



Love of Others and Love of Self

PreText

You shall not hate your kinsfolk in your heart.
 Reprove your kinsman but incur no guilt because of him.
 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear a grudge, against your countrymen;
V'ahavta l'rei'akha kamokha/Love your rei'a as yourself; I am Adona-i.
Leviticus 19:17-18

The commandment in bold triggers so many questions! Give a quick response to 3-5 of these:

1. How can one be commanded to love? Isn't that beyond 'commanding'?

2. Is this commandment about feelings or actions? If actions, how does one operationalize this *mitzvah*, in actuality?

3. Who is our *rei'a*? Any human? Any stranger? Literally a neighbor? A fellow Jew? Someone like ourselves in some particular way?

4. List people whom you truly love, no question about it: _____

5. Are we supposed to love ourselves? Is that a *mitzvah*, too? Are there limits/shapes to that?

6. If you love yourself, how is that manifest(ed)? _____

7. What does the first part of the verse – about not taking vengeance and not bearing a grudge – have to do with the middle (bolded) part?

8. And what does the last part – *I am Adona-i* – have to do with the middle part?

9. Are there limits on our love for others?

10. What does this *mitzvah* mean for us, as *bikur cholim* visitors? _____



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With indebtedness to Nehama Leibowitz, Itturi Torah, Stone Humash, and many more

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Leviticus 19:17-18

Our Sages based a number of teachings/rules on this verse; here are just two examples:

*The least painful death must be used for capital offenders

(see BT Ketubot 37b, Sanhedrin 45a)

*A husband may not put his wife into situations that might make her distasteful to him.

(see BT Kiddushin 41a; Niddah 17a)

Very famously now, Hillel paraphrased this commandment:

.....it happened that a certain heathen came before Shammai and said to him, 'Make me a proselyte, on condition that you teach me the whole Torah while I stand on one foot.' Thereupon he repulsed him with the builder's cubit which was in his hand. When he went before Hillel, he said to him, 'What is hateful to you, do not to your neighbor:' that is the whole Torah, the rest is the commentary thereof; go and learn it.

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 31a

Let's examine the famous 'discussion' of Ben Azzai and R. Akiva:

Ben Azzai said: THIS IS THE BOOK OF THE DESCENDANTS OF ADAM (*Genesis 5:1*) is a great principle of the Torah. R. Akiba said: But "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR REI'A AS YOURSELF" (*Leviticus 19:18*) is even a greater principle. Hence you must not say, 'Since I have been put to shame, let my neighbor be put to shame.' R. Tanhuma said: If you do so, know whom you put to shame, [for] 'In the Likeness of God made He him.'*

B'reishit/Genesis Rabbah 24:7

* In the *Sifra*, *Kedoshim 4:12*, the order is reversed. R. Akiba's view being stated first, viz., that "You shall love... is a great principle," and then Ben Azzai maintains that THIS IS THE BOOK, etc., is even a greater principle. For from R. Akiba's verse it might be said that when a man is put to shame he may retaliate, since he is not asked to love his neighbor *more* than himself. Whereas this verse stresses the sanctity of man even then, for he was created in God's likeness, and an insult to man is an insult to God...

Rashi, on our verse, brings just a part of this discussion in Sifra:

Rabbi Akiva said: 'This is a fundamental principle of the Torah.' -- *Sifra* (4th century anonymous midrashic commentary on the book of Leviticus)

Rashi/R. Shlomo b, Yitzhak, 1040-1105, France; pre-eminent Bible/Talmud commentator

See how Rashi's grandson attempts to resolve an issue posed by this *mitzvah*:

Love your rei'a as yourself...If your neighbor is good, but if he is wicked, "the fear of Adona-i is to hate evil." (*Proverbs 8:13*)

Rashbam, R. Shmuel ben Meir (1080-1158), grandson of Rashi, member of the Tosafist school, so committed to the P'shat (plain meaning of Biblical text) that he "took on" his Zeide! (But here – not very p'shat-esque?!?)

