

EGYPT

Leadership

If you are a leader, setting forward your plans according to that which you decide, perform perfect actions which posterity may remember, without letting the words prevail with you which multiply flattery, which excite pride and produce vanity.

If you are a leader of peace, listen to the discourse of the petitioner. Be not abrupt with him; that would trouble him. Say not to him: "You have already recounted this." Indulgence will encourage him to accomplish the object of his coming. As for being abrupt with the complainant because he described what passed when the injury was done, instead of complaining of the injury itself let it not be! The way to obtain a clear explanation is to listen with kindness.

Social Harmony

If you desire to excite respect within the house you enter, for example the house of a superior, a friend, or any person of consideration, in short everywhere where you enter, keep yourself from making advances to a woman, for there is nothing good in so doing. There is no prudence in taking part in it, and thousands of men destroy themselves in order to enjoy a moment, brief as a dream, while they gain death, so as to know it. It is a villainous intention, that of a man who thus excites himself; if he goes on to carry it out, his mind abandons him. For as for him who is without repugnance for such an act, there is no good sense at all in him.

If you desire that your conduct should be good and preserved from all evil, keep yourself from every attack of bad humor. It is a fatal malady which leads to discord, and there is no longer any existence for him who gives way to it. For it introduces discord between fathers and mothers, as well as between brothers and sisters; it causes the wife and the husband to hate each other; it contains all kinds of wickedness, it embodies all kinds of wrong. When a man has established his just equilibrium and walks in this path, there where he makes his dwelling, there is no room for bad humor.

Bend your back before your superior. You are attached to the palace of the king; your house is established in its fortune, and your profits are as is fitting. Yet a man is annoyed at having an authority above himself, and passes the period of life in being vexed thereat. Although that hurts not your . . . Do not plunder the house of your neighbors, seize not by force the goods which are beside you. Exclaim not then against that which you hear, and do not feel humiliated. It is necessary to reflect when one is hindered by it that the pressure of authority is felt also by one's neighbor.

Raising Children

If you are a wise man, bring up a son who shall be pleasing to Ptah. If he conforms his conduct to your way and occupies himself with your affairs as is right, do to him all the good you can; he is your son, a person attached to you whom your own self has begotten. Separate not your heart from him.... But if he conducts himself ill and transgresses your wish, if he rejects all counsel, if his mouth goes according to the evil word, strike him on the mouth in return. Give orders without hesitation to those who do wrong, to him whose temper is turbulent; and he will not deviate from the straight path, and there will be no obstacle to interrupt the way.

Treat your dependents well, in so far as it belongs to you to do so; and it belongs to those whom Ptah has favored. If any one fails in treating his dependents well it is said: "He is a person . . ." As we do not know the events which may happen tomorrow, he is a wise person by whom one is well treated. When there comes the necessity of showing zeal, it will then be the dependents themselves who say: "Come on, come on," if good treatment has not quitted the place; if it has quitted it, the dependents are defaulters.

Farmers

If you are a farmer, gather the crops in the field which the great Ptah has given you, do not boast in the house of your neighbors; it is better to make oneself dreaded by one's deeds. As for him who, master of his own way of acting, being all-powerful, seizes the goods of others like a crocodile in the midst even of watchment, his children are an object of malediction, of scorn, and of hatred on account of it, while his father is grievously distressed, and as for the mother who has borne him, happy is another rather than herself. But a man becomes a god when he is chief of a tribe which has confidence in following him.

