

# **THE BOOK OF SIRACH**

The wisdom of Jesus, son of Sirach, from Jerusalem  
2nd century BC

★★★

**The text of this book has been abridged, edited, and explained  
for the emerging computer generation,  
who have few opportunities, sitting in front of the television,  
to draw on the gems of millennia  
embedded in old books.**

**The editor apologises for altering the text,  
which was not committed due to arrogance or disrespect  
for the text, but due to anxiety resulting from the idea  
that young people,  
who may one day hold the power to launch nuclear missiles,  
cannot presently find time to read the whole book...**

**... in order to understand that something else can be  
a t h o u s a n d t i m e s brighter  
than the S u n...**

**... wisdom and conscience, which the Lord  
gave to the hearts of the best of us long before us.**

**Let our children be worthy of this heritage.**

**T R N A V A**  
1986 – 1990 – 2016

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## **Preface - To My Grandchildren**

*(To Miško [11], Maťko [11], Zuzka [8] and Verka [6],  
but also to the children and grandchildren of my relatives and friends  
who will consider it worth reading)*

*I first read the Book of Sirach when I was about 35. I was amazed by the author's wisdom for living, and especially by the similarity of life and its challenges more than two thousand years ago to those of modern times. At this time, I realised that I might have avoided many mistakes of my past had the experience of Sirach been firmly embedded in my heart, mind and character.*

*I later realised that despite my familiarity with this book I continued to make mistakes which should have been avoided, as, unfortunately, its advice did not sink deep into my heart. I would therefore like to highlight the value of Sirach's principles for you with parallel descriptions of some life situations in which I or someone I knew acted incorrectly. I believe that my experience, along with the principles presented in this book, will be an appropriate indicator of the importance of prudent action in your life.*

***The talent and abilities inherited from your parents are the sails propelling you like a boat on the sea; however, let the advice of this valuable book steer you away from the rocks which your boat will encounter in the winds of life.***

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## **SECRETS OF WISDOM**

- A**ll wisdom comes from the Lord, 1.1  
and endures with him forever.
- T**he grains of sea sand, the drops of rain 1.2  
and the days of eternity – who can count them?
- T**he heights of heaven, the extent of the earth 1.3  
and the depth of the abyss and wisdom, who can measure them?
- T**he fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; 1.14  
he put wisdom into the hearts of the faithful before their birth.
- A**mong human beings, she built her nest as an eternal foundation, 1.15  
and among their offspring she will be trusted.
- P**roverbs rich in content are among wisdom's treasures 1.25  
but the sinner does not want to know about God.
- D**o you desire wisdom? Keep the commandments, 1.26  
and the Lord will give her abundantly to you.

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*I first became familiar with the verses of the Book of Sirach, Proverbs and other parts of the Bible as a child, as I listened to them at masses in the church of the village of Jaslovské Bohunice, and later in Bratislava. At that time, however, I did not perceive them as something that should spark my deeper interest.*

*“The seat of wisdom...”, “Ivory tower...” – these are quite unusual expressions for a child. My mind was dealing with similar expressions that I was more familiar with. For instance the ivory tower... I had only seen an elephant in pictures before (I had asked my father to buy me a small elephant - as small as a calf - he had promised it, but we both forgot about it after some time) and it struck me as strange to build towers from their bones, although they would have been big and solid enough. I had not heard of artistically carved ivory at that time.*

*Or the seat... I only learned about the ambiguity of this word later... A doctor told a woman that her haemorrhoids were caused by hard stool. So, she laid a pillow under herself on a wooden stool to make it softer... Such health problems are nowadays prevented by the intake of fibre... I gradually discovered that the stool the doctor had referred to was a “medical” term for the waste material expelled from our bodies in the toilet. However, probably the first meaning of the word in Slovak is “the capital” (which also applies in present day Russian), and later meanings include a territorial unit, or a county. It was also used in this meaning in translations of biblical literature. The figurative medical meaning probably appeared in Slovak under the influence of the Anglo-Saxon and German “stool” and “stuhl”. Chairs with an opening used in toilets were referred to as stools.*

*When a priest pronounced in a homily that the quotation was, for instance, from the Book of Sir, I wondered whether it was related to cheese (in Slovak, “cheese” = “syr”). However, I preferred ground poppy seeds to cheese as a child. I later understood that the sin of Catholics is that we have a very shallow relationship to religion and the Bible. I did not know people who read the Old Testament systematically, not just parts of the New Testament, apart from my uncle Simon, who had studied at the seminary in Trnava but had not completed his studies.*

*Instead, I read or watched western films that usually depicted American Protestants as heroes, holding a gun in one hand and the Bible in the other, “bringing civilisation” and Christianity to the indigenous peoples - whether they wanted it or not. They filled their free time with bringing civilisation and reading the Bible together. Little boys and girls used to attend religious “Sunday schools”*

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|---|------|
| <b>C</b> hild, if you have decided to serve the Lord,<br>prepare yourself for trials.                                       | 2.1  |
| <b>K</b> eeP your heart upright and remain resolute;<br>do not be upset in the time of distress.                            | 2.2  |
| <b>H</b> old fast to the Lord, do not separate yourself from him,<br>so that you may be successful to the end of your days. | 2.3  |
| <b>A</b> cccept all that happens to you,<br>be patient when you are humbled,  | 2.4  |
| for, as gold is tested in the fire,<br>so those acceptable to God are tested in the furnace of humiliation.                 | 2.5  |
| <b>U</b> njust violence cannot be justified;<br>it will destroy itself by its own excesses.                                 | 1.22 |
| <b>D</b> o not be a hypocrite before others,<br>watch your words well.  | 1.29 |

Do not praise yourself lest you fall 1.30  
and bring dishonour on yourself,  
for the Lord will reveal your secrets,  
and in the midst of the assembly he will overthrow you.

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*The books of the Old Testament (originally the Tanakh or Torah) were written for the children of Israel, known in our region as Jews. A Jew named Firšt lived in Jaslovské Bohunice with his family before and after World War II. During the War, Jews were persecuted in Slovakia, and many of them were transported to concentration camps. The Firšt family was hidden by one of their neighbours in his house. The Firšt family later emigrated to the United States. As a child, I had no idea what it meant to be a Jew; however my older cousin taught me that they were our neighbours, only different by their sauntering - walking with the tips of their toes apart. I found this difference interesting, especially because I had never seen people walking around like that. I saw another neighbour - Charlie Chaplin - in a silent film later.*

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### RESPECT FOR PARENTS

- Listen to a fathers's reproof, children, 3.1  
and act accordingly, that you may be safe.
- For the Lord has established the father over children, 3.2  
and he has confirmed the right of the mother over her children.
- Whoever honours his father atones for his sins, 3.3  
he who gives glory to his mother  
prepares a treasure for himself.
- Whoever honours his father will receive joy from his own children, 3.5  
and in the day of his prayer he will be heard.
- With your whole heart honour your father, 7.27  
and do not be heedless of the sufferings of your mother.
- Remember that you were born through them. 7.28
- How can you repay them  
for what they have done for you?
- Do not glorify yourself by the humiliation of your father, 3.10  
because his dishonour is no glory for you.
- For a man's glory comes from his father's honour, 3.11  
and a mother who is not respected is a disgrace to her children.
- Child, support your father in old age, 3.12  
and do not cause him sorrow during his life.
- Even if he has lost his mind, have patience 3.13  
do not be disrespectful to him while you are in full strength.

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*When I was in the second year of my nuclear studies in Prague, my father was suspended by the Party (the Communist Party - for those who do not know that only one party was allowed here at that time). He had joined the Party in youthful folly in 1946. He was suspended as a result of alleged improper thoughts presented in a letter to his cousin, which the State Security had recorded.*

*The issue of my further studies was also dealt with at the faculty. I was called in by the vice-dean for study affairs and told matter-of-factly that I should leave the faculty since it was improper, from the cadre's perspective, for the son of a person suspended by the Party to study at such a strategic faculty...*

*I later found out that my studies at any faculty would probably have been threatened, because my younger brother, an honours student at the Nuclear Science Secondary School in Prague, was not admitted to the Nuclear Faculty a year later after his school-leaving examination. And, to ensure his admission at any faculty in the East of the republic, our father asked someone to change the study-forbidding letter to a "neutral" document. The number of documents in the cadre materials had to fit...*

*I answered the vice-dean that I did not care about what was going on between him and my father. I was not interested in politics but in the study of nuclear physics and technology, and I was not going to leave the faculty... It was to the vice-dean's credit that this issue was hereafter over for him and I did not feel any further pressure from him.*

*It was not to my credit, however, when I was subsequently asked about my relationship with my father by a cadre worker, and I indicated that it was negative. For the benefit of later-borns and foreigners, a cadre worker was a person who kept records of people in organisations, especially from the perspective of their loyalty to the socialist establishment, and it was her duty to discover whether they came from "trouble-causing", typically "bourgeois" families. I guess there were some reasons for my negative relationship with my father. Young adolescents are very critical of the behaviour of their parents towards each other. I disapproved of their constant arguments. As a matter of fact, in those times, "a good relationship towards socialism" was shown by denying your parents if their thoughts and actions were not in accordance with the official ideology. The shining example of the small Soviet pioneer, Pavlík (who allegedly denounced his father to the political police) had indoctrinated us in the 1950s. At the time of my university studies, "denying my father" might have helped me to remain at university and complete my studies at the "strategic faculty". Later, however, especially after reading the Sirach, I felt ashamed... I tried to make it up to my father until his last moments.....*

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### **HUMILITY AND PRIDE**

- C**hild, conduct your affairs with discretion, 3.17  
and you will be loved by those who are acceptable to God.
- T**he greater you are, the more you should humble yourself, 3.18  
and thus you will find favour with God.
- D**o not tire yourself out in resolving useless questions, 3.23  
for things beyond human understanding have been shown to you.
- F**or many have been led astray by their personal theories, 3.24  
and false pretension has undermined reason.

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*I remember that the first time I was presented with the Book of Sirach was no earlier than when I was eighteen, and it was during my studies at university in*

*Prague. Coincidentally, it was my second encounter with this book in Prague; however I am going to discuss my first encounter later, in a different section. At the time I was staying in a dormitory with Peter W., who was born in 1942 in the ghetto of the small town of Bochnia, not far from Krakow and Auschwitz, which was not so heavily guarded by the Germans. The ghetto was used to collect Jews from the surrounding areas before their transport to the extermination camps. I only remembered his story vaguely, so I asked Peter himself for details for the purpose of writing this book. We met on the Internet after 50 years... He provided me with more details – “(my) blood parents, Jews, died there, but they had managed to get me out previously. With a group of fugitives, who were trying to get to Palestine through Slovakia, I found myself in the Slovak town of Liptovský Mikuláš in 1944 with a Jewish family - this was before the second wave of deportations of Jews from the Slovak State. The Webers discovered me there and took care of me. They presented me as their nephew during the war, and adopted me after the war. They were Czech Catholics, although probably rather lukewarm. But they enabled me to keep contact with the Jewish community. As an expert in the Škoda factory in Pilsen, my adoptive father was working in the Škoda factory in Dubnica, dealing with cannon production, during the war. This was probably the reason why he stayed in Slovakia after the split of Czechoslovakia. He occupied an important position and our living conditions were good. However, after the war, our return to Plsen and his retirement, they got much worse”.*

*I felt perplexed by his fate, and I did not want to rub salt into the wounds of his soul (the feeling of collective guilt...); I therefore avoided his past in our further communications. Once, talking about this and that on our way from the faculty, he mentioned biblical literature as we were passing the Old Synagogue on Pařížska street. He told me that he had recently read the Book of Sir, which had fascinated him as a beautiful pedagogical work. I basically had no idea about the book. Anyhow, I agreed to read it, when he lent it to me. Naturally, I did not connect the aforementioned verses with its name. I only recalled these parallels later. Peter then told me that he had also read the Song of Songs, from which I had also heard some metaphors but had never read in its entirety... And I made a great mistake at that moment. In response to his enthusiastic talk about its poetic beauty, I called the metaphors clichés.... - he never mentioned the books again, nor did he bring them for me to read. I had to wait for a new encounter with the Book of Sirach and the Song of Songs, seventeen years later. This first encounter was undermined by my personal theories and false pretensions...*

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**F**or the misery of the arrogant there is no remedy,  
because the roots of evil are implanted in him.

3.28

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*When I was in the fifth year of elementary school, there was a “bad boy” in another class. He had had to repeat a few years, so he was older than me. He was unlucky as to his appearance. The view of his watery eyes with small black pupils and skinny pale face with a pointed nose reminded me of a snake. I once saw him poking a live bullet into the ground in the school yard. He was going to hit it with a nail pressed to the primer. I warned him not to do it. It was dangerous and could have cost him his fingers or hit his eyes. He stood up without a word and*

*punched me in the solar plexus. I think it was the first time someone had punched my solar plexus. He had apparently had some experience in this line of attack. In this unknown pain, which took my breath away, I understood that there was no remedy for him, the root of evil had been implanted in him.*

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**I** f you have no pupils, you will be at a loss for light; 3.25  
where there is no ability to learn, there will be missing the wisdom.

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*During my studies, I occasionally heard that some students with very good results succeeded with more difficulty in practice than those who had difficulties with studying.... I was a little surprised, but I accepted this “unfair” fate. With you, my grandchildren, I have realised a possible reason for this phenomenon. Gifted children usually learn with few difficulties, as it is enough for them to pay attention at school. They do not have to put much effort into preparing for further days at home. Hence, they do not learn to overcome obstacles and work hard, and they may lack such skills in their future lives. It can sometimes help such children to attend several after-school activities in addition to regular school classes. One of the most effective lessons is to play a musical instrument. Children often rebel against it, even though they may have been interested in playing an instrument before, when it seemed attractive and pleasant. Those who learned to play a musical instrument as a child know it entails a lot of hard work. They would have given it up with the greatest pleasure at the time. After all, I also wanted to be Paganini at that age, but the hours of practising were a nuisance. So I used to shift the clock hands forward to finish the hour of torture fifteen minutes earlier... My mum never noticed me shifting the hands back afterwards. And finally, I managed to complete this hard work. Now, I am grateful for the drill, which taught me to focus also on things that are not very much fun. In real life, one frequently has to focus one’s efforts on the things that earn a living rather than on those that might please us more. Thus, I am helping your parents to “train” you so that you learn to be persistent and work thoroughly. Because your abilities alone are not going to be enough. It is said that genius is 1 % ability and 99 % hard work. Naturally, the right opportunity is also necessary. My music teacher used to tell me that there were thousands or even millions of children with the talent of Paganini. However, many of them never had the opportunity to develop their musical talent. And this theory can be applied to all human activities, not just to music....*

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**T**he wise man reflects on proverbs. 3.29

**W**hat the wise man desires is an attentive ear.

**A**s water extinguishes the burning flames, 3.30  
charity will obtain pardon for sins.

**M**ake yourself acceptable to the community, 4.7  
and bow your head before the one in authority.

**L**isten to the poor man, 4.8  
and reply to him with kind words and with peace.

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*When a young person subconsciously shapes the model of their behaviour, it may seem that aggressive and trenchant behaviour ensures their success. Unfortunately, the shift in our society following the “velvet coup”, from stagnating socialism to rampant capitalism (some even say “towards hyenism”) appears to confirm this idea. Hence the greater necessity to appreciate the message of Sirach and incorporate it into our actions, just as rivets are tacked into jeans. My uncle embedded it in my soul, at least partially through his behaviour, which I had observed from childhood. I lived with my grandparents in the village, as my parents, who lived in Bratislava, were as poor as church mice. The war and my father’s participation in the Slovak National Uprising also played a role. Thus, I had not known any authority other than that of my uncle. As a teacher and later the director of the village school, he refused to sign the “declaration of loyalty to the socialist regime” at the beginning of the 1950s and was forced to stop teaching. He left and went to Bratislava, where his two brothers already lived. Even after he went to the capital, he remained a person to talk to for many of his fellow villagers and pupils. He frequently went to his native village to visit his parents on holidays. His authority also influenced the local Roma people, so after he had spoken to them, many fathers made their rather temperamental children go to school regularly. More or less successfully, they completed their elementary and, in some cases, also further education. It helped many of them to get a suitable job later - whether in a shop, at a post office, or the nuclear power plant, which was being built in the village beginning in the 1960s.*

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#### **ON THE ROAD TO WISDOM**

- W**isdom brings up her children  
and takes care of those who look for her. 4.11
- W**hoever loves her, loves life,  
those who rise early in the morning in search of her  
will be filled with joy. 4.12
- W**hoever trusts in her will possess her,  
and his children after him will inherit her. 4.16
- F**or in the beginning she will lead him by rough paths,  
causing him to fear and be terrified;  
she will plague him with her discipline until she can count on him;  
and she will test him with her demands. 4.17
- T**hen she will lead him on a level path,  
and will make him glad and will reveal to him her secrets. 4.18
- B**ut if he strays from the path,  
she will abandon him and allow him to become lost. 4.19
- I**n every situation weigh the pros and cons and avoid evil. 4.20
- A** wrong kind of shame could harm you.
- D**o not remain silent when it is necessary to speak, 4.23a  
for by speech will wisdom be known, 4.24  
and education in the spoken discourse.
- D**o not speak against the truth, 4.25  
because an undue behaviour  
resulting from your lack of education  
would bring you shame.

