

TARYAG MITZVOS: NO. 613

by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene

Rabbi Sumlae'i learned: Taryag mitzvos, 613 commandments were said to Moshe at Sinai. There are 365 negative commandments which correspond to the 365 days of the solar calendar and 248 positive commandments parallel to the 248 components in the human body. (Talmud, Makkos 23b)

In his message to the threat of Eisav marching with his army towards Yaakov, he sent a tribute to pacify his angry twin brother and informed him im Lavan garti, "with Lavan I sojourned" (Bereishis 32:5). The word "garti" has the same letters as "taryag, 613". Yaakov advised Eisav, "Although I took up residence with Lavan, nevertheless I observed the commandments in their entirety. Nor was I influenced by his wicked conduct". (Rashi, ad loc)

Moshe brought down G-d's Torah to the Jewish people. It contains 613 commandments - divided into 248 positive commandments and 365 negative commandments - reflected in how the numerical value of "Moshe Rabbeinu", Moshe Our Teacher, is 613.

613 is the number which defines a Jew's existence and life.

It is impossible for one individual Jew to fulfil Torah in its entirety. Some laws are only relevant to men; others to priests and still others, only to kings. Some relate to the Temple which was destroyed. It takes the unification of Jewish people, as one entity as at the foot of Sinai, for all the diverse 248 limbs to combine and make up the collective body.

Each mitzvah, like the individual components of the body, has intrinsic value. Each has a unique function to call its own - the heart circulating the blood, the eyes as the vehicle of sight, the nose to smell etc.

But they operate in a wider setting, in conjunction with all the others, to become a complete body, a whole unit. This is why each mitzvah must be heeded in equal measure - each is an important component in providing vitality for the united spiritual make-up of the Jewish people. If a little spring is missing, the mechanism of a watch will not function. No mitzvah can be negated or downplayed, Heaven forbid. Nor can one afford to dismiss one law and only accept to fulfil 612 commandments (See Rabbeinu Yonah, Shaarei Teshuva). It requires the joint efforts of all the different members of the Jewish nation to fulfill the 613 commandments. When involved in mitzvah observance, it should ideally be performed "In the name of the entire [nation of] Yisrael", as the Jewish nation are, at root, one.

What is important is that the "soul" to each one of 613 commandments is the same.

The commandments are, after all, 613 different means and pathways to connecting to G-d Who is One. A mitzvah is classified as an eitzah, "guidance". Through "any" one of these precepts, man is able to forge a pathway to draw close to his Creator.

That means every mitzvah earns him merit. Every mitzvah performed is important insofar as the common denominator running through each mitzvah is identical: obedience to the Divine Will. Accordingly, it is absurd to be selective when it comes to mitzvah observance or to favor one mitzvah over and above another.

Many sources mention the good practice of studying and memorizing all 613 commandments. Since many laws cannot be enacted today, learning the rules and laws of that mitzvah is deemed equivalent to its observance: "Anyone who is involved in the laws of the burnt offering, it is as if he has actually sacrificed it" (Menachos 110a).

The Jewish nation's performance of the 613 commandments encompassing all circumstances and all generations is what crowns G-d as King of the Universe and glorifies His Name.

And guess what?

The title Hashem Eloy-kei Yisrael, "Hashem the G-d of Israel" adds up numerically to... 613. Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene and **Torah.org**.