

PARSHAT KEDOSHIM

PARSHA GUIDE

Welcome to the Aleph Beta Study Guide to Parshat Kedoshim!

The Great Principle

Torat Kohanim¹, a midrash on the Book of Leviticus, records that Rabbi Akiva was once asked, what is the greatest principle in the whole Torah? His answer?

Leviticus 19:18

וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ

Love your neighbor as yourself

It's a quote which comes from this week's parsha. In fact, this command has taken on the quality of a sort of Jewish sound bite, and for good reason: it's a beautiful encapsulation of the compassion and humanism which throbs at the heart of the Bible's laws. But do we really understand this command? Sometimes the things which we quote the most, we understand the least. Moreover, when we take a quote out of context, we can lose something of its deeper meaning. "Love your neighbor as yourself" is a part of a larger sequence of commands, commands which interrelate in fascinating ways, each one shedding light on the next. What does this "greatest principle" mean when you're able to see it in its full light?

Context Clues

Let's dive into Chapter 19 of Leviticus to see the command in context:

Leviticus 19:17-18

17 You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your fellow, and you shall not bear a sin on his account. **18** And you shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself...²

ויקרא יט:יז-יח

יז לא-תשנא את-אחיך בלבבך; הוֹכַח תוֹכִיחַ
את-עמיתך, ולא-תשא עליו חטא. יח
ולא-תטור את-בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ, וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ...

¹ Torat Kohanim 19:45. Rashi also brings this in his comment on Leviticus 19:18.



INSTRUCTIONS

There are a lot of divrei Torah on the parsha. How is this different?

At Aleph Beta, we believe that the Torah is a guidebook that answers life's biggest questions, offering profound insights about how we should live our lives. Moreover, we believe that Jewish tradition has always recognized the right of all readers, in every generation, to look at the text themselves and try to decide what they think it means. That means you. That's why you are the most important author of this quest through the sources. We think that this guide offers a fun, stimulating and relevant path through the sources, but if you get wrapped up in a stimulating discussion and never make it past page 2, we'll consider that a success!

Is this guide for self-study or should I study it with others?

Either works! You can gather a small group of friends to explore it together, share it with a chevruta (learning partner), or go through it by yourself.

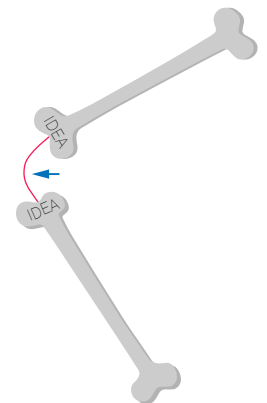
Do I need to prepare anything or can I just jump in?

Just jump in! Even if you're planning to use this for a group discussion, just open up to page 1 and get going. (If you read it in advance, it will spoil the fun!) The only thing you should do in advance is print out copies of the "Source Sheet" for the other participants, so everyone can follow along and engage with the sources.

About the Author

Most of the material within – although not the particular language contained in this guide - was first developed and taught by Rabbi David Fohrman, founder and CEO of Aleph Beta, and is presented in his video, "Parshat Kedoshim: How Can I Achieve True Love?" (available for viewing at www.alephbeta.org). This guide was written by Beth Lesch, edited by Rivky Stern, and arranged by Laura Schembre.

Let's play a little game with these verses. We call it: "Take It Apart and Put It Back Together Again." The goal is to break down the verses into their component parts and then to put them back together again. Of course, reconstructing them isn't as easy as it looks, because to really know how the whole thing works, you have to figure out how the ideas *connect*. What's the basic logic between them? How does one flow into the next? Imagine it like a skeleton: the ideas are the bones, but the Torah doesn't give us the ligaments; it just states the ideas, one after the other. It's up to us to figure out how the ideas fit together.



Take It Apart



LOOK INSIDE

Let's start by taking the verses apart. Read through verses 17-18 again. How would you divide them into their component parts? What are the basic ideas here?

Leviticus 19:17-18

17 You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your fellow, and you shall not bear a sin on his account. **18** And you shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself...²

ויקרא יט:יז-יח

יז לא-תשנא את-אחידך בלבבך; הוכיח תוכיח את-עמיתך, ולא-תשא עליו חטא. יח לא-תקם ולא-תטור את-בני עמך, ואהבת לרעך כמוך...

² We are omitting the concluding words of the verse, *אני יקרה*, "I am God," because our focus here is on the logical flow which *leads up* to the command to love your neighbor as yourself. That clause is deserving of its own fascinating study.