Do not be ashamed to acknowledge your sins, and do not swim against the tide.	4.26
Do not cower before a foolish person,	4.27a
Do not be daring in your speech, but lazy and negligent in works.	4.29
Do not be like a lion in your home, finding fault with your servants and oppressing those under you.	4.30
Do not open your hand to receive and keep it closed when you should give	4.31

#### LIFE SUPPORT AND TRICKERY

Do not rely on your wealth, and do not say, "I am self-sufficient."	5.1
Do not let yourself be carried away by greed and violence they would make you their slave.	5.2
Do not rely on riches wrongfully acquired for they will be of no use to you on the day of disaster.	5.8

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*I mentioned on the previous pages that the children of Roma families also used to attend school in Jaslovské Bohunice, and some of them succeeded in different jobs for which a certain education was required. Thus, also my "tanned" childhood friend, with whom we used to play in the meadow next to the church, got a job at the post office. His less successful older cousin talked him into earning easy money via the "slight modification" of a postal money order. He sent himself a small amount of money, let's say to the town of Nitra, and our clever postman added several zeroes to the number on the form. The cousin thus collected an amount many times higher. In this way, they allegedly managed to amass about 300,000 crowns, which was an enormous amount of money in those times. They squandered it in Prague bars, where they pretended to be Greeks. Gold-diggers believed their native language was Greek, as they sometimes added an "-us" or other Greek-sounding suffixes to their words. Of course, their scam was revealed in the end, as the post office discovered the missing money. Both were sentenced to several years in prison. It shows that even education, if not responsibly steered by the involvement of family in education, can lead to tragedy.*

*After several years, when my childhood friend from the meadow was released from prison, I once saw him sitting at the gate of the post office headquarters in Bratislava with a big placard. He was requesting that they employ him again, as he was allegedly "unfairly dismissed".*

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Be ready to listen, and know how to wait before giving your reply.	5.11
If you know what you are saying, answer your fellow, but if not, let your hand be upon your mouth.	5.12
Your words can bring you honour and dishonour, and a man's tongue can be his downfall.	5.13
Do not let yourself be known as a scandalmonger or a deceiver, for if shame is the lot of the robber, severe condemnation is the lot of the liar.	5.14

Do not sin in big things or in little things, 5.15  
and from being a friend do not turn into an enemy.

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*At elementary and secondary school, I was among the top-performing students. However, I did not always manage to swim through the white waters of childhood and youthful folly successfully. In my fourth year, for instance, my half-term report included a B for conduct, for an over-broad comprehension of the principles of democracy - when we were going to vote for a class chairperson, I said prior to the vote that the fact that the sole candidate was the daughter of our comrade class teacher should not have been a reason for making her the chairperson. I guess I found another girl or boy cleverer, but otherwise I had nothing against her. It seemed strange to me that she was selected only because she was the daughter of the class teacher.*

*She was voted in, since no one else had anything against her either, or at least did not want to publicly declare it. Naturally, up to the end of the school year, everything I did or did not do in the classroom was cause for my admonishment. And a 'B' for conduct also appeared on my end-of-the-year report. It was a reason for satisfaction for my more temperamental younger brother, as we were always competing for better grades. We were expected to spend the holiday at our father's parents, and he promised not to tell them. Despite his promise, as soon as we opened the door of our grandparents' house, he shouted: "Joe got a B for conduct...". It was very shameful moment for me, because until then I had been considered a "decent" boy.*

*Luckily, our comrade teacher in the fourth year did not teach us again in the fifth year, even though her daughter remained in the class, and I never got a B for conduct again.*

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Do not surrender yourself to your passions, 6.2  
they will turn against you and, like a bull, tear you to pieces.

They will devour the foliage and destroy the fruit, 6.3  
leaving you like a dry tree.

An evil soul will destroy him who possesses it, 6.4  
and it will make him a laughing-stock for his enemies.

A gentle word makes many friends, and mollifies the enemies, 6.5  
and an agreeable tongue calls forth gracious replies.

Let those who are at peace with you be many, 6.6  
but let your advisors be one in a thousand.

If you acquire a friend, acquire him through testing, 6.7  
and do not repose faith in him hastily.

For there is a friend when it suits him, 6.8  
and he will not remain so in the day of affliction.

A loyal friend is a sturdy shelter, 6.14  
and he who finds him has found a treasure.

### ACQUIRING WISDOM

Child, from your youth welcome education, 6.18  
and until grey hairs you will find wisdom.

Like him who ploughs and him who sows approach her, and await her good fruits.	6.19
How harsh is wisdom to the uneducated, and the knave will not remain with her.	6.20
For wisdom brings her own honour, she does not reveal herself to everyone.	6.22
If you are willing, child, you will be instructed, and if you surrender your soul, you will be clever.	6.32
If you love to listen, you will receive, and if you incline your ear, you will be wise.	6.33a

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*As my uncle was a village teacher, I sometimes attended his classes from the time I was four years old. Going to school was a natural part of life for me and, like most children, I looked forward to the day when I was expected to “actually” start going to school for the first time. A few months before I was due to start school, my parents took me to Bratislava. My uncle had insisted they do this, because “children should grow up with their parents...”. This was just the second time I had met my younger brother... We lived on Podhradské embankment in an old Baroque house not far from the tunnel. It had previously supposedly been the location of a mint for Maria Theresa. The house was demolished later, like many other picturesque large and small houses in Podhradie (extramural settlement) and elsewhere in the city. In the opinion of socialist architects, these houses had no historical value. A few panel tower blocks were built in their place, which the last Czechoslovak president called “warrens”.*

*When my dreamlike first day of school finally came, my father told me that he had to go to work and I was to go to school with the neighbours’ girls. They were starting their second and fourth years and were going with their mum, Mrs. Miler. Because I already knew the basic routine of school, I asked for a notebook and a “klajbas,” the word we used for a pencil back in Jaslovské Bohunice. We did not have any at home so I insisted to my father that he should buy them for me. He refused, as he was in a hurry to get to work. And I guess he also knew that I was not going to need a pencil and notebook on my first day. However, the idea of going to school unprepared was dreadful for me and I started blubbing... My father was unmoved and left for work. Feeling totally miserable, I carried on blubbing on my way with the neighbour and her girls. Eventually, the neighbour felt sorry for me, or she got tired of listening to me, and as we passed a “cellar” (as we used to call a store that sold mixed goods), she bought me both a notebook and a “klajbas”. Naturally, I did not need them on the first day.*

*Many years later, “on my tours” of nuclear power plants all over the world, a group of employees of the Dukovany Nuclear Power Plant and myself visited the nuclear power plant of a state on the shores of the Indian Ocean. The locals called it the Arabian Sea. Our guide spoke good English, as English was still the “unifying language” in this former British colony, and newspapers were still issued in English, alongside periodicals in the local languages. Apart from four main national languages, a number of less frequent languages and dialects were spoken in the country. I suspected that our guide could speak Czech but was concealing it. I assumed this later based on some indications. This trick is sometimes used by sly and cunning people to discover what foreigners talk about when they think nobody understands them... Among other facts, our guide said*

*that there was a high rate of illiteracy in his country, as 60 % of boys did not attend school at all and the number was even higher for girls – one out of every thousand completed secondary school studies and one out of ten thousand completed university studies. Of course, such cases involved girls from rich families... Naturally, we did not comment on this statistic. I remembered it later, when we were walking on the shore of the Arabian Sea. He was proudly showing off to me two military vessels, anchored not far from the shore. He told me that they had to be armed to protect the country from being attacked by a neighbouring hostile state. I noted that many children could have attended school for the price of those two military vessels. And it would have been to their considerable “systemic” advantage in both the economic and military competition with their neighbours.*

*I said that we had been lucky, as more than 200 years earlier, the Austro-Hungarian empress, Maria Theresa (we were under her rule then, together with Hungary), had accepted the arguments presented in a book written by Adam František Kollár, the Slovak director of the Court Library, dealing with the fact that the education of serfs resulted in national economic growth. The introduction of compulsory school attendance for boys and girls was not universally respected, especially in poor families. However, even the children of the poorest attended school at least during the winter, when they were not needed for work in the fields. And the desire for education was thus planted in most Slovak and Czech families. This situation later bore rich fruit in the form of good general cultural and living standards (and I told myself – higher than those we could observe around us in that country at the time). I do not know what my guide thought, as he did not comment. But I believe this seed gradually grew in him... On a related topic, I would like to present another experience linked to education – in my job with an international energy company, I was once speaking with the wife of the French manager of our project at a reception in Moscow. She was the mother of five children, had studied philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris, but had never worked in her field. I asked her if she considered it a loss that she had not succeeded in her profession. She answered that, on the contrary, she used all of her acquired education in the education and upbringing of her children. I reflected bitterly on the losses that were experienced by the children of the nuclear state in question, in which 99.8 % of the mothers could not study due to social traditions.*

*And to the poverty it inevitably caused.*

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| <b>B</b> e on your guard in the assembly of the elders             | 6.34  |
| <b>A</b> nd, if there is a wise man there, attach yourself to him. |       |
| <b>A</b> person who has not had trials knows very little.          | 34.10 |
| <b>B</b> ut the travelled man is competent in many ways.           |       |
| <b>I</b> have seen many things in my wandering,                    | 34.12 |
| and understood more than I can express.                            |       |

oooOOOooo

*Coincidentally, I have been lucky and had the opportunity to meet many people who have significantly influenced the history, science, and culture of society. One of them was Alfred Wetzler, who worked at the Ministry of Trade with my father and once, while he was visiting us, he lent me his book “What Dante Did Not*

*See". It had been issued under the pseudonym Jozef Lánik. With his friend, Rudolf Vrba, he had managed to escape from the Auschwitz concentration camp and provided the Anti-Fascist Alliance with one of the first reports of the Holocaust. It was my first opportunity to gain an authentic view of the horrors of the gas "showers" and furnaces of the Nazi extermination camps. I gained this not only from his book, but also from the narrative and writings of a direct witness.*

*For an even greater understanding, I was also lucky to meet a second escapee from Auschwitz, Rudolf Vrba. My father had been friends with him since their studies in Trnava. Several years after the war, he decided to leave Europe, where he had experienced the horrors of the war and the extermination camp. He lived in Israel from 1958 to 1960, and then for two years in London. He finally settled in Canada, but he never severed relations with the Old Continent. He kept in touch with my father and when he visited Slovakia they used to meet over a glass of wine or beer. Once, at his request, my father invited me to their meeting in a small restaurant at Jedlikova street in Bratislava. It was in the late 1990s. We had lived on this street previously, and it was therefore interesting for me to see the changes that had occurred after the fall of the regime. An electrical equipment repair shop had previously been at the location of the restaurant. I knew Rudolf's history from my father. We mainly discussed common family issues, my studies and job, as Rudolf apparently wanted to hear the opinions of Slovak youth. But he was also talking about his life in Canada. His beginnings in Canada were particularly tough, as everybody applying for citizenship was sent into the woods to cut trees for a long time, which basically also meant learning English and the basis of the political life of their new home... Rudolf could already speak very good English, but he did not avoid this procedure. Only after overcoming this "purgatory" could he start a normal life and become a professor of pharmacology. During one visit, my father received a present from Rudolf – a colourful tie that used to be worn in North America. My father later gave it to me, because, as he said: "it suits younger people more than myself". And so I own a tie that symbolically came from Auschwitz... The story of the pseudonym, Jozef Lánik, which Alfred Wetzler used when he wrote his book, is also interesting. This name was used in the false documents that had been provided to him by his friends from the resistance movement in Žilina after his arrival from Poland, so that he could move across Slovakia after his escape from Auschwitz. Unlike Alfred Wetzler, who resumed his original name after the war, Rudolf Vrba (originally Walter Rosenberg) preferred the name on his false documents and he used it until the end of his life....*

oooOOOooo

### **RELATIONSHIP TO PEOPLE AND TO GOD**

- |   |      |
|---|------|
| <b>O</b> evil intention! Whence have you sprung,<br>to cover the earth with deceit? | 37.3 |
| <b>Do</b> not do evil things, and evil will not overtake you.                       | 7.1  |
| <b>Keep</b> away from wrongdoing and it will leave you alone.                       | 7.2  |

oooOOOooo

*We used to live on a street in the centre of Bratislava which was closed at its upper end, where it provided two passages – one leading onto Námestie Slovenského Národného Povstania (The Square of the Slovak National Uprising)*

*and the other onto Obchodná ulica (Commercial Street). However, during our childhood, both the Square and Commercial Street were named after Soviet politicians – we used to call them Stalinka and Molotka. The Bratislava Synagogue was not far from there, at Heydukova street (we called it Hajduchka). A Rabbi in a black hat with one or two boys sometimes used the passage from Stalinka to pass by our street. The Rabbi wore curls on the sides of his head, which are called payot. They were not permitted to shave their sideburns. With boys from a nearby neighbourhood we used to play in the street, getting up to lots of monkey business. It is best I do not mention our monkey business, so that you are not tempted to repeat it. However, one of our mischievous stunts is worth mentioning, if only as advice.*

*One of the boys, Paľo W., dared us to run up to the Rabbi, insert a finger into his curl and stretch it. The other boys saw it as harmless fun, and Paľo was ready to set out running towards the Rabbi. But I stopped him and told him not to be silly, because we **should not do such things**.*

