PIRQE ABOT 3:1: Integrity, without exceptions

In the third chapter of Pirqe Abot we find Aqabiya ben Mahalalel, a prominent rabbi of the time of the Mishna, who lived during the first half of the first century of the Common Era. Before examining what he has said, let's see something about the unique personality of Aqabiya ben Mahalalel.
Aqabiya was famous for his extreme loyalty to his teachers and his solid moral integrity, which was tested on more than one occasion. What most marked the life of Aqabiya was that he maintained his view on four rabbinic subjects (□□□ □□□□□ □□□□ □□ ,□□□□□□ and other themes that we will not describe because they are very technical issues) against the view of his colleagues. We know that, on the one hand, we must be faithful to the traditions we have received from our elders, and that loyalty to the received tradition is absolutely critical in the teacher-student relationship. Teachers are confident that their students will follow their steps, and disciples considered a matter of honor to convey the tradition received from their teachers. On the other hand, as we know, many times different opinions arise among the rabbis—similar to the differences between judges or legislators of any country—and when those differences are not resolved within the framework of the rabbinical debate , the matter is submitted to vote and the court would respect and adopt the majority's opinion. In the case of Aqabiya ben Mahalalel, these two principles, loyalty to one's teachers and following the opinion of the majority of Rabbis, collided, came into conflict: on one hand, his teachers taught him to follow opinion A, while most rabbis of his generation held view B.
Aqabiya's colleagues urged him to reconsider and change his mind, but he refused. Then the rabbis made him an irresistible offer: knowing that Aqabiya had sufficient knowledge, good name and merits for the job, they offered him that, would he change his mind, he would be assigned as the Chairman of the Highest Rabbinical of Israel! To everyone's surprise, Aqabiya rejected the offer. He said, "I'd rather be taken for a fool for the rest of my days (for not accepting that deal)

than leading anyone to ever believe that I’m a corrupt person (for accepting that “sweet” deal)” … מוטב לי ליקרות שוטה כל ימי.

Interestingly, before Aqabiya died he told his son that he should follow the opinion of the majority of the rabbis, and not his father’s opinion. His son asked, “But father, all your life you kept your opinion, and you are asking me now to follow the opposite view.” To which Aqabiya replied: “I received the tradition of my teachers, who in those days were the majority. And my colleagues followed the opinion of their teachers …But you my dear son, you just received the tradition from me, an individual. My colleagues are now the majority, and you must respect the new leaders and adopt their opinion … “

The Gemara also tells an episode, very relevant for today, which demonstrates the limitless integrity of this illustrious Hakham. At the end of the days of Aqabiya, his son asked him a very “common” favor. He said something like this: “Dear father, you are very well respected, loved and admired among the Hakhamim. Your colleagues would do anything for you. I ask you please to recommend me, and talk about me to any of your friends, so I can have an easier access to a position of prominence.” Then, Aqabiya ben Mahalalel formulated one of the most famous Rabbinic statements of all times, four Hebrew words that became the highest standard of moral integrity and the rejection of nepotism, traffic of influence and other similar forms of corruption. His words were, verbatim, מעשיך יקרבוך ומעשיך ירחיקוך, which means: “Your own actions will bring you closer (to the position you aspire) or will you drive away (from that position).” In other words: I’ll not recommend you to my colleagues. What really matters is your merits, not your family connections. Your merits will bring you to the position you so long. Your actions are your best recommendation. It is about your deeds, not my influence.