

Pirke Avot – Timeless Wisdom for Modern Life by William Berkson.  
The Jewish Publication Society 2010.

The Sayings of the Fathers is one of the most loved wisdom texts in Jewish literature; originally a tractate of the Mishnah it is to be found in Daily and Sabbath prayerbooks of all Jewish persuasions, often in its entirety. Editions of the Avot with super-commentaries remain popular, and some excellent editions have been published over the years seeking to apply the wisdom of the *tannaim* to more modern times.

This latest version of Pirke Avot from the Jewish Publication Society with a commentary written by Dr William Berkson, director of the Jewish Institute for Youth and Family, has been beautifully printed and produced, with the Avot text in Hebrew and English preceding the commentary.

Berkson adopts a simple and effective structure for his commentary; following the translation of the original he comments on individual phrases in the cited text before proceeding, in a sub-section entitled Modern Life, to find more modern applications for the material, adducing as he goes other sources and philosophies to elucidate further and enrich his commentary.

Inevitably, in a text of this kind, some parts of Avot, and some commentaries thereon, resonate more with readers than others do, but overall this is a valuable edition to have and an excellent source of discussion and debate in adult education classes and synagogue discussion groups.

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