*I had been surprised by his idea as, like several other friends from the neighbourhood, Paľo also attended the synagogue and he could have been recognised.*

oooOOOooo

**Do not sow in the furrows of injustice,  
and you will not reap them sevenfold.**

7.3

oooOOOooo

*Around the time of my ninth year at the elementary school, we were affected by another wave of “socialist democracy” in education. This was the first of three final years of the so-called eleven-year school, which is nowadays called secondary grammar school. Paradoxically, the first eight years were typically taught and managed in a different building and that was called the eight-year school. Compulsory education ended after eight years and not everybody continued with their studies. And so students from different corners of the city met at this three-year “eleven-year school”, which was at the opposite end of the city. In a pre-election meeting of several classes, a boy from our street was a candidate to be his class representative on the school committee. He was rather too lively and irresponsible for my taste. So I stood up and said that his character traits were not suitable for such a position. Naturally, he was elected and I made over thirty enemies from the class in question. Their hostility persisted for the entire time of our three-year study.*

*I had probably not learnt a lesson from my flippancy in my fourth year, which I described earlier. And while back then I had only faced the hostility of one “powerful authority” – the class teacher – it was worse this time. I encountered a wall of thirty enemies almost every day for three years, whether at school or outside it. The acquaintance from our street did not forget either.*

*Our paths diverged later, I went to study in Prague and never lived in Bratislava again. As classmates, we regularly met every five years after we finished school. The students from the other classes were apparently not so persistent. We met some of them not sooner than fifty years later, after we invited them to come to our regular meeting... Even though the offended acquaintance from our street spoke to me calmly about how he had been since we finished school, his coldness was still present. We later met again on the Internet and I*

*apologised for my youthful folly... because it is never too late to regret a heedless action and say sorry.*

oooOOOooo

- Do** not assert to be a just man before the Lord  
nor a wise man in front of the king. 7.5
- Do** not seek to become a judge;  
lest you be not powerful enough to root out injustice  
and, overawed by a powerful man, you forfeit your integrity. 7.6
- Do** not commit the same sin twice,  
for once is enough to bring punishment upon you. 7.8
- Do** not deride a person when he is embittered in spirit,  
for there is one who casts down and who raises up. 7.11
- Do** not lie about your brother;  
likewise, do not lie about your friend. 7.12
- Do** not permit yourself any kind of lie,  
for nothing good will come of it. 7.13
- Do** not gossip in front of the council of the elders. 7.14
- Do** not eschew hard work  
nor the tilling of the land as instituted by the Most High. 7.15
- Do** not join the company of sinners,  
remember that the wrath of God will not be deferred. 7.16
- Do** not exchange a friend for money  
or a real brother for gold of Ophir. 7.18
- Do** not separate yourself from a wise and good woman,  
because a gracious wife is worth more than gold. 7.19
- Do** you have children? Educate them,  
and teach them to obey from their childhood. 7.23
- Do** you have daughters? Guard their virginity,  
and do not be indulgent towards them. 7.24
- If** you marry off your daughter  
you will have accomplished a great task,  
but give her to an intelligent man. 7.25

#### **PRUDENCE AND COMMON SENSE**

- Do** not argue with a powerful man,  
lest you fall into his hands. 8.1
- Do** not quarrel with a rich person,  
lest he throw his weight into the scale against you;  
for gold has ruined many  
and has perverted the hearts of kings. 8.2
- Do** not argue with a talkative person,  
and do not heap fuel on his fire. 8.3
- Do** not joke with an ignorant man,  
lest your ancestors be insulted. 8.4
- Do** not despise a person in his old age,  
because we ourselves will grow old. 8.5
- Do** not neglect the teaching of the wise,  
apply yourself well to their precepts, 8.8

because from them you will learn how to live  
and how to serve the great.

Do not lend to a person stronger than you, 8.12  
and if you do lend, consider it as lost.

**D**o not quarrel with a bad-tempered person, 8.16  
and do not traverse the desert with him,  
because bloodshed is as nothing in his eyes,  
and where there is no help, he will attack you.

**D**o not give surety beyond your means, 8.13  
and, if you do give surety, be ready to pay.

**D**o not travel with an adventurer, 8.15  
lest he impose himself on you;  
and, as he does whatever he pleases,  
you both perish through his folly.

oooOOOooo

*I tried several sports when I was younger. However, I was not gifted enough to play the standard team sports such as football and ice hockey. Rather, I was into individual sports – street badminton, skiing, judo, fencing, gliding, and from there it wasn't far to rock climbing. On our spring trip to Popradské pleso we decided to climb Rysy. My colleague and temporary friend, let us call him the Climber, who was a member of the climbing brigade, assured us that it was not too demanding a hike despite the snow cover on half of the slope. He had an ice axe for mountaineering, which he lent me to support myself. After a rest on the peak, when we had had enough of the views of the valley and surrounding peaks, we set off on our descent. The Climber asked for his ice axe back and “taught” us the art of “skiing” on the frozen snow on the edges of our boots. As I could ski quite well I “slid down” about twenty metres below the group. When I looked back up, one of the girls had slipped while “skiing”, fallen on the snow, and was hurtling towards me on her back. I knew that if I did not stop her she could be killed on the rocks below us. I dug my boots into the snow and caught her. It then occurred to me that the “Climber” had asked for the ice axe back on the way down just to save himself in the event of a fall while “skiing” and falling down the slope. I was appalled that he, an “experienced” climber who knew about the pitfalls of this sport, had exposed us to such risky “skiing” on the frozen snow without at least minimal equipment... I decided not to climb with him anymore.*

*After many years, more precisely in October 2014, news reports informed us that F. K., a well-known climber and writer, conqueror of several eight-thousand-metre peaks and the North Pole, had died after slipping on his way down from the mountain hut under Rysy, not far from the place which might also have been fatal for us...*

oooOOOooo

**W**ith a foolish one do not consult, 8.17  
because he will not be able to remain silent  
about what you have said.

**D**o nothing which should be secret before a stranger, 8.18  
because you do not know how he will react.

Do not expose your heart to any casual acquaintance,  
because he could cajole you by feigned friendship  
and expose you later. 8.19

#### HOW A MAN SHOULD BEHAVE TO A WOMAN

Do not be jealous of your own wife,  
nor teach an evil lesson against yourself. 9.1

Do not give your soul to a woman,  
to the point whereby she can dominate you. 9.2

Do not approach a woman of ill-repute,  
lest you fall into her snares. 9.3

Turn your eye away from a shapely woman,  
and do not regard a beauty belonging to another. 9.8

With a married woman do not sit down at all,  
and do not feast with her at wine,  
lest your soul incline to her  
and by your blood you slip into destruction. 9.9

#### ON HUMAN RELATIONS

Do not abandon an old friend,  
for a new one has not the same value. 9.10

Do not envy the success of the sinner,  
for you do not know what his end will be. 9.11

Keep distant from a person who has the authority to kill,  
and you will not experience the fear of death. 9.13

But if you approach him, do not make a mistake,  
lest he take your life.

Be aware that you are passing through deathtraps  
and that you are balancing on the top of the city walls.

As far as you can, be sociable,  
and take counsel with learned men. 9.14

#### PRIDE AND HUMILITY

Do not store up resentment against your neighbour,  
no matter what his offence; do nothing in a fit of anger. 10.6

Pride is odious to both God and man,  
and to both injustice is wrong. 10.7

Sovereignty passes from one nation to another  
because of injustice, violence and money. 10.8

For there is nothing more lawless than love of money;  
for this person even makes his own soul a commodity.

It is not right to dishonour an intelligent poor person,  
and it is not proper to glorify a sinful man. 10.23

Do not feel proud when you have only accomplished your work,  
and do not boast in your time of difficulty. 10.26

Child, have a modest appreciation of yourself,  
and estimate yourself at your true value. 10.28

- Do not praise a man because he is handsome, 11.2  
and do not hold a man in contempt because of his appearance.
- Small among flying creatures is a bee, 11.3  
and the origin of sweet things is its produce.
- Do not be proud because of the clothes you wear, 11.4  
and do not be proud when people honour you.
- Do not admonish anyone unless you have first been fully informed, 11.7  
consider the case first and thereafter make your reproach.
- Do not reply before you have listened; 11.8  
do not interrupt the one who is speaking.

oooOOOooo

*When I was in the second year of elementary school, our class teacher was the director of the school. He sometimes had to deal with something during our classes. In such cases, he appointed one of the pupils to supervise the others and check that they were reading silently. The names of those who made a disturbance were to be recorded on the board, and they were rebuked later. I was once deputed by the director to supervise my classmates. Children then were probably better-behaved than nowadays and I only had to write five names on the board. When the director returned with a big box in his hands he told the offending pupils to leave the classroom. They had to look through the open door at the remaining pupils, who were given UNRRA cans with sweet biscuits. These were a heavenly delicacy for us in those post-war years. I felt disgusted with the fact that I was an indirect cause of such a drastic punishment for my five classmates. I found it unfair that the punishment had not been announced in advance. And so I told the director that for this reason I did not want the biscuits either and I left the classroom to join the five expelled. I do not remember whether the six cans were distributed amongst the other pupils. Probably they were.*

oooOOOooo

- About a matter that is of no concern to you, do not quarrel, 11.9  
and do not meddle in the disputes of sinners.

oooOOOooo

*It has happened to me several times that in discussions with acquaintances, I have argued with them over the issues we discussed, when I was persuaded that I was right. But it sometimes turned out that my acquaintances were better informed. I can still remember two such situations.*

*I was once discussing English with my friend Ivan P. We were speculating about how Latin words had appeared in English. I claimed that Latin words had entered English through the French after the Norman occupation after 1066. My friend opined that a significant degree of Latin had been brought by the Romans earlier. I somehow involved the history of Central Europe in it and, as an analogy, I claimed that the Romans had not even appeared in Great Britain. If there had been any relations between them, it was not sooner than after 800, after the King Arthur era. Therefore, the English, like us, had been “untouched” by Roman civilisation prior to that. I could see that my friend looked at me in surprise but did not oppose me and he changed the subject of our talk. Naturally, I later found out that the Romans had occupied a part of Britain as early as the time of Caesar.*

*I also remembered that we had probably been taught this fact at school. I had probably also read about the defensive wall built in the middle of the island to protect them against the attacks of undefeated British tribes from the North of the island.*

*I realised that I had received a failing grade in History in the eyes of my friend. I was only surprised that he had not insisted on what he had clearly known better than me.*

*The second situation also concerned an issue related to Great Britain. Some time ago, after a short stay in London, I painted a small picture which I called “The Parliament in the Rain”. There was a view of the Thames, Parliament, Big Ben, and the adjacent bridge. When my American colleague Walter C. from the WANO Atlanta Center visited my studio, we stopped beside this picture. I told him that the bridge depicted was Waterloo Bridge. The American colleague, who had lived in London for several years, said that the bridge was Westminster Bridge and that Waterloo Bridge was not far from there. I did not take his words into consideration and insisted that it was Waterloo Bridge. He looked at me and did not argue any further... I later checked a map of London, as a seed of doubt had been planted in my head as to whether the colleague had not been right, when he had lived there for several years. Feeling uncomfortable, I had to swallow my words yet again, because the bridge in my picture and in London was actually Westminster Bridge. I decided then not to argue anymore with people who told me something different from what I believed to be true... Those two colleagues had probably always taken such an approach. But I must admit that I have not always succeeded in ceasing to argue. Because a bad habit is an iron shirt... However, this saying applies similarly to a good habit...*

oooOOOooo

**M**y child, do not undertake too many activities; 11.10  
if you multiply them, you will not be without reproach,  
and if you run after them, you will not succeed,  
and you will not escape when you flee.

**S**tand by your covenant with the Lord, and attend to it, 11.20  
and in your work grow old.

**D**o not wonder at the works of a sinner. 11.21a

**D**o not say, "I have all that is necessary, 11.24  
what misfortune can harm me now?"

**I**n the day of prosperity, adversity is forgotten, 11.25  
and in the day of adversity, prosperity will not be remembered.

oooOOOooo

*Young people like to try everything, which, albeit often interesting, might also cause damage. They often do not focus thoroughly on the activities they have a real talent for. It is certain that most people have talents for many activities, and it is not easy to find the right one for oneself. One of my friends from school in Prague told me that “a selection of our interests needs to be made, thus gaining time for the activities we want to do the most...”. It was a great discovery for me, as I had thought until then that I could and would find time to do anything I was interested in. And she continued – “We are already getting ready for our life’s journey. It is reasonable to choose an activity out of those we have a talent for that is going to earn us and our future families the best living...”*

*After several years, I appreciated this principle with satisfaction. Originally, I wanted to be a musician, as it seemed I had sufficient talent for it. But when my younger brother started studying at the Nuclear Science Secondary School in Prague, following our father's advice, I too wanted to understand what nuclear technology was, as it had begun to be frequently discussed in the 1950s. While travelling on holiday, I read an article in "Science and Technology for Youth" magazine called "300,000 Kilometres a Second". It dealt with nuclear particles, Einstein, etc. I felt overwhelmed by it and read it over several times. It was then that I decided to follow my brother to Prague. It made my father very happy, as he had not been enthusiastic about my desire to be a musician. He had sometimes pointed to the pitfalls of this profession – the hand injuries of violin players or the loss of voice of singers, because I also had quite a good voice... He used to say that technicians were needed more in a small nation like ours. In contrast with our bigger Czech neighbours, who are "all musicians", it is not the best job in our country. We should rather follow the example of the "golden Czech hands" and deal with technology.*

*After graduating from the Nuclear Faculty, I started working on the construction of our first nuclear power plant and later also on its operation. Coincidentally, the nuclear power plant was built on my "grandfather's fields" in Jaslovské Bohunice. I must say self-critically that in my work for the power plant I frequently proceeded more artistically, or intuitively, than my "solely technical" colleagues. Despite this, or maybe because of this, my career advancement was quite successful.*

*To cut a long story short – I stopped playing the violin for several decades. I sometimes played "Silent night" for my children under the Christmas tree. I also played in a country & western band for a few months. Only after I had achieved 50 years of age did I accidentally meet a group of enthusiasts playing classical music, whom I joined. And because I did not have a good bow I went to Bratislava to buy one. There was a small musical instruments store next to the Reduta concert hall, where I had gone to concerts. I discovered in a discussion with the young shop assistant that he had studied the violin at the conservatoire and the Academy of Performing Arts. I admitted that it had originally been my dream as well, but that I had replaced it with technology. He told me bitterly that I had done the right thing. There were a lot of talented musicians, especially violin players, and they could find jobs in their field only with difficulty. He was earning his living by selling musical instruments, although this had been far from his original plans.*

*This situation is highlighted by information recently reported on TV – that a high number of graduates of secondary schools and universities cannot find jobs in Slovakia because they specialised in fields for which there is no demand in the labour market or which are hopelessly over-occupied.*

