

Thirteen Principles of Torah Elucidation

An overview of the Oral Torah's systemized rules for how the Written Torah may be interpreted.

Lesson 1: The Source and Meaning of the Oral Torah

Why Torah must be comprised of both a Written Law and an accompanying Oral Tradition.

The Thirteen Principles of Torah Exegesis (*Shlosh Esreh Middot ShehaTorah Nidreshet Bahem*):

When G-d gave the Written Law to Moses he also instructed him how one is to study and understand the Torah. Every word and letter in the Torah is exact, and many laws can be extrapolated from an extra (or missing) word or letter, or a particular sequence which the Torah chooses to use. The thirteen principles which are the keys to uncovering the secrets of the Torah are called the "*Shlosh Esreh Middot ShehaTorah Nidreshet Bahem*."

For instance: One of the rules is: "Anything that was included in a general statement, but was removed from the general statement in order to teach something, was not removed to teach only about itself, but to apply its teaching to the entire generality." An example for the usage of this rule is: In Exodus 35:3 the Torah says "You shall not light fire in any of your dwellings on the Shabbat day." Now, kindling a fire was already included in the general statement that prohibits work on Shabbat (Exodus 20:10). It was removed from the general rule and stated independently in this verse to teach us that it is a distinct form of work and, as such, carries a distinct penalty. Moreover, this lesson applies to each of the 39 categories of work included in the general statement. Thus, there isn't a broad category called "work," rather each type of work is to be viewed as distinct. Therefore, if someone should do several kinds of work while unaware that they are forbidden on Shabbat, he must bring a separate sin-offering to atone for each type of work that he did.