



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).

Thought Questions:

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?

Zohar According to Rabbi Natan 20, on Idra Zuta 15

Rabbi Hananiah, deputy high priest, said: One who takes words of Torah to heart will be relieved of anxieties about war, anxieties about famine, anxieties about foolish preoccupations, anxieties about unchastity, anxieties about the impulse to evil, anxieties about craving another person's spouse, anxieties about trifles, and anxieties about the yoke of flesh and blood. For in the book of Psalms, it is written by David, king of Israel, "The precepts of the Adonai are right, a joy to the heart," etc. (Ps. 19:9).

But one who does not take words of Torah to heart will be burdened by anxieties about war, anxieties about famine, anxieties about foolish preoccupations, anxieties about unchastity, anxieties about the impulse to evil, anxieties about craving another person's spouse, anxieties about trifles, and anxieties about the yoke of flesh and blood. For it is written in Deuteronomy by our teacher Moses, "They shall serve as signs and proofs against you and your offspring for all time. Because you would not serve Adonai your God in joy and gladness over the abundance of everything..." (Deut. 28:46-48).

Thought Questions:

1. How can Torah help ease the burden of life?
2. Do you ever find Judaism to be helpful in stressful situations?
3. What about Shabbat? Is it helpful or necessary to take a break from reality?
4. How could a lack of relationship with the Torah result in higher stress?

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