*This is also the mistake of those in power who manage schools and their fields of study; however, young applicants for study and their parents must also realise that, apart from a few philosophers and a few lawyers, financiers, "managers" and politicians, we especially need "golden Slovak hands and heads" which can create the state's wealth – so that the "philosophers" can live on it, and the lawyers, politicians and financiers can increase it...*

oooOOOooo

Do not regard anyone as blessed before his death, for only in his children will the righteous man be known.	11.28
Do not bring every person into your home, for many are the ambushes of the deceitful.	11.29
Like a predator lying in wait is the heart of an arrogant person, and like a spy he watches out for your weaknesses.	11.30
For he changes good things into evil, he lays his traps and criticises even the best things.	11.31
Welcome a stranger, and he will cause you trouble and alienate you from your own.	11.34
If you do good, know for whom you do it, lest you do not receive ingratitude for your good deeds.	12.1
A friend does not become an enemy in the time of prosperity, nor does an enemy remain hidden in the time of adversity.	12.8
When a man is doing well, he will not find out who is a friend and also the enemy will hide his envy, but when he is suffering misfortune, the enemy will not conceal himself, and only a true friend will remain with him.	12.9
Never trust your enemy, for just as rust covers over bronze, so does his wickedness.	12.10
Even if he should act as a humble man and walk with his head bowed, watch yourself and be on your guard against him.	12.11
Let it not be that you understand my words too late and regret not having listened to my advice.	12.12c
Who will pity a snakecharmer bitten by a snake, or all who approach wild beasts?	12.13
So the one who goes near a man who sins and the one who gets entangled in his sins.	12.14
With his lips the enemy will speak sweetly, and in his heart he will plan to throw you into a trench.	12.16

oooOOOooo

*My daughters – your mums – learned the aforementioned verses by heart. They usually received a “reward” for every page they memorised. For example, they could go to the cinema... In their youthful good-naturedness, they wondered why we should not have pity on the snake-charmer or those that go near wild beasts. I explained that this is a poetic expression of the principle that we should not knowingly do what we know to be dangerous. Such actions can sooner or later affect our health or even take our life. When we walk along the edge of an abyss, we risk falling into it. Thus, we need not wonder how it happened. Therefore, banding together with enemies or sinners on the assumption that we can tame them – like a snake-charmer – will not result in anything good for us.*

oooOOOooo

### SNARE OF WEALTH AND POWER

He who touches pitch will be defiled, and he who associates with an arrogant man will become like him.	13.1
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oooOOOooo

*The first of the two aforementioned verses was at the outset of my “awakening” in relation to Sirach:*

*In 1976, the deputy director of the nuclear power plant requested that I go to Prague to “be the Slovak participant” at the Federal Ministry of Fuel and Energy. My colleague and friend, Jano K., an IT technician with whom I had collaborated on a computer solution of tasks related to the operation of the nuclear power plant, had left for Prague a few months earlier. Because he had worked there for some time, he knew all the local bureaucratic nuisances and helped me very much in dealing with them. And even though we worked in different departments, whenever possible, we always conferred on the minor problems of our professional and private lives “abroad”. It needs to be said that most of the Slovak people “serving” the federal authorities did not want to move to Prague with their families. Thus, we used to go to Prague for the week and we stayed in private flats paid for by the employer. This was one of the reasons we spent more time together than we would have spent had our families been there with us....*

*Once, returning from a negotiation, we discussed someone who had come into conflict with a local “wise man”. I remarked that from the time when I used to graze my grandparents’ cow, I learned that it was dangerous to get too close to a cow. It would either step on your feet, which hurt, or you would step in dung. Although stepping in dung did not physically hurt, it caused outrage, and it surely stank. To my surprise, Jano said - “he who touches pitch will be defiled...” It surprised me a lot. Pitch could not be found in our part of the world, and it was improbable that it would have appeared in proverbs. Pitch had only recently started to be imported from southern countries. However, because it was expensive, poor pitch substitutes (ersatz) had come into production, probably from oil. At least this seemed to be the case when we looked the asphalt undulations (popularly known as “road retarders”).*

*Not long after our talk, I found the books of the Old Testament on a bookshelf of one of our relatives during our holiday in Zemplínska Šírava (a lake in the East of Slovakia). I also discovered the Book of Sirach among them and remembered what my classmate in Prague had told me about the most beautiful pedagogical book. I started reading it with interest and when I came across the advice on pitch it was like emerging from under water to fresh air... and I appreciated my colleague and friend all the more for knowing it since his youth.*

oooOOOooo

**D**o not lift what is too heavy for you, 13.2  
and do not associate with one stronger and richer than you.  
**H**ow might a clay pot associate with a cauldron?  
**T**he former will strike against the latter and be smashed.

oooOOOooo

*After the “velvet coup” (\*) of 1989, we assumed that a market economic model would be created as soon as possible. The privatisation of many businesses which had previously been state-owned was expected, along with the creation of a **respectable competitive environment** to quickly achieve the standard of living of Western models. Smaller businesses were eventually followed by the “family silver” – major energy companies. At the time of the privatisation of one such*

*company, I held a position at the directorate where I was responsible for coordinating this process. I thought that I could influence things for the process to comply with state law and ultimately benefit the state and its citizens. The director showed appreciation for my work and took me to negotiations with him. Once, at a meeting of the Board of Directors with an important privatisation officer, the officer requested members of the Board to decide on a matter on which they were not authorised to decide as per their Articles of Association. I said that they could not do this on the grounds of the discussion at that place. The officer turned red and asked if I knew who he was. I was sufficiently naive and continued: “Of course, I know that you are a state officer who can manage our company by voting at the General Assembly of the public limited-liability company”. The officer turned even redder and stutteringly asked me to leave the room. It turned out later that he had crossed me off a list of people that were to be appointed as members of the new Board of Directors of the partner organisation of our company. In addition, he had asked our director to dismiss me from the company. He did not, however, as all the Board members were grateful to me for “saving their skins”. In discussions on the mistakes and infringements of privatisation, which were made later, they would have been in a difficult position to “defend” themselves. But, after having tried to be a judge, even though I was unable to remove injustice, I ended up like a clay pot smashed against a cauldron... It is worth mentioning that the officer did not experience any difficulties subsequently, because I gather he had learnt a lesson and managed all further steps in privatisation in compliance with the regulations.*

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(\**) The commonly used terminology often denotes the events of November 1989 as the “velvet revolution”, although from the point of view of many people these events did not have the characteristics to be denoted as a revolution. With regard to the historic events which were given such a name, this word is associated with the idea of bloodshed, i.e. the violent assumption of power by the “people” or a well-organised group of people, which did not correspond with the events in Czechoslovakia in 1989.*

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*I began considering this issue in 1991, when the Jaslovské Bohunice plant was visited by a group of American operators from Ohio during short-term staff exchanges at nuclear power plants. We were waiting for the official programme in the director’s office, and I was discussing the situation in our country with the director of the American plant. I also mentioned the 1989 events as a revolution. The American director smiled and asked me: “Do **you** see it as a revolution?” I carefully explained to him that, although it had not been a bloody event, it resulted in decisive change. Contrary to evolution, i.e. gradual development, it might be called a revolution. I selected my words carefully. With regard to the habits of old times, I assumed that the hidden microphones installed by the secret police were still turned on in the director’s office. Their installation was considered to be highly probable in the old “totalitarian” regime. Moreover, my American friend had mentioned casually a little earlier that his relative worked for the CIA, so I felt as though I was caught between two millstones.*

oooOOOooo

**A** rich person did wrong, and he was angry to boot;  
a poor person has been insulted, and he will apologise.

13.3

When a powerful person invites you, be reserved, and he will invite you so much more.	13.9
Do not go so far forward that you are pushed aside, or so far back that you are overlooked.	13.10
Do not aim to speak as an equal with him, and do not put faith in his rather effuse words; for with much talk he will test you, and although smiling he will be examining you.	13.11
Every living thing loves what is like to it, and every person his fellow.	13.15
What will a wolf have in common with a lamb? So is a sinner to a virtuous man.	13.17
Wealth in which there is no sin is good, and poverty is evil when it is the reward for godlessness.	13.24
Wealth does not befit the small-minded man; why would you give the greedy man riches?	14.3
He who hoards, depriving himself, is hoarding for others: and with his goods others will live luxuriously.	14.4
The envious eye covets the food of others; there will be misery and famine at his table.	14.10
My child, use well whatever you have and give worthy offerings to the Lord.	14.11
Remember that death will not be delayed, and you will leave your toils behind to another.	14.12a 14.15a
Do not desire a multitude of useless children, and be not glad over impious sons.	16.1
For by one intelligent person a city can rise up, but a tribe of lawless people will be destroyed.	16.4
Many such things has my eye seen, and more mighty things than these has my ear heard.	16.5
<b>THE GREATNESS OF GOD</b>	
What is a human being, and what is his use? What is his good, and what is his evil?	18.8
The number of a person's days is as many as a hundred years, like a drop of water from the sea and a grain of sand, so are a few years in a day of eternity.	18.9 18.10
For this reason the Lord was long-suffering with them, and he poured out his mercy upon them.	18.11
Man's mercy is for his neighbour, but the compassion of the Lord reaches all people: he corrects and instructs and teaches and turns as a shepherd does his flock.	18.13
He shows mercy to those who accept discipline and who hasten to his judgments.	18.14

## VALUE OF PRUDENCE

My child, do not mix your favours with unkind remarks nor your gifts with bitter words.	18.15
Does not dew mitigate scorching heat?	18.16
So, too, a kind word is far better than a gift.	
The fool, instead of gratitude, gives offence	18.18
The begrudged gift will not brighten the eyes.	
Before speaking, learn the facts,	18.19
before illness, take care of yourself,	
and in a time of sinful actions demonstrate repentance.	18.21b

oooOOOooo

*In the 1950s, when I was a “teenager” – only a little older than you – there were not as many sci-fi books issued as there are nowadays. There was no television and therefore I greedily read everything that I could get my hands on – quality books as well as run-of-the-mill literature. I once read a story about a young engineer who applied for an advertised job promising interesting work at an undisclosed centre. I have read a lot of books, so I do not remember the name of the book anymore (I did not keep a “reading diary”, as recommended at school...). But I found interesting the thorough preparation of the young engineer for the interview. An inventor needed talented co-workers in order to proceed with the development of his inventions. Within the interview, he was also expected to complete a complex technical drawing (a part of a locomotive, I think), and the engineer handled this demanding task excellently. I guess I imagined for myself that I might one day be as successful an engineer as the character in this story. Later, I sometimes remembered the story in practice, since, to my own disadvantage, I was not always well-prepared for the situations in which I was expected to discuss something I was supposed to have a thorough knowledge of.*

oooOOOooo

Let nothing prevent you from fulfilling your vow on time, and do not wait until death to put things in order.	18.22
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oooOOOooo

*The preceding two verses are only indirectly associated. However, let us stop and consider them. The first verse, concerning our promises, is important in order that we realise that if we promise to do something we should keep that promise – so that we are not called a “promising machine”, a name which was popular in the socialist era. However, it is equally important to keep our promises on time. Then people can claim that we are responsible - based on the proverb, “The word makes the man”. Naturally, this also applies to women today, so we can modify the proverb to “The word makes the person”.*

*The second verse presupposes that, like most people, or rather everybody, we sometimes commit wrongdoing. Whether unintentionally or, worse, intentionally. In both cases, however, we should seek a means to rectify our improper behaviour as soon as we realise its impropriety. I have described earlier how I apologised to my childhood friend Lubo after fifty years for my inconsiderate negative “promotion” in the elections of the school committee...*

oooOOOooo

- Take time to reflect, before making a vow. 18.23a  
A wise person will be cautious in everything, 18.27  
and in days of crowd rage he will refrain from wrongdoing.

oooOOOooo

*In 1988, I attended a two-week course on nuclear safety in Paris. The weekend was free. At the beginning, all participants introduced themselves; I mentioned that I had participated in a ten-month internship at the Nuclear Research Institute in Grenoble in 1973 - 1974. After the introductions, the director of a nuclear power plant in Catalonia, Spain, came to talk to me, as he had also attended an internship at this institute a year after me. We both knew several people in common that we had met there. He told me at the end of the week that he was going to Grenoble for the weekend, and he invited me to join him. I was pleased, because I had also been considering the possibility of visiting friends. On our 500 km drive we discussed many things, including the topic of the year 1968 in Czechoslovakia. The "allied" armies of the Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Bulgaria invaded our country in order to protect the socialist establishment according to the ideas of their political leaders. At that time, this event was often mentioned in our discussions with Western colleagues and they frequently asked me how I had handled it, why we had not defended ourselves, etc. I told him that, on the first evening after the invasion, I was walking between tanks on the streets of Bratislava, which were full of protesting crowds. I covertly took pictures of the invading vehicles and had discussions with the Russian soldiers, as I was able to speak Russian quite fluently. Although pretty well everybody studied Russian in school, few people were able to speak it. The vocabulary of most was reduced to varying cries of generally known words or sentences, such as "Idite domoj, vás nikto nezval" ("Go home, no one has invited you"). The discussions I had with the Russian soldiers were sometimes quite calm, and I was once lucky enough to talk with an educated lieutenant leaning out of the hatch of a tank. We discussed Masaryk, whom he had known, and our understanding of democracy. I also told him that the "father" of the Soviet hydrogen bomb, Andrej Sacharov, disapproved of the intervention. When the surrounding crowd started to become upset the lieutenant asked them not to interrupt, as we were having an interesting discussion... It was clear he was pleased by our discussion, which he preferred to resisting the cursing protesters.*

*The situation deteriorated the next day, and the shots of interveners could be heard at times. They were mostly firing into the air and at church towers; however there were also a few casualties. I was with my brother at the Square of the Slovak National Uprising (formerly known as Stalinka in our jargon), when shooting started close to the old post office. We later learned that Danka Košecová died because of this shooting. My brother and I ran into the Kamzík shopping centre (formerly known as Aso), where we waited until everything settled down. We went outside after some time and headed toward the post office. We stopped beside a Soviet captain, who was arguing with the surrounding crowd. The captain appeared to be tired as they had been on the move without sleep for two or three days before the intervention. His eyes were red, suggesting he had not slept, which should have been a warning for me. But I was already excited because of the shooting so I started to explain to him in my Russian that none among us had invited the Russians, as he was claiming, that they were unwanted occupants, zakhvatchiki. This word, which the Soviet people mainly*

*associate with the Nazi occupants of the World War II, had an electrifying effect upon him. He turned even redder and took out his gun, demonstrating that he was not going to let anybody insult him. My brother quickly drew me away and we disappeared into the crowd.*

*I was telling this story to my Catalan friend. I told him that the Book of Sirach, which was fresh in my memory at the time, after revising it for my daughters, says that “it is necessary in the days of crowd rage to stay away from wrongdoing and folly”.*

oooOOOooo

<b>B</b> e mindful of a time of hunger in a time of plenty.	18.25a
<b>L</b> et not your passions overrule you, and restrain your desires.	18.30
<b>I</b> f you satisfy your lusts, you will make yourself the laughing-stock of your enemies.	18.31
<b>D</b> o not become poor by feasting out of borrowing, for you will be plotting against your own life.	18.33
<b>A</b> drunken worker will not become rich, and he who is careless in small things will soon fall.	19.1
<b>W</b> ine and loose women will mislead intelligent men, and he who joins himself to prostitutes loses all sense of shame.	19.2

oooOOOooo

*Dear grandchildren, some time ago, when you started to realise that some people around us smoked, got drunk or took drugs, I warned you against such life-threatening actions. I tried to help you be aware even as children that such activity is like sliding down a slope with the risk of sliding into the abyss. I still ask myself why people do it when it is so dangerous. The best explanation may be the “dumb monkey effect”. I read somewhere that in those countries with a warm climate, where monkeys live freely in the wild, the local people, when they want to catch a monkey, make a hole in a hollow coconut for the hand of a monkey. They affix the coconut to a tree, for instance, and put a titbit inside. The monkey inserts an empty hand inside the coconut easily but, when holding the titbit in its hand, the monkey cannot withdraw its hand through the narrow opening. But the monkey will not let go of the titbit, even if its life is threatened. I experienced this myself, when I was offered a cigarette by a heavy smoker, Franta H., who is now dead, when I was nineteen. This happened during our school military training (most boys used to start smoking during their military service, or at school). In the Liberec military area, we were guarding the cars of our unit, which was crawling up the slope against the “enemy”. The first cigarette I smoked made me a little dizzy and I felt sick. I decided not to try it again, but I lit another cigarette the next day, because “I had already inserted my hand inside the coconut”. After some time fighting the nausea after smoking, my body was already so poisoned by nicotine that it stopped defending itself. For a long time after that, I considered smoking to be a great aid in both social contact and in focusing on work, or vice versa – during break times from work. I realised after several years that smoking was harmful, not to mention financially detrimental. Finally, I realised that, out of my modest income, I was spending more on cigarettes than on books or other necessities. I gradually stopped buying cigarettes, because I knew that when I had one in my pocket I would not be able to resist. However, in our countries at the*

