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ABOUT THE
GREATEST
COMMANDMENT

This Is the Whole Torah

A non-Jew once came to Shammai and said to him: "Convert me to Judaism, on condition that you can teach me the whole Torah while I am standing on one foot."

With a builder's measuring rod in his hand, Shammai angrily threw him out.

The non-Jew then went to Hillel and repeated his request: "Convert me to Judaism, on condition that you can teach me the whole Torah while I am standing on one foot."

Hillel converted him and taught him as follows: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah. All the rest is commentary. Go now and study it!"

B. *Shabbath* 31a

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Still a Greater One

Love your neighbor as yourself.
(Leviticus 19:18)

Rabbi 'Aqiba said: "This is the great principle of the Torah."

But Ben 'Azzai said: "There is an even greater one than this. It is found in Genesis 5:1: 'This is the book of the generations of Man. When God created Man, He made him in the likeness of God.' (For here, not only the neighbor is involved, but all human beings.)"

Siphra, Qedoshim, pereq 4:12, ed. Weiss, p. 89b

From Moses to Habakkuk

Rabbi Simlai preached:

Six hundred and thirteen commandments were revealed through Moses.

Then David came, and found their basis in eleven commandments, as it is said in the fifteenth Psalm:

A psalm of David.

Lord, who may stay in Your tent,
who may reside on Your holy mountain?

- (i) He who lives without blame,
- (ii) who does what is right,
- (iii) and in his heart acknowledges the truth;
- (iv) who has no slander upon his tongue;
- (v) who has never done harm to his fellow,
- (vi) or borne reproach for his acts toward his neighbor;
- (vii) for whom a contemptible man is abhorrent,
- (viii) but who honors those who fear the Lord;

- (ix) who stands by his oath even to his hurt;
 - (x) who has never lent money on interest,
 - (xi) or accepted a bribe against the innocent.
- The man who acts thus shall never be shaken.

Then Isaiah came, and found the basis in six commandments, as it is said in Isaiah 35:15-16:

- (i) He who walks in righteousness,
- (ii) speaks uprightly,
- (iii) spurns profit from fraudulent dealings,
- (iv) waves away a bribe instead of grasping it,
- (v) stops his ears against listening to infamy,
- (vi) shuts his eyes against looking at evil—
such a one shall dwell in lofty security.

Then Micah came, and found the basis in three commandments, as it is said in Micah 6:8:

He has told you, O man, what is good,
and what the Lord requires of you:

- (i) Only to do justice
- (ii) and to love goodness,
- (iii) and to walk humbly with your God.

Then Isaiah returned, and found the basis in two commandments, as it is said in Isaiah 56:1:

Thus said the Lord:

- (i) Observe what is right
- (ii) and do what is just.

Then Amos came, and found the basis in one single commandment, as it is said in Amos 5:4:

Thus said the Lord to the House of Israel:

- (i) Seek Me, and you will live!

But Rabh Nahman bar Isaac objected to this: "Amos 5:4 could

be understood to imply that God is to be sought through the observance of the entire Torah (which would give us a basis of six hundred and thirteen commandments, and not the single commandment that is the basis of them all). Rather would we have to say that the Prophet who found the basis of all the commandments in one single commandment was Habakkuk, who (in Habakkuk 2:4) said: 'The righteous shall live by his faith.'"

B. *Makkoth* 23b, 24a

From Akiba to Moses

Rav Judah taught in the name of Rav: When Moses ascended the mountain, he found the Holy One, blessed be He, occupied in attaching little crowns to the letters of the Torah. [In a Torah scroll, unlike printed Hebrew script, seven of the letters have the ornamentalations or "crowns" referred to in our text.]

Moses asked Him: "Master of the Universe, why are You attaching those crowns?"

God replied: "Someday in the future, a man will appear named Akiva ben Joseph and he will be able to make heaps of interpretations just based on these little crowns."

Moses said: "Let me see him."

"Turn around," God said.

Moses found himself in Akiva's academy and sat in the back to listen to the class. But he was unable to understand what was going on and he was distressed.

Finally a certain subject came up and the students asked Akiva, "How do you know this?" and Akiva replied "This is a teaching from Moses on Sinai." And Moses was pleased. . . .

(Talmud, *Menahot* 29b)