



**ELITE 8: MATCH 3 - VOTE FOR WHICH OF THESE TEXTS SHOULD MOVE ON TO THE FINAL 4:**

<https://forms.office.com/r/8rF34DhCe1>

### **Elite 8 Additional NEW Study Questions for both texts:**

1. In Makkot, which of the “levels” of summarizing the Torah do you like best? Why?
2. Both of these texts effectively try to “summarize” Torah, either into basic precepts or by using metaphor. What are the advantages of “reducing” the complexities of Torah into simpler and/or smaller ideas? What are the disadvantages?
3. Torah contains both universally relatable ideas and very particular stories and cultural ideas. To what degree can we summarize Torah into universal ideas while retaining the particularity that makes it Torah?

### **Babylonian Talmud Makkot 3b-24a**

The Holy One, blessed be God, desired to make Israel worthy, therefore God gave them the Law [to study] and many commandments [to do]; for it is said, Adonai was pleased, for Israel’s righteousness’ sake, to make the Law great and glorious (Isaiah 42:21). [...]

Rabbi Simlai when preaching said: Six hundred and thirteen *mitzvot*/precepts were communicated to Moses, three hundred and sixty-five negative precepts (“thou shalt not”s...), corresponding to the number of solar days [in the year], and two hundred and forty-eight positive precepts (“thou shalt”s...), corresponding to the number of the members [joints or bones] of a human’s body.

Said Rabbi Hamnuna, [...] David came and reduced them to eleven [principles], as it is written, “A Psalm of David. Adonai, who shall sojourn in Your House? Who shall dwell upon Your Holy Mountain?— (1) They that walk uprightly, and (2) do righteousness, and (3) speak the truth in their heart; that (4) has no slander upon their tongue, (5) nor does evil to their neighbors, (6) nor take up criticism against their neighbor; (7) who only seeks good companions, (8) Who honors them that are faithful to God, (9) who does not blame others, (10) who does not take advantage of those less fortunate, (11) nor takes bribes; they shall never be shaken” (Psalms 15:1-5). [...]

Isaiah came and reduced them to six [principles], as it is written,

“(1) One that walks righteously, and (2) speaks uprightly; (3) One that fights the oppression, (4) One that does not take bribes, (5) One that refuses to listen to evil (6) and shuts their eyes from looking upon evil; they shall dwell on high” (Isaiah 33:15). [...]

Micah came and reduced them to three [principles], as it is written, “It hath been told to you, ‘Do what is good, and what God does require of you: (1) only to do justly, and (2) to love mercy, and (3) to walk humbly with your God’” (Micah 6:8). [...]

Again came Isaiah and reduced them to two [principles], as it is said, “This says God: (1) keep justice, and (2) do righteousness” (Isaiah 56:1).

Amos came and reduced them to one [principle], as it is said, “God said to the house of Israel: Seek Me, and live” (Amos 5:4).

To this Rabbi Nahman ben Isaac demurred, saying, [Might it not be taken as,] Seek Me by observing the whole Torah and live? But it is Habakkuk who came and based them all on one [principle], as it is said, “But the righteous shall live by their faith” (Habakkuk 2:4).

### **Original Thought Questions for Babylonian Talmud Makkot 3b-24a**

1. Why is there a desire to summarize the Torah?
2. Why is simplicity important?
3. Can the Torah truly be summarized or distilled down to a few words or sentences?
4. Are these good summaries? Are they missing anything?
5. How would you summarize the Torah?

### **[Midrash] Song of Songs Rabbah 1:2**

Words of Torah are likened to waters: “All who are thirsty, come all to the waters” (Isaiah 55:1). As waters reach from one end of the world to the other, so Torah reaches from one end of the world to the other. As waters give life to the world, so Torah gives life to the world. As waters are given without cost to the world, so is Torah given without cost to the world. As waters are given from heaven, so is Torah given from heaven. As waters are given to the accompaniment of powerful thundering, so was Torah given to the accompaniment of powerful thundering. As waters restore one's spirit, so Torah restores one's spirit. As waters cleanse one from uncleanness, so Torah cleanses an unclean person from their uncleanness. As waters come down in myriads of drops and become a multitude of brooks, so are words of Torah; today a person learns two Halakhot [laws], tomorrow two more, [and so on], until they become like a bubbling brook. As waters leave a high place and flow to a low place, so Torah leaves one whose opinion of themselves is high and cleaves to one whose spirit is lowly. As water is not kept in vessels of silver or gold, but in humble earthenware vessels, so Torah abides only in one who regards themselves as part of the earth, not above it. When thirsty, an adult is not ashamed to say to a child, “Let me have a drink of water,” so in studying Torah an [unlearned] adult should not be ashamed to say to a child, “Teach me a chapter,” “Teach me a verse,” “Teach me a word,” even “Teach me a single letter.” As with water, if one does not know how to swim in water, they will end by drowning, so with words of Torah: if one does not know how to swim in them and teach them, they will drown in the end.

### **Original Thought Questions for Song of Songs Rabbah 1:2**

1. Do you think water is a good metaphor for Torah?
2. Water is essential to life; do you feel that way about Torah?
3. Why do you think Torah is traditionally read on Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays? How long can you go without water? How long can you go without Torah?
4. Can you think of other metaphors for Torah?