*time (unlike in the West), one might be offered a cigarette by a smoker out of a false sense of solidarity or malice. After a while, I felt embarrassed only taking cigarettes from my friends, so I got used to the fact that I did not need a cigarette even when others around me smoked. I cut down on smoking during the work weeks and slightly on weekends. However, I believe I would still be smoking today had Providence not taught me a lesson. This happened during the revolutionary year, on the third day of what was later called the “Velvet Revolution” in November 1989. I was painting in an amateur studio which the power plant had provided to us on its premises. I was listening to an audio report from Letenská pláň in Prague, where tens of thousands of citizens were demonstrating their desire to dispose of the totalitarian regime. After I had taken a puff, I felt a burning sensation on my lower lip. I looked in the mirror and froze – I had a half-centimetre black spot on my lip, which reminded me of cancer. I realised that my daughters, who were eleven and fourteen at the time, could be orphans within six months. I put the cigarette out and I knew then that I did not have to smoke anymore, I knew that I was a human again, not a monkey... Since then, and it has been twenty-seven years, I have had only four cigarettes, which other smokers coerced me into lighting on the occasions of my daughters’ weddings and the celebrations of my fiftieth and sixtieth birthdays. Smokers typically provoke their victims by taunting you, suggesting that you are afraid to “have one”, because you would start smoking again. Unfortunately, this is true in the case of many former smokers, whose lungs have recognised that it is easier for them to stop smoking than not to smoke at all. Many have “stopped” smoking a thousand times in their lives...*

*The same is true of drugs and wine – spirits were unknown at the time of Sirach – Arab alchemists only discovered them a thousand years later.*

oooOOOooo

### WHEN TO SPEAK AND WHEN TO BE SILENT

- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| He who readily reposes trust in others reveals a shallow mind,<br>and he who sins will do wrong to his soul. | 19.4  |
| He who is gladdened by wickedness will be condemned.   | 19.5  |
| He who controls the tongue will live without strife.   | 19.6  |
| Never repeat what you are told and you will come to no harm.   | 19.7  |
| Report nothing of it to friend or foe and,<br>unless silence is sinful, reveal it to no one.                 | 19.8  |
| They will listen, distrust you<br>and you will end up being hated.   | 19.9  |
| Have you heard an unfavourable word about your fellow?<br>Let it perish along with you.                      | 19.10 |
| Be brave! It will never make you burst.  |       |
| Like an arrow stuck in a thigh of flesh,<br>such is a secret inside a fool.                                  | 19.12 |
| Question a friend; perhaps he has done nothing and,<br>and if he has, he will not do it again.               | 19.13 |
| Question a friend, for there is much slander,<br>and do not believe all you hear.                            | 19.15 |
| Often, unintentional slips are made,<br>and who has not sinned with his tongue?                              | 19.16 |

oooOOOooo

*A good friend from scouting once told me a story about our director from the time of World War II. The director had come from a Balkan country ruled by the brutality of the Gestapo during the war. Allegedly, he was a member of a resistance group which was denounced. Every member of the group died except our director, and my friend quite clearly implied that this may not have been a coincidence, but that the director may have betrayed them. I wondered why my friend was speaking to me about such a sensitive issue. I could not believe it. The authorities prosecuting Nazi collaborators would certainly have discovered this long before. Especially if some people “knew” about it, since my friend could not have witnessed it himself... So, I let the words perish with me and did not tell anyone about this story. I later understood that I had been on trial. My friend was testing whether I was going to pass the story on, even if it had been a lie, which had been revealed to me confidentially, and whether he could trust me and remain friends with me.*

oooOOOooo

### EXHORTATION AND SILENCE

- There is questioning that is inopportune, 20.1  
and there is the silence of a sensible man.
- How good it is to question rather than to be angry. 20.2
- And he who recognises his fault diminishes its consequences. 20.3
- Like a eunuch desiring to violate a girl — 20.4  
such is he who makes judgments by force.
- One keeps silent and is thought to be wise, 20.5  
and there is one who is hated for much talk.
- One remains silent, for he does not have an answer, 20.6  
and there is one who keeps silent,  
since he knows the proper time.
- The wise person will make himself beloved 20.13  
through his words alone,  
but the favours of the foolish will be poured out.
- A gift of a fool will not profit you, 20.14  
for he gives with greedy eyes.
- He gives little but puts on a great outward appearance, 20.15  
exclaims for all to hear;  
he will lend today and demand back tomorrow;  
such a person is hateful.
- Better to slip on the ground than to make a slip with the tongue; 20.18  
so the downfall of evil persons will come speedily.
- There exists a person who promises a favour to a friend 20.23  
out of a wish to please (despite being unable to fulfil the promise)  
and makes of him an enemy to no purpose.
- Habitual lying is detestable, 20.26  
disgrace never leaves the liar.
- Friendly gifts and presents blind the eyes of wise persons, 20.29  
and like a muzzle on a mouth they turn away reproofs.

Child, have you sinned? Do not do it again, and beg forgiveness for your past sins.	21.1
Escape from sin as you would from a snake.	21.2
The chatterer is known everywhere, but the discreet man recognises his weakness.	21.7
Building a house with borrowed money is like collecting stones for the winter instead of wood.	21.8

### WISE AND FOOLISH

He who keeps the Law is in control of his thoughts; the fear of the Lord brings wisdom.	21.11
He who is not clever shall not be instructed, but there is a cleverness and craftiness that increases bitterness.	21.12

oooOOOooo

*If children are lucky they might inherit abilities from their parents which we call talents. However, talent by itself is frequently not enough. Many children are raised in an environment lacking the tradition of proper learning. At the time of their early development, they often perceive a discrepancy between what is considered right and how the adults around them act in practice. The child thus develops the approach that an “easy” way of life and gaining the means of living is the right thing, ensuring success. I have encountered several such instances in both world literature and everyday life. Out of all literary characters, I would like to point to Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*, who had the good fortune to be removed from the environment of pickpockets. However, such happy endings are rare in life.*

*One boy, the son of an acquaintance, once told me that he was not stupid enough to have to study. This resulted in his seeking Mammon and a messy family life. His mother felt unhappy that his two children did not have a good upbringing and learned nothing useful for life. However, I have no doubt that, with his abilities, he could have achieved much more. It makes me feel sad when I meet children or adults who have misused their abilities to live careless or even criminal lives.*

*I will also point to an instance from the other side of the world. Shortly before the turn of the century, my daughter and I were flying home from the World Scout Jamboree in Chile. As we had travelled so far, we wanted to visit as much as possible and we decided to do some sightseeing in a beautiful city in a neighbouring country. This city on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean is well-known for both its natural beauty and its high crime rates. However, to be aware of crime and to be able to protect oneself against it are two different things. Tourists, with their minds preoccupied with enjoying the beauty of a new environment, make especially tempting targets to local gangs. Thus, tired after a long walk along the seashore, we decided to go for a swim at a well-known beach. Arriving at the beach, we noticed an announcement that the showers were out of operation due to a lack of water. We hoped this situation would change, as it was not a pleasing idea to put clothes on our salt-covered bodies. A little later, I went to check to see whether the showers were in operation. They weren’t... After returning to my daughter, she told me: “Dad, you’ve lost your shirt...”. During my absence, she was surrounded by “water sellers”, who were probably aiming for our camera and camcorder. One of them picked up my shirt to divert attention*

*from the two devices. But my daughter decided to sacrifice the shirt, as it was obvious that they were thieves. As she could not speak the local language she could not defend herself. The water sellers dispersed immediately and when I came back after a short time no one from their group could be seen. The worst thing was that my passport and credit card were in the pocket of my shirt. The passport was later found in a phone booth in the city. As a hotel receipt was inserted inside my passport, the honest person who found my passport knew where to call. The credit card was not found, however, and before I blocked it the thieves had withdrawn some money from it. However, our inexperience did not end there. On the following day, during a walk in a park close to the seashore, where one can meet only a few “normal” people, we almost lost our camcorder again. About 8 or 9 suspicious people were wandering around us, although we hardly noticed them. As we were leaving the park, walking across a bridge over a road, they followed us. A passer-by, a decently dressed local, asked us whether we could speak English. He told us that it was apparent that the people behind us wanted to rob us and he offered to accompany us to the other side of the road. The group was furious, but they did not have the courage to continue to follow us. Our saviour had to take a different route to his destination, because, as he said, they would probably have hurt him in the park. The conclusion is that even though the local maladjusted people had succeeded in stealing from tourists, their success could hardly be observed in their living conditions. They lived in “favelas” - shacks built from wooden or sheet metal panels, and they probably did not send their children to school. They were cunning enough to outfox tourists, but they were not wise...*

oooOOOooo

- A** wise person's knowledge will increase like a flood, 21.13  
and his counsel is like a spring of life.
- The** fool's wisdom is like a house in ruins, 21.18  
and the knowledge of the fool is only a litter-bin full of words.
- As** far as the fool is concerned, 21.19  
instruction is no more than handcuffs and fetters.
- The** idiot laughs out loud, 21.20  
while the intelligent man merely smiles quietly.
- The** fool steps inside the house immediately, 21.22  
the experienced man would not be so bold.
- A** fool peers into a house from a doorway, 21.23  
but an educated man will stand outside.
- It** is lack of education for a person to listen at a door, 21.24  
the upright man would be ashamed of doing so.
- Strangers** speak thoughtlessly of everything, 21.25  
while wise men's words are carefully weighed.
- The** heart of fools is in their mouth, 21.26  
but the mouth of the wise is in their heart.
- The** slanderer defiles his own soul, 21.28  
and he will be hated in a neighbourhood.
- The** silent and wise man shall be honoured.

## NICE KIDS AND BAD KIDS

- The idler has been compared to cow dung from dunghills; 22.2  
everyone who picks it up will shake it off his hand.
- Badly brought-up children are the shame of their father. 22.3a
- A prudent daughter is a treasure to her husband, 22.4  
but the disgraceful one is a burden to her father.
- The shameless woman brings disgrace on her father and husband, 22.5  
and she will be held in dishonour by both of them.
- An untimely word is like music during mourning, 22.6  
but whips and instruction are wisdom at any time.
- Mourning the dead lasts seven days, 22.12  
but it lasts a lifetime for the fool and godless man.
- Do not waste words on the fool, 22.13  
and do not go to an unintelligent person!
- Keep away from him, lest you have trouble,  
and you will not be sullied by his shaking off.
- Do not accustom your mouth to foul language. 23.13
- A man used to indecent talk 23.15  
will never be reformed in his lifetime.  
for there is in it a word of sin.
- A person who is accustomed to words of reproach,  
in all his days, will never be instructed.

oooOOOooo

*From an early age, every child takes note of the language of the people closest to them and quickly develops their language. It sometimes even appears that foul words are picked up more easily than ordinary ones. Naturally, it only seems so, since children use foul words like any other new words, without realising the true meaning of what they say. I remember when my daughter Zuzka was about 2-3 years old, I used to say “sh.t the grave” when something went wrong. A cube tower that Zuzka had built while playing collapsed. Based on the model of her father, she said to herself, trying to repeat after me: “she is brave”... It occurred to me that I could not speak that way anymore and I became more attentive to my language, as a foul word uttered by an innocent child warns us that we have crossed the line into unacceptable behaviour. Sadly, when children grow older and understand the meaning of such words, they sometimes believe that their use makes them an “adult”.*

*The language of some members of our Parliament is also tragic... One relatively young politician earned popularity after he criticised the party in which he had started his career. He established his own political party and received enough votes in the election to secure his new party seats in the Parliament. Populism can briefly be characterised by the statement: “Nobody can give you what I can promise you...” Unfortunately, there have always been people unable to distinguish between weeds and wheat. When changes in society do not take place as such people wish, and they feel disappointed, they always vote for another new populist. Thus, the members of this small party argued with the chairman and requested that a special session be called. The session was aimed at demonstrating whether the chairman had sufficient support or whether a new chairman should be chosen. The chairman did not handle the situation in which someone dared to stand as a candidate against him in the election. He addressed*

*his colleagues in an offensive manner at the chairman's table. Naturally, "the omnipresent ears of the mass media" recorded his vulgarities, which were promptly offered to the public in newspapers and on television. The party declined after the new chairman was chosen and some of the members joined another parliamentary party. It is a sad example of how weak political content, "strengthened" by vulgar language, did not become a lesson for its user. The fact that similar cases have occurred previously makes it even more surprising. A few years ago, prominent politicians discussed our President and referred to him in an offensive manner linked to his age. After it was made public in newspapers and television, they claimed that they had said "with the old mister". Only a few people believed it... As a politician, the chairman of the party referred to earlier had to be aware of the consequences to which his behaviour would lead.*

*But, as Sirach says, a person who is accustomed to words of reproach, in all his days, will never be instructed.*

oooOOOooo

**T**he timber joint in a building 22.16  
 is not dislodged by an earthquake;  
 so a heart firmly set upon a thought from counsel  
 will not be afraid at any time.

**S**takes set on a height do not resist the wind; 22.18  
 the fool's heart, frightened by his own imaginings,  
 cannot withstand fear.

### **FIDELITY TO FRIENDS**

**S**triking the eye brings out tears, 22.19  
 if you strike the heart, lucidity will come forth.

**H**e who throws a stone at birds scares them off, 22.20  
 and he who insults a friend dissolves a friendship.

**I**f you draw a sword on a friend, 22.21  
 do not despair, for a way back is possible.

**I**f you open your mouth against a friend, be not concerned, 22.22  
 for reconciliation is possible,  
 with the exception of reproach and arrogance,  
 and revealing a secret and a treacherous blow;  
 in these cases any friend will flee.

### **ABOUT ADULTERY**

**T**here is a person who transgresses against his marriage bed, 23.18  
 saying in his soul, "Who will see me?"

**D**arkness surrounds me, and the walls will hide me,  
 and no one will see me.

**H**e fears the scrutiny of men, 23.19  
 and does not realise that the Lord's eyes  
 are a thousand times brighter than the sun,  
 that they watch the conduct of all men  
 and penetrate into the most secret corners.

**T**his one will be punished in the streets of the city, 23.21  
 and when he did not suspect it, he will be seized.

So also a woman when she leaves her husband  
and presents an heir by another.

23.22

oooOOOooo

*During my studies at the Nuclear Faculty, someone once brought a book to class by Robert Jungk called "Brighter than a Thousand Suns". The Austrian author deals with the question of how much matter was turned into energy in the explosion of the atomic bomb above Hiroshima. He applied data resulting from precise measurements recorded in an experimental explosion in the 1950s. After calculating the measurable radioactive residues at fission of a several-hundred-kilogram uranium bomb, he discovered that only about a kilogram of uranium turned completely into energy and destroyed the whole city. One by one, everyone in the class read the book. We were once discussing it while having lunch in the students' hall of the Faculty of Law. My girlfriend Daniela said: "Jungk used a verse from the Book of Sir in the title of his book, but I guess you do not know it...." Thus was my first conscious encounter with the Book of Sir. I was a bit surprised that Daniela knew the book so well that she could remember a verse from it. But I did not ask about the book and soon forgot about it. I only recalled it after several years...*

oooOOOooo

#### GOOD AND BAD HUSBAND

My soul found passion in three things, 25.1  
and these are beautiful before the Lord and human beings:  
harmony of brothers and friendship of fellows  
and a wife and husband who accommodate each other.