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Ramban/Nahmanides narrows “Love” and distinguishes “qualitative” fr/ “quantitative”:

The phrase “**Love your rei’a as yourself**” is not meant literally, since man cannot be expected to love his neighbor as his own soul. Rabbi Akiva himself ruled the contrary, that “your life takes precedence over your fellow man’s.” The Torah here implied that we should wish our neighbor to enjoy the same wellbeing that we wish ourselves. Perhaps this is the reason for the dative instead of the accusative form of the verb phrase. It does not state, “Love your neighbor,” but “Love /for (*le*) your neighbor/as yourself.” Sometimes a person will be interested in his neighbor’s welfare in certain respects only; he may wish him wealth, but not scholarly attainments and the like. But even if he wishes him well, in everything, in wealth, honor, learning, and wisdom, he will still not want him to be absolutely equal with him. He will still want to be superior to him in some respect. It was this form of selfishness that the Torah condemned. But, a man should wish his fellow well *in all things*, just as he wishes his own self, and have no reservations. The text referred to such love in the case of Jonathan and David, when it stated that Jonathan loved him “as his own soul.” This implied that he had removed all jealousy from his heart and was able to say, ‘For you shall rule over Israel.’

Love your fellow with all the qualities and modes of love with which you love yourself. The text is concerned with love in its *qualitative* and not its *quantitative* sense. A man may love an inanimate object. But the quality of the love is different. Man will not love his animal in the same way as he loves his son. A man’s wife, his silver, gold, fig and vine may all be the objects of his love. But in each case, the *nature* of the love is different. But in objects of belonging to the same category, as far as the nature of the love is concerned, the strength or intensity may vary. A man may love his younger son more than the older. Wherever he cannot extend love to two objects at one and same time, he will prefer the one he loves more. God commanded us to love our fellow man, just as we love ourselves. The quality and nature of our love must be of the highest category – parallel to that which we employ in promoting our own welfare. Wherever this love of others does not clash, however, with our own legitimate interests, we are obliged to promote our fellowman’s welfare, just as we would our own. The quality must be the same but not necessarily the quantity. The intensity, the strength of our love may vary with the circumstances. If we cannot promote his welfare without injuring our legitimate interests, then we are not obliged to do so. The Torah did not allude to the *extent* of our love but to its *character*.

Nahmanides/Ramban, R. Moshe b. Nahman, Spain/Israel 1194- 1270; Biblical commentaries colored by Kabbalistic insights yet adhering to p’shat and guided by Talmud/Midrash

The word *kamokha* is not usually used adverbially, but rather subjectively, meaning, ‘similar to you’ (cf. *Genesis 44:18*). Love your neighbor who is as yourself. Every person was created in the image of God. Love him/her therefore because s/he is as yourself. The text therefore offers us no advice on how far to go in loving our neighbor. It merely tells us to love our neighbor who is a human being ‘just like you.’ The Hebrew phrase for loving a person as one’s self is, indeed, employed elsewhere, in the case of David and Jonathan where it states that the latter loved David ‘as his own soul’ (*ke-nafsho*).

Biur, ca. 1780-83; Humash commentary by Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786)(in collab.with Solomon Dubno, Naftali Herz Wessely, Naftali Herz Homburg, and Aaron Yaroslav)



The Stone Humash (page 662) offers this list of realistic examples of how one can fulfill this commandment, as offered by *HaK'tav v'HaKabbalah*:

- a. Your affection for others should be real, not feigned;
- b. Always treat others with respect;
- c. Always seek the best for them;
- d. Join them in their pain;
- e. Greet them with friendliness;
- f. Give them the benefit of the doubt;
- g. Assist them physically, even in matters that are not very difficult;
- h. Be ready to assist with small or moderate loans and gifts;
- i. Do not consider yourself better than them.

