

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas  
Acharei-Kedoshim

8 Iyar, 5786 – April 25, 2026

Compiled from the works of  
**Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson**  
**The Lubavitcher Rebbe**

by  
Rabbi Shmuel Mendelsohn  
North Miami Beach, FL

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**An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Rashi  
Parshas Acharei-Kedoshim  
Likkutei Sichos Volume 17, Pages 215 – 224**

**Rashi in His Own Words**

ויקרא י"ט – י"ח: ... ואהבת לרעך כמוך אגני ה':

רש"י ד"ה ואהבת לרעך כמוך: אמר רבי עקיבא זה כלל גדול בתורה:

**Vayikroh 19:18:** you shall love your fellow as yourself. I am Hashem.

**Rashi Heading – You shall love your fellow as yourself:** Rabbi Akiva says, "This is a great principle of the Torah."

**Synopsis**

In this week's Torah portion, Acharei-Kedoshim, we find the famous commandment to "love our fellow as ourselves." Rashi cites these words and writes that "Rabbi Akiva says, 'This is a great principle of the Torah.'" The fact is that Rashi's commentary is not an ethical treatise. Its purpose is to explain the simple meaning of each verse. "Loving your fellow as yourself" does not present any difficulty in Peshat; hence, Rashi should not need to explain it.

When we learn that one is obligated to love his fellow as himself, an obvious question comes to mind. The Torah has numerous Mitzvos that govern interactions between people. What need is there for individual, interpersonal commandments? Why does the Torah need to tell me not to steal, not to rob, not to take revenge or bear a grudge, etc., etc.? I am commanded to love my fellow. The commandment is not merely to love him but to love him as I love myself. I'm not going to take something that is his! I will certainly not cause him any harm!

That is why Rashi tells us that this is a principle of the Torah. In other words, it is a general rule or a set of rules. This set includes many details, and all of them involve not causing another individual any bodily or financial harm. We find many such examples in the Torah.

However, this pattern differs from others. Usually, the Torah writes the details near the general rule. Here, the interpersonal laws are scattered from one end of the Torah to the other! To explain this, Rashi tells us that it differs from other general principles and is a "great principle."

**Rashi's Explanation**

This week's Torah portion, Acharei-Kedoshim, instructs us in several fundamental Torah laws. Among them is to<sup>1</sup> "love your fellow as yourself." Rashi cites these words and comments, "Rabbi Akiva says that this is

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1. Our Parshah, Vayikroh 19:18.

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a great principle of the Torah." Rashi is teaching us the special significance of this particular Mitzvah. This law is considered an all-encompassing principle from the many laws included in the Torah.

Rabbi Akiva's teaching contains the same idea that Hillel taught several generations earlier<sup>2</sup>. "That which is hateful to you, you shall not do to your fellow. That is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary."

### **Difficulties in Understanding Rashi**

Rashi's commentary on the Torah is not an ethical work. Rather, it primarily serves to explain Peshat, the simple meaning of the words of the Torah. Rashi himself says so numerous times throughout his commentary<sup>3</sup>. There are also unique teachings alluded to throughout Rashi's comments that go far beyond Peshat. These include teachings in every approach to Torah study. This also includes the mystical, Kabbalistic path to understanding the Torah. There are also practical lessons in Rashi's comments, which teach us how to serve Hashem daily. We must strive to learn every lesson from Rashi's commentary we can.

Nonetheless, the main point of his commentary is to explain the simple meaning of the words. He is primarily there to hold a beginner's hand and explain, step by step, what the Torah is saying. He limits himself to pointing out things that could present a potential question to the novice.

Based on this, there appears to be a difficulty. Why do the words "love your fellow as yourself" present a difficulty? They seem to be self-explanatory! Let us assume that these words present a difficulty for the beginning student. How and why could the terms "these are a great principle in the Torah" possibly explain that difficulty?

We also need to understand why Rashi quotes this teaching in the name of Rabbi Akiva. Generally speaking, Rashi does not cite his sources; he only names the Sage whom he is quoting, when this dispels some difficulty. What additional understanding do we gain from Rabbi Akiva's teaching of this statement?

### **The Explanation**

There is an obvious question with which the commandment to love one's fellow as oneself presents us. The Torah is divided into two different types of commandments. There are those Mitzvos between man and G-d, and some commandments are between man and his fellow man, i.e., interpersonal commandments<sup>4</sup>. These are called "מצוות בין אדם לחברו" – Mitzvos Bain Odom L'Chaveiro. One example of the first type of Mitzvah would be Hashem's commandment to all Jewish men to put on Tefillin every weekday. An example of the second type would be not to deceive one's fellow in business.

The commandment to love our fellow as ourselves would seem to include the majority of Mitzvos between

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2. See Talmud Shabbos 31, a.

3. See for example Parshas Bereishis, Bereishis 3:8 and 3:24.

4. Despite the fact that these are called Mitzvos between man and his fellow, the reason for observing them is because G-d so commanded.

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a man and his fellow. If one loves his fellow, he obviously will not deceive him. This is undoubtedly true if he loves him "as he loves himself!" Quite to the contrary, if one loves his fellow *as himself*, he will constantly be looking out for his welfare.

