

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas Acharei-Kedoshim

12 Iyar, 5781 – April 24, 2021

Compiled from the works of
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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 אני 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, 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 reason for being is to explain the simple meaning of each verse. "Loving your fellow as yourself" does not present any difficulty in Peshat; hence Rashi does 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 which govern the interaction between one person and another. What need is there for individual inter-personal commandments? Why does the Torah need to tell me not to steal, rob, take revenge or bear a grudge, etc.? Hashem commands me 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 which is his! I will certainly not cause him any harm!

That is the reason that Rashi tells us that this is a principle of the Torah. In other words, it is a general rule or a set. This set includes many members. The members of this set are not causing another individual bodily or financial harm. We find many such examples in the Torah.

However, one could ask that this principle is different than others. Usually, the Torah writes the details in proximity to the general rule. However, the Torah lists the inter-personal laws from one end to the other! To explain this, Rashi tells us that this is different than other general principles. Loving one's fellow as oneself is a "*great principle*."

Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Kedoshim, instructs us in quite a few fundamental Torah laws. Among them

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is to¹ "love your fellow as yourself." Rashi cites these words and comments that "Rabbi Akiva says that this is a great principle of the Torah." Rashi is teaching us the special significance of this particular Mitzvah. From among all of the many regulations included in the Torah, this law is considered an all-encompassing principle.

Rabbi Akiva's teaching contains the same idea as that which was taught by Hillel several generations earlier². "That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary."

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Rashi's commentary to the Torah is not a work of ethics. Instead, it primarily serves the function of explaining Peshat, meaning the simple meaning of the words of the Torah. Rashi himself says as much numerous times throughout his commentary³. There are also profound teachings alluded to throughout Rashi's comments which go far beyond Peshat⁴. These include lessons in every approach to Torah study, including the mystical, Kabbalistic path to understanding the Torah⁵. There are also practical lessons included in Rashi's comments, which teach us how to serve Hashem daily. We must strive to learn every lesson from Rashi's commentary, which we possibly 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 are the words "love your fellow as yourself" difficult? They seem to be self-explanatory! Let us assume that these words are difficult for the beginning student. How and why could the words "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 doing so dispels some difficulty. What additional understanding do we gain from the fact that Rabbi Akiva taught this statement?

The Explanation

There is an obvious question with which the commandment to love one's fellow as oneself presents us. There are two different types of commandments in the Torah. Some Mitzvos that are between man and G-d.

1. Our Parshah, Vayikroh 19:18.

2. See Talmud Shabbos 31, a.

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

4. See Tractate Shavuos of the Sheloh, 181, a.

5. This is known as "the Wine of Torah." See Hayom Yom, Page 24.

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These are called “מצוות בין אדם למקום – Mitzvos Bain Odom L’Mokom.” Others are between man and his fellow man, i.e., inter-personal commandments⁶. 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 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!" On the contrary, if one loves his fellow *as himself*, he will constantly be looking out for his welfare.

That is the reason that 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 to steal, rob, or damage another's property. This is quite common; quite often, the Torah gives us one general commandment and then lists all of its details. We find this clearly stated regarding the laws of "Shemittah – the Sabbatical Year." Rashi says that⁷ "Hashem gave us the laws of Shemittah, its general principles, and its finer details at Sinai. So too, is the case with all Mitzvos. Hashem gave us both their general principles and their finer details at Sinai."

However, there is still a difficulty remaining. When the Torah writes a general principle and its finer details, it generally writes them all together or near each other. Here, the Torah writes the commandment to love one's fellow as himself in our Torah portion. However, all of the details, the inter-personal 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. It is great to the extent that many of its details are principles in their own right. This principle spans the entire Torah. Accordingly, one cannot write all of its components in proximity to each other. They encompass the entire Torah.

We need to understand the answer to a more general question. How can Hashem command one to feel an emotion⁸? Hashem can command me to act. But how can He command me 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 the principle is by fulfilling its components. By lending money to my fellow without charging

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

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

8. 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.

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him interest, helping him by giving him Tzedokoh, not deceiving him, etc., 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 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 law⁹. "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 it is better that they both drink and die, rather than one of them witness his companion's death. This was until Rabbi Akiva came and taught that¹⁰ 'your brother may live with you.' Your life takes precedence over his life."

Rabbi Akiva believes that your own life takes precedence. Hence, one should not take loving him *as* you love yourself literally. Instead, what it means (according to Peshat) is that the love I have for my fellow must be as I love myself, comparable to 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 here by Rashi; "Rabbi Akiva says that this is a great principle of the Torah." There is also the saying of Hillel²; "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. It is indeed a *great* principle. However, according to Rabbi Akiva, it is one of the many principles which the Torah teaches. In contrast to this, Hillel says that this concept is the *entire* Torah. Everything else which is 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. We can say that it is a general principle that includes all of the inter-personal laws. However, we cannot say that it includes all of the laws between man and G-d.

That is the reason that in the Talmud², Rashi gives an unusual explanation to "that which is hateful to you, you shall not do to your fellow."¹¹ 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

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

10. Parshas Behar, Vayikroh 25:36.

11. 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.

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should be written "Fellow" (with an upper-case "F"). This does indeed include the entire Torah; Hillel says 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, accordingly, he must explain, "This is the entire Torah; the rest is commentary," as only referring to the part of Torah which is 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 explains¹² that only by viewing each Jew as oneself can one genuinely love his fellow. 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 of us is the Divine soul. In terms of the soul, there is no actual difference between one of us and the other. We are all a veritable part of the one G-d. The only thing which divides us is our bodies. We see that the way to love a fellow as ourselves truly is by elevating 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 that you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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12. See Tanya Chapter 32.

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