HaK'tav v'HaKabbalah, 1839, one of the first comprehensive Humash commentaries aimed at demonstrating how the Oral Tradition (Kabbalah) could be read into the Written (K'tav). Composed by Rabbi Jacob Zvi Mecklenburg (1785-1865), Chief Rabbi of Konigsburg

Some Teachings from the Hassidic World, Broadly Stated:

From Itturei Torah; translation the total responsibility of Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear a grudge...

It was said about the saintly R. Shaul Katzenellenbogen, over whom Purah, the angel of oblivion/forgetfulness, had no power/authority, that he was a one-of-a-kind Master of Memory: He never forgot anything (“nor 1 ½ of anything”) of what he heard and saw, only someone’s transgression in opposing him or insulting him – that he forgot immediately.

M'kor Barukh of Barukh Bendet ben Reuven (aka Benedict Reuven Gomperz) died 1753, German rabbi and author

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear a grudge...

The great esteemed rabbi, Moshe of Kobrin (1784-1858), had many opponents (*mitnagdim*) who humiliated him and caused him grief exceedingly, and he heard these affronts and was silent.

“*Rabbeinu*,” one tormentor once asked him, “behold our Sages taught (*in BT Yoma 22b-23a*) that ‘Any *Talmid Hakham*/scholar who does not avenge himself and retain anger like a serpent, is no real scholar,’ and so why does Your Honor remain silent and does not react to the affront of a *Talmid Hakham*”?

“The matter is thus,” R. Moshe of Kobrin explained to them, “When I arrive at the *Pamalia shel Ma’alah* (the “ministering angels,” the “Family of Above”) and they ask me, ‘Why did you remain silent and did behave as a *Talmid Hakham* at the hour that they insulted you?’ I will respond, ‘I did not consider myself to be a *Talmid Hakham*. But if I take vengeance on my opponents, and they asked me in the *Beit Din shel Ma’alah* (the “Heavenly Tribunal”), ‘Why did you take revenge and nourish ill-feeling, are you some kind of *Talmid Hakham*? Maybe you piled on the agony?’ How shall I respond to that?”

A. Katz



Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

They tell of R. Moshe Leib of Sassov (1745-1807) who used to say, “The love of Israel I learned from a certain non-Jew. Once I saw two *goyyim*, country people, sitting in a tavern and eating gluttonously and drinking to intoxication. When their hearts were ‘good with wine and strong drink” (see *Esther 1:10*), they began to kiss one another and one asked the other,

‘Do you really love me?’

‘But of course!’ answered his friend.

‘How can you say,’ the first one asked, ‘you love me, but you don’t know what I lack?’

At that moment, said R. Moshe Leib, I learned, that a person in Israel does not love his fellow truly unless he knows what he lacks.

Pirke Zikhronot liGdolei Yisrael

Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

The commandment to love your fellows does not mean to love saintly and righteous people – it is impossible not to love such people. God commands us to love even people whom it is hard to love.

Rabbi Avraham Joshua Heschel of Kopitchinitz

Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

Our esteemed rabbi, Avraham Hayyim of Zlotchov, asked his rabbi, R. Shmelke of Nicholsburg (d. 1778): “*Love your rei'a as yourself* -- how is one to love an evil one?” R. Shmelke answered him: “All the souls in Israel are as One Soul. Just as your soul is found in all your limbs, and if it should happen, from time to time, that your own hand injures one of your limbs, would you ever beat that hand to warn it of doing so again, adding to your pain in that manner?”

“Thus it is: When your friend, whose soul is your own, causes you evil from lack of knowledge, should you cause him evil? Surely you are only, then, injuring yourself.”

From Ma'ynot HaNetzah

Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

The *Y'hudi HaKadosh* (NOTE: This is Yaakov Yitzhak of Pshysshka, 1766-1814, a great pupil of the Seer of Lublin) posed the challenge: “How can this be? One cannot love everyone in the same manner? Do we not have to love righteous ones more?”

And the *Y'hudi* said: “We must pay close attention to the text. *Kamokha/as yourself*, that means, just as you behave with love of your body, in which different limbs or parts rank differently in your scheme of love – the heart is generally dearer than the hands, the head more than the feet, etc. – so one must love each person according to his value.