MESOPOTAMIA

Social Structure

196. If a free person puts out the eye of another free person, that person's eye shall be put out.
197. If a free person breaks the bone of another free person, that person's bone shall be broken.
198. If a free person puts out the eye or breaks the bone of a civil-servant, that person shall pay one-half kilogram of silver.
199. If a free person puts out the eye or breaks the bone of another free person's slave, that person shall pay half the value of the slave.
195. If a son strikes his father, his hand shall be cut off.
205. If a free person's slave strikes the cheek of another free person, the ear of the slave shall be cut off.
282. If a slave says to the master, "you are not my master," the master shall cut off the slave's ear.
138. If a free man wishes to divorce his wife who has had no children, he must pay her a settlement equal to the value of the gifts he gave her father when they were married plus the dowry she brought from her father's house; by paying this settlement he divorces her.
159. If the first wife and a female slave of a free man both bear him sons, and the father acknowledges the sons of the female slave as his own, then the sons of the female slave shall share equally with the sons of the first wife in the paternal inheritance after the death of the father.
171. If the father did not acknowledge the sons of the female slave as his own, then the sons have no right to share in the paternal inheritance; but both the female slave and her sons shall be given their freedom.

Economic Structure

7. If a free person buys or receives in pawn anything from another free person who is a minor, or from a free person's slave, without a contract signed by witnesses, that person is a fence and shall be executed.

122. If a free person wishes to pawn anything, that person is responsible for drawing up a contract signed by witnesses before completing the transaction.

123. If a free person has pawned anything without a contract signed by witnesses, and the pawnbroker later claims not to have received anything, that case is not subject to claim.

124. If a free person has pawned anything in front of witnesses (even if there is no contract), and the pawnbroker later claims not to have received anything, the pawnbroker must repay twice the amount denied.

88. A merchant may collect interest of thirty-three and one-third per cent on a loan of grain, and twenty per cent interest may be charged on a loan of silver.

89. If a free person who has borrowed cannot repay the loan with silver but can repay it with grain, the merchant who made the loan is obligated to accept the grain at the rate of exchange set by the king; if the merchant tries to raise the interest-rate, that merchant shall forfeit both the capital and the interest.

92. If a merchant loans grain or silver at one rate but later tries to collect at a higher rate, that merchant shall forfeit both the capital and the interest.

INDIA

I.3. On account of his pre-eminence, on account of the superiority of his origin, on account of his observance of particular restrictive rules, and on account of his particular sanctification, the brahmin is the lord of all castes.

I.4. The brahmin, the kshatriya, and the vaisya castes are the twice-born ones, but the fourth, the sudra, has one birth only. . . .

I.31. But for the sake of the prosperity of the worlds, [the Creator] caused the brahmin, the kshatriya, the vaisya, and the sudra to proceed from his mouth, his arms, his thighs, and his feet.

I.87. But in order to protect this universe He, the most resplendent one, assigned separate duties and occupations to those who sprang from his mouth, arms, thighs, and feet.

X.5. In all castes those children only which are begotten in the direct order on wedded wives, equal in caste and married as virgins, are to be considered as belonging to the same caste as their fathers.

X.24. By adultery committed by persons of different castes, by marriages with women who ought not to be married, and by the neglect of the duties and occupations prescribed to each, are produced sons who owe their origin to a confusion of the castes.

VII.352. Men who commit adultery with the wives of others, the king shall cause to be marked by punishments which cause terror, and afterwards banish.

VII.353. For by adultery is caused a mixture of the castes among men; thence follows sin, which cuts up even the roots and causes the destruction of everything.

DUTIES OF MEMBERS OF THE FOUR CASTES

X.97. It is better to discharge one's own appointed duty incompletely than to perform completely that of another; for he who lives according to the law of another caste is instantly excluded from his own.

Duties of a Brahmin

X.75. Teaching, studying, sacrificing for himself, sacrificing for others, making gifts and receiving them are the six acts prescribed for a brahmin.

X.76. But among the six acts ordained for him three are his means of subsistence, sacrificing for others, teaching, and accepting gifts from pure men.

X.81. But a brahmin, unable to subsist by his peculiar occupations just mentioned, may live according to the law applicable to kshatriyas; for the latter is next to him in rank.

X.82. If it be asked, "How shall it be, if he cannot maintain himself by either of these occupations?" the answer is, he may adopt a vaisya's mode of life, employing himself in agriculture and rearing cattle.

X.83. But a brahmin, or a kshatriya, living by a vaisya's mode of subsistence, shall carefully avoid the pursuit of agriculture, which causes injury to many beings and depends on others.