But three kinds my soul hates, 25.2  
and their existence I cast away from me:  
an arrogant poor person and a rich liar,  
an old adulterer lacking in understanding.

Nine suppositions I deem happy in my heart: 25.7  
The man who finds his happiness in his children,  
the man who sees the ruin of his enemies in his lifetime.

Happy is he who lives with a sensible wife 25.8  
and who did not slip with the tongue,  
he who does not serve an unworthy master.

Happy is he who has acquired good sense, 25.9  
and is able to speak before an attentive audience.

How great is he who finds wisdom, 25.10  
but none surpasses the man who fears the Lord.

#### GOOD AND BAD SPOUSE

Any wound rather than the wound of the heart, 25.13  
and any wickedness rather than the wickedness of a woman;

any attack rather than the attack of those who hate, 25.14  
and any vengeance rather than the vengeance of enemies.

Better to live with a lion and a snake, 25.16  
than to share a house with a wicked woman.

As a sandhill is to an old man's feet, 25.20  
so is a talkative woman to a quiet husband.

Do not be fooled by a woman's beauty, or fall in love with her.	25.21
Expect anger, reproach and a deal of shame when the wife rules the husband.	25.22
A dejected heart and a sullen face and a wound of the heart is a wicked wife; slack hands and weakened knees are from a woman who does not make her husband happy.	25.23
Of three things was my heart wary, and in the face of a fourth was I frightened: neighbourhood gossip, a rioting mob, and false accusation, all these are worse than death!	26.5
But the woman jealous of another woman brings heartbreak, her tongue lashes out at everyone.	26.6
A bad wife is like a badly fixed yoke, taking her is like grasping a scorpion.	26.7
A drunken wife causes scandal, and her shameful conduct she will not hide.	26.8
A licentious woman is noticed by her secretive looks, and recognised by her lively eyes.	26.9
Keep a firm eye on a defiant daughter, so that she may not take advantage of some occasion.	26.10
A woman who honours her own husband will appear wise to everyone, but she who dishonours him with arrogance will be known to all as impious.	26.26
Happy is the husband of a good wife, for the number of his days will be double.	26.1
A courageous wife gladdens her husband, and he will fulfil his years in peace.	26.2
A wife's charm will delight her husband, and her prudence refreshes his body.	26.13
Charm upon charm is a modest wife, and there is no standard weight good enough for a self-controlled soul.	26.15
<b>RISKS AND SEDUCTIONS, STRIFE AND FORGIVENESS</b>	
By two things has my heart been grieved, and by a third anger came upon me: a warrior who suffers want, and intelligent men when they are treated contemptuously, a man who turns from virtue to sin, the Lord will prepare him for the sword.	26.28
The merchant can barely avoid greed, and the shopkeeper cannot remain sinless.	26.29
Many sin for love of gain, and he who desires riches silences his conscience.	27.1

When a sieve is shaken the dirt falls through, so, too, the defects of a man are seen when he begins to speak.	27.4
Praise no one before he has spoken, for this is the test of people.	27.7
A well-tended tree is shown by its fruits, so a man's feelings can be detected in what he says.	27.6
Birds will nest with those like them, and truth will come back to those who practise it.	27.9
The man who winks an eye is plotting evil,	27.22
he is all sweetness to your face, praising your words,	27.23
but behind your back he speaks differently and twists your words.	
When one throws a stone in the air, it falls back on his head.	27.25
Whoever deals a treacherous blow wounds himself.	

oooOOOooo

*It has surely happened to you that you became angry with a close person and said things you later regretted, after calming down. You may even have said things that you were not sure were true, but "someone said them, so they had to be true". Or even worse, you may have had a fight. Even though I have not been much of a fighter, it sometimes happened to me that I did not manage to keep calm and I regretted it later. I can remember a story from the time when I was in the seventh year of elementary school. I had been in love with a classmate, coincidentally the best student in our class, for two years. Naturally, I was not the only one, as not only were her grades pretty but she herself was very pretty also... I was aware of two "competing boys", as they did not hide their affection. I acted as though I was not interested. Once, I do not even remember why, I had an exchange of opinions with one of the other boys, which ended up in my throwing a ruler at him. My "love" observed this and I could see in her face that she condemned me. She said something to the effect that she did not think I should behave like that and I could have hurt him, if the ruler had hit his face. I was unhappy, because I knew that I had lost my chance, if indeed I ever had a chance previously. Thus, I understood that one who strikes treacherous blows only wounds himself in the end.*

oooOOOooo

He who digs a hole will fall into it.	27.26a
Mockery and reproaches belong to an arrogant person, and vengeance, like a lion, will lie in wait for him.	27.28
Ire and anger, these also are abominations in which sinful people excel.	27.30
Forgive your neighbour a wrong, and you may ask that your sins be forgiven.	28.2
If you blow on a spark, it will flame up, and if you spit on it, it will be extinguished, and both will proceed out of your mouth.	28.12
Curse a slanderous and forked-tongued person, for he has destroyed many who are at peace.	28.13
A vicious tongue has cast out courageous women, depriving them of the fruit of their work,	28.15
has demolished many and hounded them from nation to nation.	28.14

It has ruined powerful cities and laid low great households.  
**M**any have fallen by the sword, 28.18  
but many more have perished by the tongue.  
**F**ence your property with thorns 28.24a  
and, in the same way, 28.25  
make weights and scales for your words  
and put a bolted door on your mouth.

### FINANCIAL MATTERS

**L**end to your fellow in his time of need, 29.2  
and, in turn, pay back your fellow at the proper time.  
**K**eep your word, and be trustworthy with him, 29.3  
and on every occasion you will find what you need.  
**M**any have regarded a loan as a windfall, 29.4  
and they caused trouble for those who helped them.  
**U**ntil he receives it, he will kiss his hands, 29.5  
and at the moment for repayment he will delay for time  
and will pay back words of apathy, and he will blame the time.  
**I**f he is capable, he will recover scarcely half, 29.6a  
and he will consider that as a windfall.  
**M**any refused to lend not because of wickedness; 29.7  
they were afraid of being cheated without cause.  
  
**M**oreover, a good man will give surety for his fellow; 29.14a  
for all of that, do not forget a guarantor's kindness, 29.15  
for he gave his soul on your behalf.  
**S**urety destroyed many who were prosperous 29.18  
and tossed them about like a wave of the sea;  
powerful men it exiled, and they wandered among foreign nations.  
**A**ssist your fellow according to your ability, 29.20  
and take care for yourself that you do not fall.

oooOOOooo

*My friend J. K. lent a large sum of money to a businessman. When the time came to repay the money, the businessman acted like he had found the money and was not going to return it. He hired criminals to kill his creditor. In his foolishness, he believed he was not going to be revealed... The murderers and the planner were soon revealed and convicted; however the unlucky creditor was not to be revived.*

oooOOOooo

### MODESTY IN LIVING AND CLOTHING

**L**ife's beginning is water and bread and clothing 29.21  
and a house for hiding indecency.  
**B**etter is the life of a poor person in his wooden shack 29.22  
than splendid foods among strangers.  
**W**ith little or much have contentment, 29.23  
and you will never hear reproach for being an outsider.

## CORRECT YOUR CHILDREN

The man who loves his son makes use of the rod, later on he will be proud of him.	30.1
He who instructs his child will profit by him, and among acquaintances he will boast about him.	30.2
He who teaches his child will make his enemy envious, and before friends he will exult in him.	30.3
When one cherishes a child, one will bind up his wounds, and with every cry one's insides will be troubled.	30.7
Just as an unbroken horse turns out stubborn, so a spoiled child becomes insolent.	30.8
Coddle a child, and it will terrorise you; play with it, and it will grieve you.	30.9
Do not laugh together with it, lest you suffer together, and in the end you will gnash your teeth.	30.10
Instruct your child, and work with him, lest by his disgraceful behaviour you become offended.	30.13

oooOOOooo

*Folk wisdom says that one who has daughters does not lose them even after they get married. Because daughters always come to their parents, while sons go to the parents of their wives. As I have two daughters, we often had visitors. My daughters both had sons first, and I only realised at that time how lucky I had been to have daughters, because the upbringing of girls and boys differs considerably. Even though our girls were lively enough, they were quite obedient. However, their sons were almost "wild"... To civilise them, we registered them for different after-school activities, including piano classes. Both were interested in playing at the beginning. I have mentioned it in another context... Naturally, they had sufficient musical talent. However, they found out that the piano was not going to play by itself and that it was necessary to practise to make their fingers and heads collaborate. Both began to claim that they did not want to and would not play... If we had backtracked, they would have developed a habit that they could avoid everything that requires a certain effort and self-discipline. It would certainly have reflected negatively in their lives.*

*I have seen many such things in my life, and we should be concerned over the fact that the contemporary liberalised pedagogy forgets the saying*

*"You can't teach an old dog  
new tricks."*

*Although we can agree that corporal punishment was too drastic and should have been more moderate, the rejection of such punishment has not resulted in discovering the right way of developing discipline. If parents go to another extreme and, figuratively, let their children do what they want, they help them become maladjusted citizens. It does not matter whether "white" or "tanned"; the consequences are very similar.*

oooOOOooo

## HEALTH AND PLEASURE

- Health and vigour are better than any gold, 30.15  
and a robust body worth more than great wealth.
- Do not give yourself over to sadness, 30.21  
or torment yourself with brooding.
- Gladness of heart is life for a person, 30.22  
and exultation gives him length of days.
- Delight your soul and comfort your heart, 30.23  
and remove grief far from you.
- For many has grief destroyed,  
and there is no advantage in it.

## DO NOT WORRY TOO MUCH ABOUT WEALTH

- The sleeplessness that wealth brings makes a man lose weight, 31.1  
and anxiety about it removes sleep.
- He who loves gold cannot be righteous, 31.5  
and he who pursues profits will be led astray by them.
- Gold is a snare for those who are possessed by love of it. 31.7  
The senseless will be caught in it.

oooOOOooo

*Gambling is a seemingly easy and fast way to wealth; however, it leads to an unwholesome end as reliably as alcohol or drugs. It is a different story than the story of drugs presented earlier, because no poisons are consumed in it. But the consequences of both are equally dangerous. This vice, or rather illness, was probably not as widespread in ancient times. The dice game was played at the time, but hazard was not as easily accessible for everyone and did not have as great consequences as it does today. In the literature about ancient times, I have only read about soldiers who sometimes lost their share in the spoils of war or the garments of the crucified in the dice game.*

*The offer of hazardous games is based on human greed. Most people would like to get rich without doing something reasonable and useful. No **hazardous game is for the players to get rich**, but each of them **is for the game operators to get rich**. Games typically have a probability of victory set at a ratio of approximately 48 % - 49 % for the player to 51 % - 52 % for the operator. It is seemingly quite balanced, as it appears that some players can win even when others lose. However, the fact is that practically everyone who gets trapped, like the monkey that wants the titbit hidden in the coconut, inevitably loses. Because even the one who wins coincidentally is unable to stop early enough. He believes that he is in luck, but eventually he loses not only the money he has won but even more money.*

***It is like wanting to slide up the slope. Everybody knows that one can only slide down the slope, even when the slope is mild.***

*When I was at an internship in Grenoble in 1973 - 1974 I had Polish friends who had emigrated there. It was a weekend pleasure to hear a Slavic language after a week of speaking only French. They asked me to go to a casino with them to play roulette. I refused at first, as I knew from my father that one could risk losing all of one's money. In the end, I agreed to go and watch but decided not to play. I stuck to my plan for quite a long time, but eventually they persuaded me to bet 10 francs. I told myself: "After all, what can happen if I lost it?" And I won 10*

francs so I decided that if I bet the original 10 with the 10 I had won I did not risk anything new, only what I had risked the first time, i.e. 10 francs, and I would have 30 francs in total. However, this time I lost, so I ended up with a loss of 10 francs. I was a bit upset and wanted the 10 francs back. I bet another 10 francs, but I lost again, ending up with a loss of 20 francs. Thus, I gradually lost more and more francs. Even though I sometimes won something, the amount of losses predominated. I did not stop until I had already lost 300 francs. When we returned, I promised myself not to go to the casino with my Polish friends anymore. I wondered how I could earn the 300 francs back. I found some work-from-home advertisements, and I went to the address which was provided in the ad. I thought it was a small company. But when I arrived at the given address it turned out that it was a flat in a multi-storey building with dirty corridors. I did not believe that someone living in such a building could employ people and I left. But I found the loss of 300 francs too big and I wanted to get the money back. Finally, I succumbed to the persuasion of my Polish friends and went to the casino with them again. The situation repeated itself. Even if we sometimes won a few francs, the result was our increasing loss. My Polish friends chose a simple system of playing, doubling their bets after every loss to get their 10 francs back and win another 10 francs. I later called them "kamikaze" to myself, although in the theory of hazardous games, it is named after the person who used it first. The system assumed that a series of losses eventually had to end, as the right number would come up, and we would win our money back. However, the problem is that when the set of wrong numbers is too long, you double your bets and have no remaining money to double your bet anymore, thus losing everything you have bet. Accordingly, I saw one of our Polish friends gradually bet 5,110 francs, and bet his last 5,120 francs in the tenth round to win back 10,240 francs, i.e. to finally win 10 francs. He was as pale as a sheet, because he had no more money. But coincidentally, it worked out and he won 10 francs and got back what he had bet earlier... One might think that if he had had enough money on him, i.e. several millions, he could not lose. This is mistaken, as the rules of the game are set so that you cannot bet more than a certain limit on the playing table. The limit was 100,000 francs at that time. If you had lost a total of e.g. 109,990 francs earlier, you could not bet 110,000 francs to "win" 10 francs and get back the 109,990 francs that you had gradually bet on the wrong numbers earlier. So, a bet of 100,000 instead of 110,000 would result in the loss of 9,990 francs even in the case of a win.

I had access to computer technology in the Nuclear Research Institute in Grenoble and I was quite a good programmer. I decided rather early not to risk my money anymore. With the help of the computer, I wanted to verify whether I could win based on a more reasonable strategy than our "kamikaze" method. My goal was to ensure that we gradually won more than we lost. As my Polish friends had gone to casinos for a long time and recorded their numbers, a long series of real values was available to me. I could verify them through the systems I had designed. It turned out that neither of the systems was so reliable as to ensure that the player ultimately did not lose...