Sha'ar HeHassidut

Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

To every thing there is a way to evaluate whether the thing is counterfeit/false or not.

The way to measure if a person in Israel is a true Jew is love of Israel. According to his love of fellow Israelite so is his portion in Judaism. And this is ‘Love your *rei'a*’ – according to the love of your *rei'a* within you – ‘*kamokha/as yourself*’ – you are evaluated.

R. Sinha Bunam of Pshysshka, 1767-1827; author of Kol Simha

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Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

R. Akiva used to say, “This is the great/est principle of the Torah” (*Jer. Talmud, Nedarim* 9:4). – that is, if you want to know your Torah-standing, measure your love of Israel.

From Ma'ynot HaNetzah

Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

How can the Torah command that a person love his fellow “as himself” – is it, then, permitted to love oneself?! Does not self-love lead to egotism, lazy intelligence, self-deceit, and the like? The answer is: ‘*Kamokha/as yourself:*’ Just as you are obligated to hate and nullify yourself in complete abrogation, so are you obligated to love others with a complete love.

From the School of Kotzk (R. Menahem Mendl of Kotzk, 1787-1859; known for his sharpness in learning as well as his perceptiveness with regard to people/human nature)

Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

Just as you love yourself instinctively, not for the sake of a mitzvah, without looking for reasons, so you must love your kinsmen, instinctively, not for the sake of a mitzvah, even without reasons.

The “Sabba of Slobodka” Natan Tzvi ben Moshe Finkel (1849–1927), rosh yeshivah and one of the leaders of the Musar movement, in Lithuania, the Ukraine, and Eretz Yisrael

Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

Those within Israel who commit transgressions are included in “your *rei'a*”, as our Sages taught (*BT Sanhedrin* 52b): “Even those who deserve capital punishment deserve an easy death, because it says, ‘Love your *rei'a* as yourself...’” And when they say that it is a *mitzvah* to hate one who is evil, this is only after they have been fittingly reprovved and he does not accept the *tokhahah* (*Rambam, Hilkhhot Dei'ot.*) And today, we do not know how to properly reprove. In the G'mara (*BT Arakhin* 16): “Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah said, ‘I wonder if there is one in this generation who knows how to reprove!’” – which means that it is perpetually the case that people are “pre-*tokhahah*/reproof.” So the evil one is like one who is forced/compelled, and it is a mitzvah to love him.

The explanation of the Hazon Ish (Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz, 1878-1953, outstanding Lithuanian Talmudic scholar, settled in Israel in 1933) to the Rambam, Hilkhhot Dei'ot

Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

In the siddur of Rav Ba'al HaTanya it says: It is proper to say before prayers, ‘Behold, I take upon myself the positive mitzvah of *Love your rei'a as yourself...*’ The mitzvah of love of Israel is the entry gate to come and stand before the Holy Blessed One to pray.

Every one in Israel is obligated to take upon himself before prayer the commandment of *Love your rei'a as yourself...*, and intend, in his prayer, the betterment of the collective/masses. And if he prays only for his own sake, behold, that is theft.

R. Menahem Mendel of Vorki/Warka (1819–1868)



Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

And our Sages taught: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor,” this is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary: go and study!” (*BT Shabbat 31a*)
That is, don’t make the *Yetzer haRa*/Evil Inclination, who is your enemy, into your friend; You must know that he is your enemy and seeks evil for you. ‘What is hateful to you’ – the one whom you detest and reject – do not make him your friend.’

R. Jacob Ben Wolf Kranz, the Maggid of Dubno (1741-1804)

Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

Regarding the *Yetzer haRa*/Evil Inclination, R. Bunam of Pshysshka once said, “One must imagine that he is like a murderer standing over you with a weapon in his hand, always poised to cut off your head.”

“But what if it is hard for one to picture that?” asked one of his Hassidim.

“That is a sign,” the Rebbe responded, “that he has already beheaded you.”

