

בס"ד

THE RASHI OF THE WEEK

Week of

Parshas
Acharei-Kedoshim

10 Iyar, 5777 – May 6, 2017

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 neighbor 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 reason for being is to explain the simple meaning of the verse. “Loving your fellow as yourself” does not present any difficulty in Peshat; hence Rashi should have no 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, 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. Obviously 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 details will be written in proximity to the general rule. However the inter-personal laws are scattered from one end of the Torah to the other! In order to explain this Rashi tells us that this is different than other general principles. This is a “*great principle.*”

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Rashi's Explanation

This week's Torah portion, Acharei-Kedoshim, tells us quite a few fundamental laws of the Torah. Among them 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. This law from among *all* of the many laws included in the Torah is considered to be an all-encompassing principle.

Rabbi Akiva's teaching basically contains the same idea as that which was taught by Hillel several generations earlier². “Do not do to your fellow that which is hateful to you. That is the entire Torah; the rest is (simply) commentary.”

Difficulties in Understanding Rashi

Rashi's commentary to the Torah is not a work of ethics. Rather, it primarily serves the function of explaining Peshat, meaning the simple meaning of the words of the Torah. He himself says as much numerous times throughout his commentary³. There are also astounding teachings alluded to throughout Rashi's comments which go far beyond Peshat⁴. These include teachings in every approach to Torah study. This includes the mystical, Kabbalistic path to understanding the Torah as well⁵. There are also practical lessons included in Rashi's comments, which teach us how to serve Hashem on a daily basis. We must strive to learn every lesson from Rashi's commentary which we can. Nonetheless the main point of his commentary is to explain the simple meaning of the words. He is primarily there in order to hold a beginners hand and explain to him step by step what the Torah is saying. He limits himself to pointing out things which could present a potential question to the novice.

Based on this there appears to be a difficulty. Why do the words to “love your fellow as yourself” present a difficulty? They seem to be self-explanatory! Let us assume that these words do present a difficulty to 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 this statement was taught by Rabbi Akiva?

1. Vayikroh 19:18.

2. See Talmud Shabbos 31, a.

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

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

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

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The Explanation

There is an obvious question with which the teaching to love ones fellow as oneself presents us. The Torah is divided into two different types of commandments. There are those Mitzvos which are between man and G-d. These are called “מצוות בין אדם למקום – Mitzvos Bain Odom L’Mokom.” There is another type of commandment which is 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 ones 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 certainly 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 the reason that Rashi explains that this is “a principle of the Torah.” It is a general rule or a set which includes many details. Among the details included in this is not to steal, rob, or damage another’s property. This is quite common. The Torah often 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 “just as with the laws of Shemittah, its general principles and its finer details were all stated from Sinai, so too is the case with all Mitzvos, both their general principles and their finer details were said at Sinai.”

However there is still a difficulty remaining. When the Torah writes a general principle and its finer details, it writes them all together; at least it writes them in close proximity to each other. Here, the commandment to love your fellow as yourself is written in our Torah portion. However, all of the details, the inter-personal commandments are scattered throughout the Torah. That is uncommon to say the least! Rashi explains this by saying that this principle is unlike any other principle of the Torah. It is a *great principle of the Torah*. This is so to the extent that a number of its details are principles in their own right. This principle spans the entire Torah. Accordingly all of its details do not and cannot be written in proximity to each other.

How it is possible for Hashem to command us to feel an emotion⁸? One can be commended to perform an action. But how can I be commanded to love *each and every Jew*? Not just that, but to love each one *as I love myself*!

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

7. See Rashi’s comments to Vayikroh 25:1.

8. A similar question is asked regarding the commandment (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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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 details. By lending money to my fellow without charging 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 possibly love him with the same intensity that I love myself! Rashi alludes to the answer to this question by stating that his source is Rabbi Akiva. Rabbi Akiva teaches the following law⁹. “If two are travelling (far from civilization) and one has a pitcher of water. (There is insufficient water to sustain both of them.) If they both drink, they will both die. However if only one drinks he can 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 is of the opinion that your own life takes precedence. Hence loving him *as* you love yourself is not meant to be taken literally. Rather what it means (according to Peshat) is that the love which I have for my fellow must be *as, comparable* to the love which I have for myself.

A Deeper Lesson from Rashi

As mentioned above, there are two Talmudic statements regarding the Mitzvah of loving ones fellow. There is the dictum cited here by Rashi; “Rabbi Akiva says that this is a great principle of the Torah.” There is also the saying of Hillel²; “Do not do to your fellow that which is hateful to you. That is the entire Torah; the rest is (simply) commentary.”

The difference between the two is clear. According to Rabbi Akiva, 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 ones fellow as oneself is the entire Torah. What we can say is that it is a general principle which includes all of the inter-personal laws. But we cannot say that it includes all of the laws between man and G-d.

That is the reason that in the Talmud² Rashi explains “do not do to your fellow that which is hateful to you” in an unusual manner¹¹. He offers two explanations for “your fellow.” The first (and primary) explanation is that it refers to Hashem. The word fellow should therefore be written “Fellow” (with an upper-

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

10. 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. That is because a beginning student of Talmud is far more advanced than one who is beginning Torah.

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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 does indeed explain that the word fellow does refer 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 only referring to the part of Torah which is between man and his fellow man.

Indeed we must understand how the Mitzvah of loving ones fellow can possibly include the *entire* Torah. The Alter Rebbe explains¹² that there is one way to achieve love of *every* Jew. 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 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. From this we see that the way to truly love a fellow as ourselves is by elevating the spiritual above the physical. Focusing on the G-dly is indeed the entire Torah.

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

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12. See Tanya Chapter 32.

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