Coincidentally, at the time, a local weekly published an article on Monte Carlo and its casino, where we had also gone. It presented the stories of notorious players, who had lost all of their wealth there. One of them was a baron from Hungary. He might even have originally been a Slovak whose ancestor became a "Hungarian patriot". Before he went crazy following the loss of all his wealth, he

wrote a short poem (it was presented in French; the following is my translation of it):

*(When playing a hazardous game), you can sometimes win,  
but you inevitably have to lose.  
However, when you lose,  
you never recover again.*

*(On peut gagner, mais on est obligé de perdre. Mais, si on perd, on ne peut jamais se rattraper...)*

The writer Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy wrote in this relation:

*“Nothing weakens a person more  
than hope in something other  
than his own effort to find salvation and happiness...”*

oooOOOooo

Happy is a rich person who was found blameless and who did not pursue gold.	31.8
For he did wonders among his people.	31.9b
Who has been tested by it and found perfect?	31.10
Who could have sinned but resisted, who could have done wrong and did not do it?	
It will be as a boast for him.	31.10b
Therefore his good things will be confirmed, and his acts of charity an assembly will recount.	31.11
<b>DINNER PARTIES</b>	
Are you seated at a great table?	31.12
Do not open your throat at it. And do not say, "Indeed how many are the things on it!"	
Remember that a greedy eye is an evil thing.	31.13
What is worse than such an eye? That is why it was condemned to weep.	
Do not extend a hand for whatever you see, or be quick in reaching for a dish.	31.14
Judge the needs of your fellow guest by your own and in all things act prudently.	31.15
Eat like an educated person the things set before you, and be not a glutton, lest you be detested.	31.16
Like a well-mannered man, be the first to stop, and don't be voracious if you are to avoid difficulties.	31.17
A little is sufficient for a well-bred person, and upon his bed he does not gasp for breath.	31.19
He rises early and his soul with him.	31.20b
Listen, child, be moderate in all that you do and no illness will ever come upon you.	31.22b
Do not try to show how much wine you can take, for wine has destroyed many.	31.25
As the furnace tests the temper of steel, so the wine proves hearts and makes proud men quarrel.	31.26

oooOOOooo

*In 1982, I participated in a month-long training programme in Tbilisi with a group of fellow employees from the Nuclear Power Plant. The company which had supplied the first two blocks of the VI plant with first-generation computers had a seat there. We stayed in a classic old-fashioned hotel on the main street of Tbilisi. After day-long lectures, we sometimes met in a common room and discussed this and that. Sometimes someone would take out a bottle of vodka which they had bought in a local store or brought from home, and drinks were offered to colleagues. Everyone enjoyed a glass, and most of us drank moderately. Only one of our colleagues was noted for not knowing his limit. On one occasion, he came to me with an open bottle and two eight-ounce glasses and said: "I bet I can drink you under the table". I replied by stating that I did not think this was a heroic act, because an ox could drink me under the table, too. An ox could drink a 405-ounce bucket of water and I can hardly handle 13 ounces of water and that is enough for me. I advised him to calm down, because if he drank too much he would only shame us abroad... My comments probably fired up his intoxicated mind. He finished the bottle and said that nothing would happen anyway, and he threw the bottle out of the half-open window overlooking the busy main street. Luckily, the bottle hit the frame of the closed half of the window and did not fall out. Everyone was horrified at the thought of what could have happened had the bottle hit somebody walking on the street, or if he had broken the window. The mood changed and we retired to our rooms.*

*My unrestrained colleague had completed distance studies at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering while working, since he had become an expert in semiconductor electronics on the job. However, he lacked culture, which is acquired particularly within a family setting and at school at a young age. After we returned home from the training programme, he continued with his occasional folly at work. As the head of a department, he set a poor example to his subordinates. Ultimately, I recommended that he find another job. He probably continued with his unrestrained drinking, as I discovered some time later that he had a funeral before he could enjoy his retirement...*

oooOOOooo

<b>W</b> ine is life for man if taken in moderation.	31.27
<b>W</b> hat is life to one who lacks wine?	
<b>I</b> t was created from the beginning for gladness.	
<b>J</b> oy of heart and gladness of soul	31.28
is moderate wine drunk at the proper time:	
- two, three, but not more than four cups.	*5) (add.)
<b>B</b> ut if taken to excess it brings bitterness of soul, excitement and a fumbling step.	31.29
<b>D</b> runkenness increases a fool's temper for hurt, since it reduces strength and adds wounds.	31.30
<b>A</b> t a banquet of wine do not reprove your fellow, and do not scorn him in his gladness.	31.31a

oooOOOooo

*After 1990, I worked for the regional centre of the World Association of Nuclear Operators in Moscow for four years. This organisation was intended to ensure the exchange of experience and mutual support in enhancing nuclear safety among*

*the employees of nuclear power plants worldwide. This organisation was primarily established as a response to the shock of the Chernobyl disaster in the former USSR. Besides a London coordination centre, it had three other regional centres in Paris, Atlanta, and Tokyo.*

*Naturally, one of the first power plants that received necessary assistance was the Chernobyl plant. Three other blocks were still in operation there after the disaster.*

*With a group of six experts from the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, I visited the Three Mile Island plant in the USA in 1990. A major disaster had occurred there seven years before the Chernobyl disaster. A so-called social programme was a part of such visits accompanying the specialised programme. It included cultural events, common dinners, etc.*

*At one such dinner, I was sitting next to a young engineer, who casually mentioned that he was a member of the Mormon Church, which is quite active in the USA. I had only a vague idea of how this church differed from other Protestant churches, and so I asked my table companion about it. Besides other things, he said that they were strictly prohibited from drinking wine and other alcoholic beverages. I said that this was wise, because alcohol can do a lot of wrong when not handled in moderation. I mentioned that a warning against excessive drinking was presented in the Book of Sirach; however Sirach writes that wine can lighten our hearts when it is drunk moderately. My neighbour objected that the Book of Sirach was not part of the canonical Scripture, and that the Mormon church fathers disapproved of it. He promised to bring me a copy of an article dealing with that matter, written by a renowned Christian thinker, the next day.*

*He kept his promise, and what I read in that article was right. However, once the evil of alcohol was released from Pandora's box, humankind could hardly handle its total prohibition. This is demonstrated by the example of prohibition in the USA in the first half of the 20th century. It only resulted in increased criminality in association with smuggling prohibited alcohol. I agreed that it would be ideal not to know wine and other alcoholic beverages at all. However, I disagreed that the whole book, containing many great thoughts, should be rejected because of Sirach's tolerance for the reasonable and moderate use of wine. Such a rejection of the book is like throwing out the baby with the bathwater... Not to mention that human experience with prohibition appears to confirm Sirach's assumption that, once evil is present, we need to learn to live with it.*

oooOOOooo

- |  |      |
|--|------|
| <b>I</b> f you are older, speak as befits your age,                    | 32.3 |
| but know what you are talking about, and do not interrupt the music.   |      |
| <b>W</b> here there is entertainment, refrain from speaking,           | 32.4 |
| it is not the time for playing the wise man.                           |      |
| <b>A</b> ruby seal on a gold ornament                                  | 32.5 |
| is a concert of music at a banquet of wine.                            |      |
| <b>I</b> f you are young, speak if you have to,                        | 32.7 |
| but not more than twice and only if requested.                         |      |
| <b>K</b> eep to the point and say it all in a few words.               | 32.8 |
| <b>S</b> how that you are well-informed but not over-anxious to speak. |      |

- D**o not try to be the equal of eminent people, 32.9  
and do not chat when someone else is speaking.
- A**s lightning goes before thunder, 32.10  
the reputation of a modest man goes before him.
- L**ease the party at the right time and be not slow about it; 32.11  
no lingering, go straight home!.
- T**here you may relax and do as you please, 32.12  
but do not sin by arrogant speech.

oooOOOooo

*West Point is a place around 80 km north of New York City, overlooking the Hudson River. After our visit to the Indian Point nuclear power plant, we were invited to West Point, which is home to the oldest and most prestigious American military academy, a place frequently visited by American citizens and tourists. After a tour of the academy, we partook in a ceremonial lunch with much talking, which is typical of Anglo-Saxon and French-speaking countries. As often used to happen to me in such cases, I became engrossed in conversation with interesting fellow-guests. While I was slowly eating the last dish, ice cream, and speaking at length to the tablemate on my right, I realised that everyone had fallen silent and was listening to what I was saying... I thought that my story must be interesting to everyone; however, when I took a breath between two sentences, our host saved me from my delusion by saying: "Jozef, when you finish your ice cream, we will all be able to leave...". Thus, I realised that I should have stopped eating and talking earlier, and reflected that this agreeable meeting had to come to an end.*

oooOOOooo

### **DISTINCTION BETWEEN WISE AND UNWISE**

- W**hoever fears the Lord will accept his correction. 32.14a
- A** sinful person refuses correction, 32.17  
and excuses himself for doing what he wants.
- A** person of judgment reflects beforehand, 32.18  
the stubborn and proud man goes ahead  
without worrying about anything.
- C**hild, never act without first reflecting, 32.19  
and you will have no regret.
- D**o not go along a rough road, 32.20  
lest you stumble on stones.
- A**nd do not be over-sure of your step on a smooth path. 32.21
- B**eware even of your own children. 32.22
- B**e careful in whatever you do, 32.23  
for this as well is a means of keeping the commandments.
- P**repare a speech, and so you will be heard; 33.4  
recall what you have learned before you give an answer.
- T**he emotions of a foolish person are like a wheel of a wagon, 33.5  
and his argument is like a turning axle.
- A** mocking friend is like a wild horse, 33.6  
neighing when anyone rides him.

## DIVERSITY OF LIFE

- Why is a day superior to a day, 33.7  
when all the light of a day of a year is from the sun?
- By the Lord's knowledge they were marked off, 33.8  
and he made seasons and feasts different.
- And despite that all human beings are from clay, 33.10a  
the Lord made each one unique and made their ways different. 33.11b
- Good is opposite evil, and life is opposite death; 33.14  
so a sinner is opposite of the upright person.
- And so look on all of the works of the Most High, 33.15  
two by two, one opposite the other.

## PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

- Not to son, wife, brother nor to friend 33.20  
give power over yourself during your lifetime  
and do not give your property to another,  
lest you change your mind and ask for it back.
- While you are still alive and there is breath in you, 33.21  
do not exchange yourself with any flesh.
- For it is better that your children ask of you 33.22  
than that you should look to the hands of your sons.
- In all your works be one who excels; 33.23  
do not bring a stain on your reputation.
- Wait until the end of your days, 33.24  
until death is near, to distribute your inheritance.

oooOOOooo

*An acquaintance of my father (let us call him Vlado) decided, like many other young people, to leave Europe for North America after his experience with the Communist government. He wrote regularly to my father, as they had known each other from their youth, when they lived in Trnava. After the change of regime in 1989, they used to meet when Vlado visited his old home every year. For his own comfort, he bought a small flat in Bratislava to avoid staying in hotels during his visits. While he was away, he let a distant relative live in the flat and he delegated the relative to represent him, if necessary. After some time, Vlado was unpleasantly surprised when he discovered that he had nowhere to stay during one of his visits, as the flat had been sold and the money spent. Due to his "Canadian" income, he had no problem staying in a small boarding-house, but he was embittered by the fact that his trust had been betrayed.*

oooOOOooo

## CHOOSING A WIFE

- The stomach takes in all kinds of food, 36.18  
but one food is better than another.
- Just as the tongue can distinguish the flavour of game, 36.19  
so does the alert mind detect lies.
- A crooked heart causes sorrow, 36.20  
but an experienced person knows how to get even with him.
- A woman will accept any husband, 36.21  
but some daughters are better than others.

oooOOOooo

*In ancient times, parents used to choose brides for their sons. This habit has been abandoned in most contemporary European societies, but has survived in some Asian societies. I encountered this practice in Moscow, when I was working for an international organisation for nuclear power plants for four years in the 1990s. Life in the then Soviet Union was not easy for foreigners. Even though the perestroika (reformation) of the former totalitarian regime was concluding, for better control as well as for the protection of foreigners, the Administration of Diplomatic Corps secured accommodation for visitors in chosen blocks of flats. They were continuously guarded by the police. However, this did not prevent cockroaches from occupying the entire building. After all, this is the fate of blocks of flats in many cities all around the world. The building management hired experts from time to time to fight against the cockroaches by spraying the flats with the appropriate poison. I was surprised, however, that the sprayer did not protect himself against the poison. When I warned him, he demonstratively took out a snack in the kitchen and ate it. I said to myself that occupational health and safety were not among his strengths. However, I also sometimes encountered such instances in other relations in this country. My Russian friends explained to me that the lack of discipline and observance of regulations were due to the experience of fighting in World War II, when the lives of soldiers were not valued. This situation also applied later, in the “socialist way of life”, which was seemingly not based on hierarchy, when employees did not always follow the orders of their superiors – because, based on the propaganda of the day, “all people were made equal”. “Soviet” staircases offered a great example of non-compliance with regulations. At least one step was always higher and another was always lower than the others. Walking up such a staircase with a suitcase, and inevitably stumbling, is an experience one never forgets. However, it needs to be said that staircases with such “standards” were also common, for example, in Great Britain until recently. I once watched a documentary dealing with injuries suffered on staircases in England in the 19th century. This situation may have been similar in other countries, also.*

*An Indian family lived on the same floor of the diplomatic house as me. The father worked at the Indian embassy, the mother was a housewife, the son studied at a technical faculty, and the daughter attended a secondary grammar school for the children of foreign employees in Moscow. We used to say hello when we met, but we did not visit one another. They first invited me to visit them shortly before the mother and daughter left Moscow. They said that their daughter, who was old enough to get married, would participate in a market for brides and grooms in Delhi, where her future partner was going to be selected. The father and the son were planning to stay in Moscow until the end of the school year.*

*I was not very surprised by this tradition, as I could remember that marriages had been arranged in our country in the past. The issue of the money or property that a bride was supposed to receive as a dowry, or to inherit, frequently played an important role. However, after the change to the “socialist” way of life in our country, the habit of parents selecting spouses was abandoned. Money and property temporarily lost their function in defining social status.*

*I experienced something else that was unusual to me during the visit to my Indian neighbours. We were sitting at the table in the living room, drinking a lemonade and speaking about India and Czechoslovakia in English. They were amused when I said that Czechoslovakia had 15 million inhabitants. In their*

*mathematics, this was 1.5 “kore”, similar to their capital, Delhi... Kore represented 10 million. In this state, where the number of inhabitants approached 1 billion, “kore” was used to prevent the numbers from sounding so horrendous. In the course of our conversation, I noticed a cockroach crawling into my glass. The father also noticed it and changed my glass for a clean one, saying: “We could have our flat sprayed but, for religious reasons, my children disagree with killing these people.” I realised that it was a tenet of his belief that after people died, they were reincarnated into different animals depending on their merits. The worst possible reincarnation was into a pig... After this, they can subsequently be reincarnated back into a person.*

*This also helped me to understand why the cockroaches always reappeared after my flat was sprayed.*

ooo000ooo

- A** woman’s beauty delights people, 36.22  
and is beyond all that could be wished for.
- If** she is kindly-spoken and gentle, 36.23  
her husband is the most fortunate of men.
- When** a man marries he acquires a fortune, 36.24  
someone who understands him and who will help and support him.
- Where** there is no fence, property will be plundered, 36.25  
and when a man has no wife he will groan as he wanders.
- Who** would trust a clever robber 36.26  
flitting from town to town?
- And** who would trust a man without a nest, 36.27  
who lodges wherever nightfall finds him?

oooOOOooo

*In the past, young single people who started work had the possibility of living in so-called “single-person housing”, if they did not have accommodation with their job. Such housing could either be furnished flats for several young employees, or hotel-type housing, where cleaners tidied the rooms.*