Siah Sarfei Kodesh, stories/sayings of Hanokh of Aleksandrow (1798–1870), Hasidic zaddik /leader; disciple of Simhah Bunim of Pshysshka and Menahem Mendel of Kotsk,

Love your *rei'a* as yourself...

“What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor,” this is the whole Torah, and the rest is commentary: go and study!” (*BT Shabbat 31a*)

Why didn’t Hillel speak in the language of Scripture: *Love your rei'a as yourself...*

Why did he change it and say, *What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor?*

One can answer that Hillel saw in the proselyte that he wanted to learn the basics of Judaism in a straightforward and guided manner, and he understood that his perception was superficial, and that he could grasp only the negative formulation, not to do to the other, that which causes oneself pain. But to appreciate the positive aspect of love, in the manner of *Love your rei'a as yourself...*, that would be beyond his capability. Therefore, in his desire to draw him near and to help him enter under the wings of the Shekhinah, Hillel utilized this manner of speech that would be closer to his grasp.

Hiddushei HaRim, of R. Isaac Meir Alter of Gur (1799–1866), founder of dynasty, disciple of the Kotzker Rebbe and noted Talmudic scholar

Love your *rei'a* as yourself; I am Adona-i.

If you love your fellow Jew, and think with your whole heart that he is as you, standing with you on the same level – not that you are higher than him and superior to him in virtues and character, but that he stands with you, you are next to each other on one plane – then with the two Jews (in spoken Yiddish, ‘yudin’) as these, in which pure love and complete equality exists between them – I am Adona-i; out of the two of them, together, the Name of the Holy Blessed One is completed (two yudin – as the Tetragrammaton.)

R. David of Mikoliiov, from the students of the Besht

Love your *rei'a* as yourself; I am Adona-i.

If one Jew loves another as himself, as he loves himself, then there is here a double love – of himself and of his fellow. And “*ahavah/love*”, doubled, in *gematria*, forms the Tetragrammaton (2 x 13 = 26). And this is what Scripture intends: **Love your *rei'a* as yourself** – if your love is doubled, that of your *rei'a* plus that of yourself, **then I am Adona-i** – what will emerge from this is the Name of the Holy Blessed One, the Tetragrammaton.-- *R. Abraham, the Maggid of Trisk (1806-1889; author of Magen Avraham)*

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Love your *rei'a* as yourself; I am Adona-i.

The Holy Blessed One says, As long as *you love one another*, each person the other, in truth/sincerity, *I am Adona-i* – as it were, God asks, “Take me, also, into your *hevrutah*.”

Rabbi M. Cohen

Love your *rei'a* as yourself; I am Adona-i.

Love your *re'ia*, *kamokha*/as yourself – as you behave with your *rei'a*, *I am Adona-i* – so I will behave vis-à-vis you.

R. Avraham Yaakov Friedman of Sadigora, directly related to R. Dov Ber of Mezeritch (member of the Agudate Israel's Council of Great Torah Scholars; succeeded his father, R. Mordecai Shalom Joseph, in Tel Aviv in 1978)

And just a few more Jewish quotes about loving others...from over the centuries...

Teach not the love of scholars only, but the love of all.

Avot deRabbi Natan, chapter 16

Love without admonition is not love.

B'reishit/Genesis Rabbah, 54

To be pious towards God is to be affectionate towards men.

Philo, Avraham, 37

Love all, Jews and Gentiles, and envy none.

Hayyim ben Yosekf Vital (1542–1620), one of the greatest kabbalists, in his Shaarei Kedusha

Love is the voice of God.

Grace Aguilar (1816-1847)

*(English novelist/writer on Jewish history and religion;
descended from Portuguese Marranos who sought asylum in England in the 1700s)*

Love is based on equality and freedom.

Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom, 1941, page 161

If you see love as a compromise, a defeat, you're mistaken. It's a victory.
Above all, in time of war, when men are filled with death, this is the time to love.

This is the time to choose.

An act of love may tip the balance.

Elie Wiesel, Gates of the Forest