We came up with five basic ideas:

A	Do not hate your brother in your heart	לֹא-תִשְׁנָא אֶת-אָחִיךָ בְּלִבְּךָ
B	You shall surely rebuke your fellow	הוֹכַח תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת-עַמִּיתְךָ
C	Do not bear a sin on his account	לֹא-תִשָּׂא עָלָיו חַטָּא
D	Neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people	לֹא-תִקֶּם וְלֹא-תִטּוֹר אֶת-בְּנֵי עַמְּךָ
E	You shall love your neighbor as yourself	אָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ

Now, you might have separated “don’t take revenge” and “don’t bear a grudge,” or you might have come up with a different organization altogether. Not to worry; there’s no single right answer here. The point that we want to emphasize is that there are multiple distinct commands contained in these verses, and it’s not at all obvious how each one connects to the next. What’s the logical flow? How does A relate to B, and B to C? In order to see it, we’ll have to study each one more closely. Let’s begin with A.

A Heartfelt Emotion



PONDER THIS

“Don’t hate your brother in your heart” - what exactly does this mean?



Hint: What does the word בְּלִבְּךָ (“in your heart”) add?

Here’s how we understand “in your heart”: To hate someone in your heart is to bury your hatred deep inside – all the while smiling on the outside, pretending that everything is fine.³



PONDER THIS

Wait - does this mean that it’s okay to hate somebody, so long as it’s not “in your heart”?

We think the surprising answer, when you look at the Bible, is yes. Things go wrong between people. Hatred is a normal human emotion. It’s okay to feel hatred. The problem is when you bury that hatred. That’s what the verse forbids.

לֹא תִשְׁנָא אֶת אָחִיךָ, בְּלִבְּךָ
DO NOT HATE YOUR FELLOW **IN YOUR HEART.**



³ This follows the interpretation of Nachmanides on Leviticus 19:17.

A Necessary Confrontation

Now we understand the meaning of A. So let's move onto the next link in the chain, what we referred to as B:

Leviticus 19:17

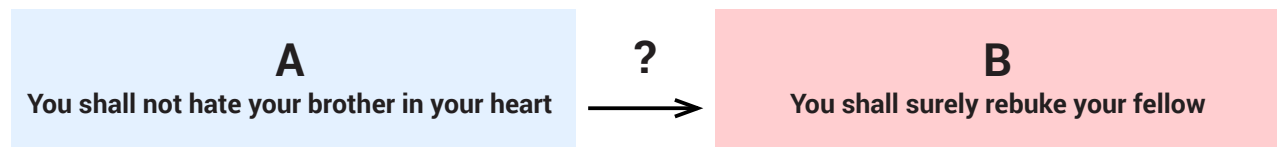
הוֹכִיחַ תּוֹכִיחַ אֶת-עַמִּיתְךָ

You shall surely rebuke your fellow



PONDER THIS

Let's focus on the transition from A to B. What is the flow of logic that connects these two ideas?



If you had to plug in a **conjunction** word – like *and, but, because, instead, then, therefore, unless* or any other word – which would you use?

We want to suggest that the connecting piece is “**instead**” – as in: Don't hate your brother in your heart. *If you find yourself hating your brother, here's what you should do instead, to deal with those feelings:* rebuke your fellow. Confront him and tell him what he did to make you upset. If you do that, you'll have laid your cards on the table. You're allowed to hate – but first, you need to make your case to your “brother,” the one who wronged you. Hatred likes to be secretive, to bury itself. Don't give in to that impulse. Be upfront.

But why? Why does the Bible command us to confront those who wrong us? Isn't it better to keep your anger to yourself? What could possibly be constructive about bringing it out into the open?



PONDER THIS

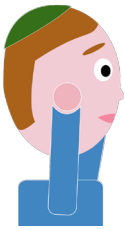
Imagine that you think you overheard a friend of yours gossiping about you. You're hurting, you feel betrayed. But the Bible tells you: It's okay to be upset, but you've got to talk to him about it. What might happen when you confront your friend and tell him how you feel? Imagine as many possibilities as you can.

Imagining the Possibilities

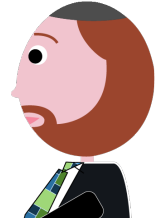
Yes, it's possible that he will say: “I really did mean to hurt you, and I don't feel bad about it! And you know what? I'd do it again!” In such a case, you can go on hating him - because the hatred is no longer in your heart. You've put it on the table. It's not simmering inside of you.

But that's not the only possibility. We can imagine a few other possibilities:

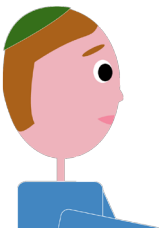
- A** You try to formulate your complaint - and you find that you really can't make your case at all. In that case, your anger melts away.