X.85. But he who, through a want of means of subsistence, gives up the strictness with respect to his duties, may sell, in order to increase his wealth, the commodities sold by vaisyas, making however the following exceptions:

X.92. By selling flesh, salt, and lac [resin] a brahmin at once becomes an outcaste; by selling milk he becomes equal to a sudra in three days.

X.93. But by willingly selling in this world other forbidden commodities, a brahmin assumes after seven nights the character of a vaisya.

III.77. As all living creatures subsist by receiving support from air, even so the members of all orders subsist by receiving support from the householder.

III.78. Because men of the three other orders are daily supported by the householder with gifts of sacred knowledge and food, therefore the order of householders is the most excellent order.

III.89. And in accordance with the precepts of the Veda and of the traditional texts, the householder is declared to be superior to all of [the other three orders]; for he supports the other three.

Duties of a Kshatriya

VII.1. I will declare the duties of kings, and show how a king should conduct himself, . . . and how he can obtain highest success.

VII.2. A kshatriya who has received according to the rule the sacrament prescribed by the Veda, must duly protect this whole world.

VII.3. For, when these creatures, being without a king, through fear dispersed in all directions, the Lord created a king for the protection of this whole creation.

VII.14. For the king's sake the Lord formerly created his own son, Punishment, the protector of all creatures, an incarnation of the law, formed of Brahman's glory.

VII.18. Punishment alone governs all created beings, punishment alone protects them, punishment watches over them while they sleep; the wise declare punishment to be identical with the law.

VII.19. If punishment is properly inflicted after due consideration, it makes all people happy; but inflicted without consideration, it destroys everything.

VII.20. If the king did not, without tiring, inflict punishment on those worthy to be punished, the stronger would roast the weaker, like fish on a spit.

VII.35. The king has been created to be the protector of the castes and orders, who, all according to their rank, discharge their several duties.

VII.87. A king who, while he protects his people, is defied by foes, be they equal in strength, or stronger, or weaker, must not shrink from battle, remembering the duty of kshatriyas.

VII.88. Not to turn back in battle, to protect the people, to honour the brahmins, is the best means for a king to secure happiness.

VII.89. Those kings who, seeking to slay each other in battle, fight with the utmost exertion and do not turn back, go to heaven.

Duties of a Vaisya

IX.326. After a vaisya has received the sacraments and has taken a wife, he shall be always attentive to the business whereby he may subsist and to that of tending cattle.

IX.327. For when the Lord of creatures created cattle, he made them over to the vaisya; to the brahmins and the the king he entrusted all created beings.

IX.328. A vaisya must never conceive this wish, "I will not keep cattle"; and if a vaisya is willing to keep them, they must never be kept by men of other castes.

IX.329. A vaisya must know the respective value of gems, or pearls, of coral, of metals, of cloth made of thread, of perfumes, and of condiments.

IX.332. He must be acquainted with the proper wages of servants with the various languages of men, with the manner of keeping goods, and the rule of purchase and sale.

IX.333. Let him exert himself to the utmost in order to increase his property in a righteous manner, and let him zealously give food to all created beings.

Duties of a Sudra

IX.334. [T]o serve brahmins who are learned in the Vedas, householders, and famous for virtue, is the highest duty of a sudra, which leads to beatitude.

IX.335. A sudra who is pure, the servant of his betters, gentle in his speech, and free from pride, and always seeks a refuge with brahmins, attains a higher caste.

IX.413. But a sudra . . . may [be compelled] to do servile work; for he was created by the Self-existent [Lord] to be the slave of a brahmin.

IX.414. A sudra, though emancipated by his master, is not released from servitude; since that is innate in him, who can set him free from it?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In analyzing the primary source documents what can we determine about the priorities of the ancient Egyptian laws, the Code of Hammurabi, and the Laws on Manu?
2. After reading the primary sources documents, what do you believe was the role of the family in this society? Provide three examples.
3. In reading these primary source documents, how did these law codes allow for the existing hierarchies to maintain and facilitate control over people?