That is why Rashi explains that this is "a principle of the Torah." It is a general rule or a set that includes many details. Among the elements included in this is not stealing, robbing, or damaging another's property. This is quite common; the Torah often gives us one general commandment and lists its details. We find this clearly stated regarding the laws of "Shemittah – the Sabbatical Year." Rashi says<sup>5</sup>, "With the laws of Shemittah, its general principles and finer details were all stated from Sinai. The same is true of all Mitzvos."

However, a difficulty remains. When the Torah writes a general principle and its finer details, it generally writes them all together or at least close to each other. Here, the commandment to love your fellow as yourself is written in our Torah portion. However, all of the details, the interpersonal commandments, are scattered throughout the Torah. That is uncommon! Rashi explains this by saying that this principle is unlike any other principle of the Torah. It is a *great* principle of the Torah, and it is great to the extent that many of its details are principles in their own right. This principle spans the entire Torah. Accordingly, its components cannot be written in proximity.

We need to understand the answer to a more general question: how can Hashem command us to feel an emotion<sup>6</sup>? One can be commanded to act. But how can I be commanded to love *every Jew*? Not just that, but to love each one *as I love myself!*

By telling us that this is a general principle (which consists of details), Rashi answers this question. The way to fulfill this principle is by fulfilling its components. By lending money to my fellow without charging him interest, helping him by giving him Tzedokoh, not deceiving him, etc., I am fulfilling the general rule of loving him.

However, that still does not explain how I can love him with the same intensity that I love myself! Rashi alludes to the answer to this question by stating that his source for this is Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva teaches the following law<sup>7</sup>. "If two are traveling (far from civilization) and one has a pitcher of water. (There is insufficient water to sustain both of them.) If both of them drink, they will both die. However, if only one drinks, he can survive and reach civilization. Ben Petura taught that they both should drink and die rather than one of them

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5. See Rashi's comments to Parshas Behar, Vayikroh 25:1.

6. A similar question is asked regarding the commandment (Parshas Vo'eschanan, Devorim 6:5) to "love the Lord your G-d." There one answer which is given is that the commandment is to meditate on things which awaken the natural love which the soul feels for G-d.

7. See Talmud Bava Metzi'a 62, a.

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witness his companion's death. This was until Rabbi Akiva came and taught that<sup>8</sup> 'your brother may live with you.' Your life takes precedence over his life."

Rabbi Akiva believes that your own life takes precedence, and hence, loving him *as* you love yourself is not meant to be taken literally. Instead, it means (according to Peshat) that the love I have for my fellow must be as great as the love I have for myself.

### A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

As mentioned above, there are two Talmudic statements regarding the Mitzvah of loving one's fellow. There is the mandate cited by Rashi here: "Rabbi Akiva says that this is a great principle of the Torah." There is also the saying of Hillel<sup>2</sup>: "That which is hateful to you, you shall not do to your fellow. That is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary."

The difference between the two is clear. According to Rabbi Akiva, the love of a fellow is one principle of many in the Torah, and it is indeed a *great* principle. However, according to Rabbi Akiva, it is one of the many principles the Torah teaches. In contrast, Hillel says this concept is the *entire* Torah. Everything else written in the Torah is included in this one Mitzvah.

Based on this, we can understand why Rashi cites Rabbi Akiva's teaching rather than Hillel's. According to Peshat, we cannot say that loving one's fellow as oneself is the entire Torah; rather, it is a general principle that encompasses all interpersonal laws. However, we cannot say that it includes all of the laws between man and G-d.

That is why in the Talmud,<sup>2</sup> Rashi explains, "that which is hateful to you, you shall not do to your fellow" in an unusual manner<sup>9</sup>. He offers two explanations for the term "your fellow." The first (and primary) explanation is that it refers to Hashem. According to this explanation, the word fellow in English should be written "Fellow" (with an upper-case "F"). Based on this, it does indeed include the entire Torah; Hillel is saying not to do that, which is hateful to G-d. In his second explanation, Rashi explains that the word "fellow" refers to an ordinary flesh-and-blood fellow. However, according to that, he must explain the words "This is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary" as referring only to the part of Torah between man and his fellow man.

According to Rashi's second explanation in the Talmud, we must understand how the Mitzvah of loving one's fellow can include the *entire* Torah. The Alter Rebbe explains<sup>10</sup> that by viewing each Jew as one, one can

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8. Parshas Behar, Vayikroh 25:36.

9. Rashi's commentary to the Talmud is also based on Peshat. However, Peshat in the Talmud is on a totally different level than it is in the Chumash. That is because a beginning student of Talmud is far more advanced than one who is beginning Torah.

10. See Tanya Chapter 32.

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love a fellow Jew as oneself. If one focuses on the physical, then we are all different. There is not necessarily a reason for me to love someone else. However, if I focus on the spiritual, the essential part of each one of us is the Divine soul. In terms of the soul, there is no actual difference between one and the other. We are all a veritable part of the one G-d. The only thing that divides us is our bodies. From this, we see that the way to love a fellow as ourselves, we must elevate the spiritual above the physical. Focusing on the G-dly spark in everything indeed includes the entire Torah.

*(Adapted from a talk given on Shabbos Parshas Kedoshim 5727)*

**I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.**

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