. Be generous as long as you live,
What leaves the storehouse does not return;
It is the food to be shared which is coveted,
One whose belly is empty is an accuser;
One deprived becomes an opponent,
Don't have him for a neighbor.
Kindness is a man's memorial
For the years after the function.
35. Know your helpers, then you prosper,
Don't be mean toward your friends,
They are one's watered field,
And greater than one's riches,
For what belongs to one belongs to another.
The character of a son-of-man is profit to
him;
Good nature is a memorial.
36. Punish firmly, chastise soundly,
Then repression of crime becomes an
example;
Punishment except for crime
Turns the complainer into an enemy.
37. If you take to wife a *špnt*²
Who is joyful and known by her town,
If she is fickle and likes the moment,
Do not reject her, let her eat,
The joyful brings happiness.

Epilogue

If you listen to my sayings,
All your affairs will go forward;
In their truth resides their value,
Their memory goes on in the speech of men,
Because of the worth of their precepts;
If every word is carried on,
They will not perish in this land.
If advice is given for the good,
The great will speak accordingly;
It is teaching a man to speak to posterity,
He who hears it becomes a master-hearer;
It is good to speak to posterity,
It will listen to it.

If a good example is set by him who leads,
He will be beneficent for ever,
His wisdom being for all time.
The wise feeds his *ba*³ with what endures,
So that it is happy with him on earth.
The wise is known by his wisdom,
The great by his good actions;
His heart matches his tongue,
His lips are straight when he speaks;
He has eyes that see,
His ears are made to hear what will profit his son,
Acting with truth he is free of falsehood.
Useful is hearing to a son who hears;
If hearing enters the hearer,
The hearer becomes a listener,
Hearing well is speaking well.
Useful is hearing to one who hears,
Hearing is better than all else,
It creates good will.
How good for a son to grasp his father's words,
He will reach old age through them.

He who hears is beloved of god,
He whom god hates does not hear.
The heart makes of its owner a hearer or non-
hearer,
Man's heart is his life-prosperity-health!
The hearer is one who hears what is said,
He who loves to hear is one who does what is said.
How good for a son to listen to his father,
How happy is he to whom it is said:
"The son, he pleases as a master of hearing."
The hearer of whom this is said,
He is well-endowed
And honored by his father;
His remembrance is in the mouth of the living,
Those on earth and those who will be.

If a man's son accepts his father's words,
No plan of his will go wrong.
Teach your son to be a hearer,
One who will be valued by the nobles;
One who guides his speech by what he was told,

² No single translation of *špnt* has been agreed upon.

³ Like *ka*, the term *ba* is a complex concept intimately related to one's individuality. It is somewhat analogous to our concept of "soul."

One regarded as a hearer.
 This son excels, his deeds stand out,
 While failure follows him who hears not.
 The wise wakes early to his lasting gain,
 While the fool is hard pressed.

The fool who does not hear,
 He can do nothing at all;
 He sees knowledge in ignorance,
 Usefulness in harmfulness.
 He does all that one detests
 And is blamed for it each day;
 He lives on that by which one dies,
 His food is distortion of speech.
 His sort is known to the officials,
 Who say: "A living death each day."
 One passes over his doings,
 Because of his many daily troubles.

A son who hears is a follower of Horus,
 It goes well with him when he has heard.
 When he is old, has reached veneration,
 He will speak likewise to his children,
 Renewing the teaching of his father.
 Every man teaches as he acts,
 He will speak to the children,
 So that they will speak to their children:
 Set an example, don't give offense,
 If justice stands firm your children will live.

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Conceal your heart, control your mouth,
 Then you will be known among the officials;
 Be quite exact before your lord,
 Act so that one will say to him: "He's the son of
 that one."

And those who hear it will say:
 "Blessed is he to whom he was born!"
 Be deliberate when you speak,
 So as to say things that count;
 Then the officials who listen will say:
 "How good is what comes from his mouth!"
 Act so that your lord will say of you:
 "How good is he whom his father taught;
 When he came forth from his body,
 He told him all that was in his mind,
 And he does even more than he was told."

Lo, the good son, the gift of god,
 Exceeds what is told him by his lord,
 He will do right when his heart is straight.
 As you succeed me, sound in your body,
 The king content with all that was done,
 May you obtain many years of life!
 Not small is what I did on earth,
 I had one hundred and ten years of life
 As gift of the king,
 Honors exceeding those of the ancestors,
 By doing justice for the king,
 Until the state of veneration!

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REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. According to Ptah-hotep, what are the most important virtues in proper human relations?
2. Are those virtues to be applied differently to people of different rank and social class?
3. How much importance is ascribed to the ability to fight physically?