



***THE (RABBINICAL) FIRE OF THE WISE: PRINCIPLES GOVERNING
THE HUMAN INTERFACE IN PIRKEY ABOTH (300 B.C.E to 200 A.D.)***

ABSTRACT of the PRESENTATION by ROGER DANIEL BENSKY

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Who is wise ? He who learns from all men. This profound statement, ascribed to Simeon Ben Zoma, who, together with the great Akiba, Ben Azzai and Elisha Ben Abuya, was attracted to early Judeo-Gnostic thinking, is from one of the most noteworthy tractates of the Mishna entitled PIRKE ABOTH, also known as the Mishnath Chassidim, favorite sayings of some sixty rabbis, extending over a crucial five-hundred year period which saw the destruction of ancient Hasmonean Israel and the decadent heathen rule of Roman imperialism. A period in which concatenations of wisdom sayings and laws governing socio-ethical conduct were established, saving core ancestral teachings of Judaism from oblivion. This is why, as Rabbi Joseph Hertz, an eminent former Chief Rabbi of England, points out in his extensive commentaries, the PIRKE ABOTH has been early on incorporated into the Prayer Book of many Jewish communities, thereby becoming a foundation-stone of traditional teachings down through the ages.

It is proposed in this presentation to perform a diagonal reading of those rabbinical maxims which pertain most clearly to the generic topic of this Interfaith Conference, coals from the inexhaustible fire of Wisdom, which, as will hopefully become apparent, bring healing warmth to dimensions of the human interface which determine the way we honor (or fail to honor) the innate sacredness of the (O)ther.