*I was involved with the scouts at that time. My troop included the son of an employee responsible for the distribution of employees in the housing units. Accordingly, I got the smaller of two rooms of a unit for myself. The salaries of starting engineers were quite small at that time, but I did not spend my entire monthly income anyway. I was putting the money I saved in a pile on my cabinet. It seemed to me that the pile was not growing as quickly as I expected, but I did not pay much attention to it, as I had not made records of the amounts. My girlfriend, who later became my wife, noticed my unfortunate saving habit and asked why I did not put my savings in a bank. Coincidentally, I kept my violin in the same cabinet as the money. I was once unpleasantly surprised after opening the case, because the bow was much tighter than customary. Usually, I fully loosened the hair tension by the screw when I put the bow in the case. It was clear that someone had been in my cabinet and handled my violin. And it occurred to me that not only my violin but also my money had been interfered with. I knew that the cleaner used to be accompanied by her thirteen-year-old daughter, who had probably been tinkering with my violin, while her mother had been tinkering with something else. However, because I could not prove it, I did not call the police. Moreover, the cleaner was the sister of a prominent member of the*

*Communist Party, so the police would probably not make much of an effort. Following the advice of my girlfriend, I established a passbook as a fence against stealing, and my savings started growing significantly...*

oooOOOooo

### **FRIENDS AND COUNSELLORS**

- E**very friend says, "I am your friend, too," 37.1  
but some friends are only friends in name.
- I**s it not a deadly grief, 37.2  
when a companion or friend turns into an enemy?
- O**ne kind of comrade takes advantage of his friend's good fortune, 37.4  
in the time of trouble he turns against him.
- A**nother kind shares his friend's suffering, for the sake of a meal, 37.5  
and when it comes to a fight, he thinks only of saving himself.
- D**o not neglect a friend or forget him 37.6  
once you are wealthy.
- D**o not seek advice from one who looks at you suspiciously, 37.10  
and hide your plans from those who envy you.
- A**ll counsellors give advice, 37.7  
but some seek only their own gain.
- D**istrust the person who offers advice, 37.8  
lest he take advantage of you;  
first of all, ask yourself what he lacks,  
and what his own interest suggests to him.
- P**erhaps he says to you, "You are on the right road," 37.9  
and he will stand aside to see what will happen to you.
- D**o not consult with a woman about her rival 37.11  
and with a cowardly person about war,  
with a merchant about business  
and with one who buys about a sale,  
with a slanderer about gratitude  
and with an unmerciful person about generosity of heart,  
with an idle person about any work  
and with a casual worker about completing a job,  
with a lazy servant about an important task.

oooOOOooo

*During a business trip to an Eastern country, I saw a video about road workers repairing an asphalt pavement with large holes in it on TV. The images were taken after it had rained, and the holes were full of water but the road workers did not show any concern. They shovelled molten asphalt onto the pavement. A passer-by stopped and told the workers that the asphalt was not going to stick to the surface of the dirty and wet holes, that the potholes would only reappear. A road worker addressed her with rude words that were censored on TV. His answer roughly expressed the notion, "Why are you bothering with things that you don't understand?" He carelessly levelled the patch with a shovel and went on. It would be interesting to know whether he was at least a little bit ashamed, when he, as well*

*as his neighbours, saw this on TV later. My colleague from that town explained to me why these workers were not trying to repair the pavement and roads properly to ensure their longer durability. Had the repairs been of good quality, the workers would have been sent to work further from home, which they did not want. Thus, they ensured work for themselves at the same places in the town. After several months, during my next visit to that town, I could see that their efforts had born the desired fruit – the potholes were there again. I bitterly considered that the situation was only a little better in our country. Cracked roads and pavements, from which weeds grow, were repaired once every 10 or 15 years. This is cheaper than patching the holes with asphalt every year. Unfortunately, after just a few years, our roads and pavements look similar to those in that Eastern country for another decade.*

oooOOOooo

- B**ut go to a trustworthy man 37.12  
whom you know to be a keeper of the commandments,  
whose soul reflects your own,  
and who will suffer with you, if you fail.
- A**nd stand by your heart's counsel, 37.13  
for there is nothing more faithful to you than it.
- F**or a man's soul often gives better advice 37.14  
than seven sentinels sitting high up on a lookout.
- A**nd above all these, 37.15  
implore the Almighty to guide your steps in the way of truth.
- DIFFERENT WISDOM**
- A** plan must be at the beginning of all work; 37.16  
reflection comes before every action.
- W**hen you decide, four ways are open before you: 37.17  
good and evil, life and death, 37.18  
and that which is continually lord over them is the tongue.
- T**here exists a clever man who is an instructor to many, 37.19  
and to his own soul he is useless.
- S**omeone merely muses in words, so nobody regards him; 37.20  
this one will be lacking in any luxury.
- F**or no charm has been granted him by the Lord, 37.21  
because he is devoid of any wisdom.
- A**nother man is wise only for himself. 37.22  
**H**e himself takes advantage of his wisdom.
- T**he truly wise man teaches his people, 37.23  
and the fruits of his understanding are reliable.
- C**hild, during your life test out your soul, 37.27  
and see what is harmful and avoid it.
- F**or not everything suits everybody, 37.28  
nor is everyone satisfied with all things.
- B**ecause of gluttony many have died, 37.31  
but he who pays attention will add to life.

## GRIEVING

Child, weep for the dead, 38.16  
lament to express your sorrow,  
and bury the dead with fitting ceremony,  
and do not fail to honour his tomb.

Weep bitterly, cry out with a full voice, 38.17  
and mourn according to the merits of the deceased.

Let it be for one or two days, and so avoid criticism,  
and then be consoled in your grief.

For sorrow may lead to death, 38.18  
and grief of the heart will cripple strength.

Remember! There is no coming back, 38.21  
you do the dead no good, but rather harm yourself.

## CRAFTSMEN AND WISE MEN

A scholar acquires wisdom during his leisure hours, 38.24  
free from business he is capable of becoming wise.

How shall he who steers a plough 38.25  
and boasts in the shaft of a goad become wise,  
when he drives cattle and is engaged in their tasks  
and his talk is about the offspring of bulls?

He will give his heart to ploughing furrows, 38.26  
and all his attention is devoted to fattening heifers.

It is the same for all craftsmen and skilled workers, 38.27  
who toil day and night,  
professional engravers and designers of seals.

All are intent on creating different designs  
and reproducing the model,  
and they work even at night in order to succeed.

All of these rely on their hands, and each is skilled in his work. 38.31

Without them a city could not be built, 38.32  
no settlers or travellers would come to it.

But they are not to be found in the councils of people. 38.33a

On the judge's seat they will not sit,  
and the disposition of a legal decision they will not understand,  
but they will support the foundation of an age, 38.34  
and their need is in the execution of a craft.

Quite different is it with the person 39.1  
who spends his life reflecting on the Law of the Most High.

He will seek out the wisdom of all the ancients,  
and he will be occupied with prophecies.

He will preserve the narratives of famous men, 39.2  
and he will penetrate into the twists of illustrations.

He will seek out the inner meaning of proverbs, 39.3  
and is interested in the secret of parables.

He will serve among nobles, 39.4  
and he will appear in front of rulers.

He will travel in the lands of foreign nations, and has experience of both the good and evil in mankind.	
He will devote his heart to rise early towards the Lord who made him, he opens his mouth in prayer and makes supplication because of his sins.	39.5
If the great Lord so wills, he will be filled with a spirit of understanding.	39.6
He will pour forth words of his wisdom, and in prayer he will acknowledge the Lord.	
Many will praise his understanding, and it will never be erased; his memorial will not depart, and his name will live for generations of generations.	39.9
 <b>THE MISERY OF HUMAN LIFE</b>	
Painful is the lot of all humans, and a heavy yoke rests on Adam's sons from the day of their exit from their mother's womb until the day of their return to the mother of all.	40.1
What is on their mind, what they fear in their heart, is the day of their death.	40.2
From the king, glorious on his throne, robed in purple and wearing a crown,	40.3
to the lowliest person sitting in dust and ashes and covered with sackcloth,	40.4
there is anger, envy, trouble and unrest, fear of death, rivalry and quarrels.	
Even at the moment of rest upon a bed, we are troubled by dreams as vivid as if it were day and we were fleeing from a battle.	40.5
 O death, how bitter is the remembrance of you to someone who lives happily among his possessions.	41.1a
O death, your sentence is welcome to a needy person whose strength is failing, who is old, worn out, and full of worries.	41.2a
Do not be afraid of Death's sentence, think of those who have gone before you and those who will follow.	41.3
 Have regard for your reputation, for it will live on, of greater value than a thousand hoards of gold.	41.12
My children, observe my teaching and live in peace.	41.14a
This is the fate of every living creature, man and beast, but for sinners it is seven times worse.	40.8 40.9
Everything that is of the earth goes back to the earth, and what comes from the waters returns to the sea.	40.11

### ABOUT TRUE WEALTH

All bribery, all injustice will disappear, but good faith will last forever.	40.12
The money of the unjust will dry up like a river, and like loud thunder in a rainstorm it will crash.	40.13
The life of a self-reliant and hard-working person will be sweet, and such a life is as he finds a treasure.	40.18
Children and the building of a city fix a name securely, and above both is a wife regarded as blameless.	40.19
Wine and music gladden a heart, and above both is love of wisdom.	40.20
The flute and harp make sweet melodies, and above both is a pleasant tongue.	40.21
Friend and companion meet at the right moment, and above both is a wife with a husband.	40.23
Gold and silver make a foot firm, and above both counsel is highly esteemed.	40.25
Hidden wisdom and unseen treasure, what profit is in either?	41.14b
It is better for a man to hide his foolishness than to conceal his wisdom.	41.15

### TRUE AND FALSE SHAME

Therefore, show respect for my judgment, for it is not good to guard against every shame, and not everything will be approved by all with confidence.	41.16
Be ashamed before father and mother, of sexual immorality, and before leader and dynast, of falsehood,	41.17
before judge and magistrate, of error,	41.18
and before an assembly of people, of lawlessness, before partner and friend, of injustice, and before a place where you sojourn, of theft,	41.19b
before planting an elbow for bread, before damning in receiving and giving and before failing to return a greeting,	41.20
before a man's look at a bad woman, or a woman's look at a lascivious man,	*6)(add.)
and before turning away from the face of a relative, before depriving someone of what is his, and before casting admiring looks at a married woman (or married man),	41.21
before friends, of words of reproach, and after giving, do not reproach,	41.22b
before repeating a word of hearsay and before disclosing secret words, and you will be truly modest and finding favour before every human.	42.1

But do not let yourself be led astray  
by any of the things that follow.

Do not be ashamed of these things: of the law of the Most High and his covenant	42.2
and of judging even the wicked fairly, of an account of a partner or travellers	42.3
and of sharing your inheritance with friends, of accuracy with scale and weights	42.4
and of making a profit whether small or great from the business of merchants	42.5
and of much discipline of children and to punish a wicked domestic.	
In the case of a wicked wife, a seal is excellent, and where there are many hands, lock up.	42.6
Whatever you hand over, by number and weight and giving or receiving, put everything in writing.	42.7
Do not be ashamed of discipline for the stupid and foolish and for the aged guilty of sexual immorality.	42.8
Doing that, you prove that you are a well-educated person, and you will be generally respected.	
<b>FATHER'S ANXIETY ABOUT HIS DAUGHTER</b>	
A daughter causes her father hidden worries, and anxiety about her deprives him of sleep: in her youth, lest she become past her prime, and having married, lest she be hated, in virginity, lest she be defiled	42.9    42.10
and she become pregnant in her father's house, being with a man, lest she transgress, and having married, lest she be barren.	
Over a wanton daughter keep strict guard, lest she make you a laughing-stock to enemies, the talk of the town and a public disgrace.	42.11
Do not be taken in by human beauty, and in the midst of women do not deliberate.	42.12
For from garments proceeds a moth, and from a bad woman, woman's wickedness.	42.13

**PRAYER**

**W**ho will put a guard on my mouth  
and effectively lock up my lips,  
to prevent me from sinning  
and my tongue from hastening my ruin? 22.27

**O** Lord, Father and Master of my life,  
do not abandon me to the thoughtless words of my lips,  
or allow me to fall because of them. 23.1

**W**ho will set whips upon my thought  
and discipline of wisdom upon my heart  
so that they might not spare my faults of ignorance  
and he shall not let their sins go? 23.2

**T**hat my acts of ignorance may not be multiplied,  
and my sins may increase,  
and I will fall before my adversaries,  
and my enemy will rejoice over me. 23.3

**O** Lord, Father and God of my life,  
do not allow me to become haughty,  
and keep greed far away from me. 23.4  
23.5

**D**o not let lust and lechery take hold of me,  
and deliver me not up to filthy passions. 23.6

**EPILOGUE**

**A**s for myself, I have been the last to be awoken,  
and as one who gleaned after the grape-pickers. 33.16

**B**y the blessing of the Lord I arrived with the first,  
and like one who picks grapes I filled a wine vat. 33.17

**C**onsider that I have not laboured for myself alone  
but for all those who seek instruction. 33.18

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## **EDITORIAL NOTES**

- 1) I abridged and edited the Book of Sirach in 1986 and 1990, and I formulated the explanations between 2011 - 2016.

The edited Slovak texts were translations of: The Old Testament, issued by Saint Adalbert Association in Trnava 1955, 1969; and Apocrypha, Kalich - Praha, 1985.

Some verses I edited or supplemented based on my understanding of the author's intent. For the English version, I selected the corresponding verses from translations in English, available online:

"11+Sirach+pp+979-1017", and

<http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/nets/edition/30-sirach-nets.pdf>

Also, in this case, the editions and supplements as per the Slovak text I used based on my understanding of the author's intent.

Translations in different editions sometimes differ significantly, as our knowledge of the meaning of the Hebrew words may be insufficient nowadays. Therefore, the translators may have modified the literal translations of some words into the Slovak, Czech, and English languages based on their own understandings to depict the most precise meaning of Sirach's thoughts. Some of them were more successful than others.

The translators numbered some verses within blocks differently, based on the source they used. These are sometimes distinguished by different insertions or variants of a thought. Thus, the numbering of some English verses differs from the numbering of the corresponding Slovak verses in our text.

For the sake of preciseness, it needs to be said that the version presented here may be perceived by experts of the text as a compilation of extracts from the book, as the abridged text only represents approximately 33% of the original text. However, I have tried to maintain the structure as well as the moral principles of the work as fully as possible. Where Sirach uses many poetic images to support the main idea, I only chose basic verses.

When abbreviating the ideas contained in several verses, I marked the verse with an "a" in cases where I only use the first part of the sentence, and a "b" in cases where I only use the second part of the sentence (e.g. 41.14a, or 41.22b). Similarly, "c" is used in cases where only a middle part of the sentence contained in several verses is used.

- 2) The editions and acceptable length of the text were chosen with the perceptiveness of 10-13-year-old children in mind. This significantly influenced the selection of verses in abbreviating.

It is probable that one who instils an abridged text into the heart at a young age will turn to the original when he grows older.

- 3) When editing the Slovak (as well as the English text), I changed the remarks of the author from "My son" to "My child", as the work is useful for both boys and

girls. Thus, I have also sent the extended message of the ancestors to my daughters and granddaughters, as well as to other girls who will read the book. Where the author clearly addressed men, the original text was preserved.

- 4) Upon editing the text, I inserted some verses into different blocks than in the original texts so as to create a new continuity of thought, otherwise disturbed by omitting surrounding verses. The most important was probably the migration of two blocks from within the body of the book to the end, with the headings Prayer and Epilogue. The headings do not form part of the original text.
  
- 5) The line marked with \*5)(*add.*) on page 42 was edited to quantify Sirach's advice based on the so-called rule of four glasses. I encountered this rule in 1976 while reading a novel about a Jewish scribe who became the Roman citizen. It does not form part of the original text.
  
- 6) Two lines marked with \*6) (*add.*) on page 52 were included in the text to address both boys and girls, based on note 3).