

Akkadian Father's Advice to His Son

The Advice of an Akkadian Father to His Son, c. 2200 BCE

Do not set out to stand around in the assembly. Do not loiter where there is a dispute, for in the dispute they will have you as an observer. Then you will be made a witness for them, and they will involve you in a lawsuit to affirm something that does not concern you. In case of a dispute, get away from it, disregard it! If a dispute involving you should flare up, calm it down. A dispute is a covered pit, a wall which can cover over its foes; it brings to mind what one has forgotten and makes an accusation against a man. Do not return evil to your adversary; requite with kindness the one who does evil to you, maintain justice for your enemy, be friendly to your enemy. Do not honor a slave girl in your house; she should not rule your bedroom like a wife, do not give yourself over to slave girls....Let this be said among your people: "The household which a slave girl rules, she disrupts." Do not marry a prostitute, whose husbands are legion, an Ishtar-woman who is dedicated to a god, a *kulmashitu*-woman. . . .When you have trouble, she will not support you, when you have a dispute she will be a mocker. There is no reverence or submissiveness in her. Even if she is powerful in the household, get rid of her, for she pricks up her ears for the footsteps of another. My son, if it be the wish of a ruler that you belong to him, if you are entrusted with his closely guarded seal, open his treasure house and enter it, for no one but you may do it. Uncounted wealth you will find inside, but do not covet any of that, nor set your mind on a secret crime, for afterwards the matter will be investigated and the secret crime which you committed will be exposed. Do not speak ill, speak only good. Do not say evil things, speak well of people. He who speaks ill and says evil--people will waylay him because of his debt to Shamash. Do not talk too freely, watch what you say. Do not express your innermost thoughts even when you are alone. What you say in haste you may regret later. Exert yourself to restrain your speech. Worship your god every day. Sacrifice and pious utterance are the proper accompaniment of incense. Have a freewill offering for your god, for this is proper toward a god. Prayer, supplication, and prostration offer him daily, then your prayer will be granted, and you will be in harmony with god.

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