"Now that I stop to think about it, I didn't hear enough to be sure that he was actually gossiping about me. I was jumping to conclusions. I guess I don't have such a great reason for being angry after all."



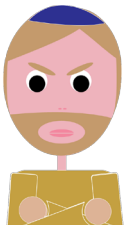
- B** You make your case - and your brother shows you that it was really a misunderstanding. In that case, too, your anger melts away.



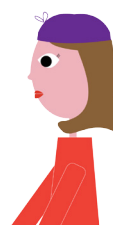
"Oh, you thought that I was gossiping about you? Yes, I was talking about you behind your back, but I think you misheard me. I was actually singing your praises to this guy who is thinking about making a job offer to you."



- C** You make your case - and your brother hears you and apologizes for his mistake. If his apology is sincere, you'll probably find that your angry feelings are diffused.



"You're right, I was gossiping about you - and I'm really sorry. In the moment, I wasn't thinking about how I was betraying your trust. I was just caught up in the moment of a juicy conversation. It was the wrong thing to do. I hope you'll forgive me."



Being honest about your hurt and anger can be scary - but if you want to have any chance of repairing your relationships, you've got to do it. If you hate your brother and you never confront him, you'll just be stewing in your own anger. You'll never give him a chance to correct your misconceptions, or to apologize, or give yourself a chance to forgive. The Bible is giving us a remarkably constructive method for dealing with conflict in interpersonal relations - a way for resolving conflict, if at all possible.

Constructive Criticism

Now we can appreciate how A connects to B. Let's turn to C:

Leviticus 19:17

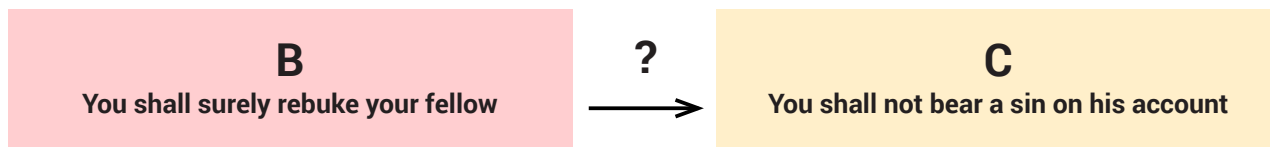
לֹא-תִשָּׂא עָלֶיךָ חֵטְא

Do not bear a sin on his account



PONDER THIS

How does B connect to C?



Again, think back to our list of **conjunction** words: *and, but, because, instead, then, therefore, unless*. Which would you use?

How about “*but*”? As in: Rebuke your fellow, *but when you do, make sure that you don’t do it in such a way that you end up* bearing a sin on his account?

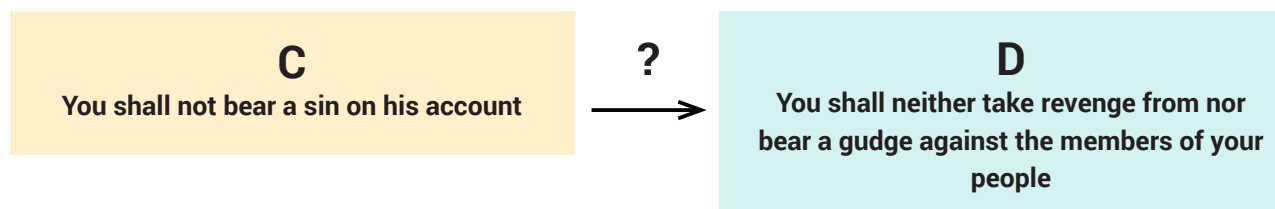
In other words, you’ve got to be careful about *how* you give rebuke. Even if your friend *was* gossiping about you, you can’t show up at his workplace and start telling him off in front of his co-workers, or in front of his family or friends. The Bible isn’t giving you a blank check to embarrass him in public, or to knock on his door and yell his ear off, to abuse him verbally. If you do that, you yourself will have sinned! When you make your case, you have to do it in a way that isn’t hurtful. That requires sensitivity and creativity.⁴

An Avoidable Mistake



PONDER THIS

Let’s take the next step: What’s the link between C and D?



How about “*then*”? As in: *If you are careful to* rebuke your fellow -- *to notice when you are experiencing hatred, and to confront your friend and lay your cards on the table in a way that is constructive and not hurtful -- then you will not end up* “taking revenge or bearing a grudge against the members of your people.” D is the evil alternative; it’s what will unfortunately happen if you hate your brother in your heart and you fail to deal with it. You’ll end up taking revenge or bearing a grudge.

What do these two ideas mean, taking revenge and bearing a grudge? Here’s how Rashi interprets them:

⁴ This is indeed how the medieval commentator Rashi understands the verse. See Rashi on Leviticus 19:17.

Rashi on Leviticus 19:18

You shall neither take revenge: For example, someone says to his friend, "Lend me your sickle," and the friend replies, "No!" The next day, the friend says to him, "Lend me your ax." He says to him, "I'm not lending anything to you, since you didn't lend to me!" - this constitutes revenge.

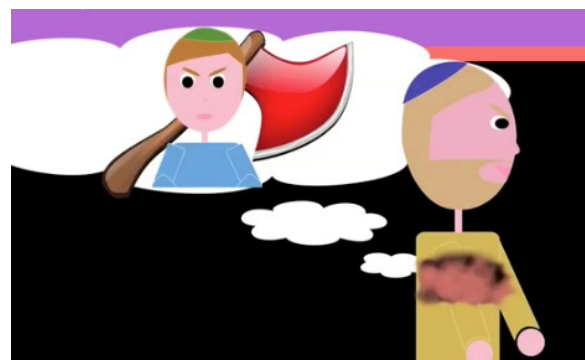
And what constitutes "bearing a grudge?" For example, he says to his friend "Lend me your ax," and the friend replies, "No!" Then the next day, the friend says to him, "Lend me your sickle." He says to him, "Here you are; I'm not like some people who don't lend their things..." - this constitutes bearing a grudge. For he keeps the hatred in his heart, even though he does not actually take revenge. (Torat Kohanim 19:44, Yoma 23a)

רש"י על ויקרא יט:יח

לא תקם: אמר לו השאילני מגלך. אמר לו לאו. למחר אמר לו השאילני קרדומך. אמר לו איני משאילך בדרך שלא השאלתני, זו היא נקימה.

ואיזו היא נטירה, אמר לו השאילני קרדומך. אמר לו לאו. למחר אמר לו השאילני מגלך. אמר לו הא לך ואיני כמותך, שלא השאלתני. זו היא נטירה, שנוטר האיבה בלבו אף על פי שאינו נוקם:

It can be so easy to rationalize your hatred, to say: "So my friend was gossiping about me, but I can handle it. I can make myself smile when I'm with him. I can get past this." You look happy, and everything appears to be fine. But on the inside, you've still got a lot of negative emotions directed at your friend. The Bible is telling us that repressed hatred always comes out. The only way to avoid it? Go back to Step B - confront the pain, speak with your brother.



The Final Link

Finally, we've made it to the grand conclusion: "Love your neighbor as yourself."



PONDER THIS

How does this idea follow from all of the others? What's the connection?

We think it goes like this: *If you follow the advice of A through D, then you'll be in a position to do E:* to "love your neighbor as yourself." A through D are prerequisites for E. Because what gets in the way of love? Buried hatred, submerged tensions that could have been resolved. So the Bible is giving us a path for dealing constructively with our hatred.

A Recipe for Love

"Love your neighbor as yourself" doesn't come out of nowhere. Sometimes relationships get broken, sometimes friends betray one another's trust, sometimes misunderstandings arise - but the Bible gives us a recipe for love in the face of all of that. Even when tension does arise, in most cases, there's a way to diffuse the hatred and clear the path for love. It all starts with constructive and sensitive confrontation.

Think about what an effective recipe this is: how much of our hatred would be diffused if we were forced to confront those who wronged us and to talk it over?

This is how you get to love - a love that works through the problems, that takes the misunderstandings and the little slights and turns them into building blocks for an honest and true affection.



Love the guide?
Then **SHARE** and **SUPPORT!**

Think of friends and family who will love it as much as you did - and share it with them!

And when you do, please remember to support Aleph Beta. Nothing makes us happier than bringing eye-opening, soul-heartening, life-changing Torah directly to you — but it all costs money. Like the cost of the writing, editing, design and circulation of the guide that you're reading. So until we win the lottery, we need your support. Encourage your friends to subscribe to Aleph Beta, so they can get the guides sent directly to them! Or if you shared it with a friend and it was an awesome experience for both of you, consider making a small donation to show your love.

Thanks for understanding - we love you guys, too.

Source Sheet

Leviticus 19:17-18

17 You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your fellow, and you shall not bear a sin on his account. 18 And you shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

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ויקרא יט:יז-יח

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רש"י על ויקרא יט:יח

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