

Comments on Kedoshim: Leviticus 19 and Exodus 20 - The Holiness Code vs. The Ten Commandments
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דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם קדשים תהיו... Speak to the entire community of the Children of Israel, and say to them: Be holy... (Lev. 19:2)

Rashi's comment:

דבר אל כל עדת בני ישראל. מלמד שנאמרה פרשה זו בהקהל מפני שרוב גופי תורה תלויין בה (ספרא): *Speak to the entire community of Israel. This teaches us that this section was proclaimed in the Hakhel ceremony because most of the fundamental teachings of the Torah are dependent on it.*

To understand this comment we have to recall what the Hakhel ceremony was. It took place every seven years, and in the sabbatical year, at Sukkot, and **the entire community** was to gather at the place of pilgrimage to hear words of Torah as is described in the book of Deut. (31:12):

הקהל את העם האנשים והנשים והטף וגרד אשר בשעריך למען ישמעו ולמען ילמדו ויראו את ה' אלהיהם ושמרו לעשות את כל דברי התורה הזאת.

Assemble the people, the men, the women, and the little-ones, and your sojourner who is within your gates, in order that they may hearken, in order that they may learn and have-awe-for the Lord your God, and take care to observe all the words of this Instruction...

This was a septennial national assembly, during which the people would be able to hear the Torah and have it shape their lives. But to read the entire Torah from start to finish, in a public reading, would take about 80 hours! So what part of the Torah would they have heard when they assembled every seven years? Rashi, quoting an early midrash, Sifra, says that Lev. 19, was the text that was read and studied every seven years at that assembly. Why? Because it contains everything you need to know about how to live as a Jew, the essence of the Torah, or in the language of the midrash, **the key principles of the Torah**. For example: **do not put a stumbling block in front of the blind**, (Lev. 19:14) or **do not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor**, (19:16) or the most famous one of all, **love your neighbor as yourself**, (19:18). We would say that these are some of the most important values in Judaism: integrity, interdependence, and mutual respect and this is what Lev. 19 is all about. What Rashi is saying then is if you have one chance every seven years to study the Torah, this is your text, because this text is the essence of the Torah. We find this idea in a slightly different form in another midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 24). There it is attributed to Rabbi Hiyya, one of the last great figures of the Tannaitic era (c. 220):

תני רבי חייא: פרשה זו נאמרה בהקהל, מפני שרוב גופי תורה תלויין בה. *Rabbi Hiyya taught: This portion was stated in a Hakhel because most of the essential principles of the Torah are dependent upon it.*

But that midrash goes on to give us another reason why this text, Lev. 19, was the chosen text for the Hakhel ceremony.

רבי לוי אמר מפני ששששרת הדברות כלולין בתוכה. *Rabbi Levi (a contemporary of R. Hiyya) said: Because the Ten Commandments are included in it.*

He then goes on to show how Lev. 19 is simply a restatement of the Ten Commandments. Here are some of his arguments demonstrating that Lev. 19 is really a reiteration of Exod 20:

"אנכי ה' אלהיך" – וכתוב הכא: "אני ה' אלהיכם".	(It says there), I am the Lord your God . (Exod. 20:2) And it is written here, I am the Lord your God . (Lev. 19:2)
"לא יהיה לך" – וכתוב הכא: "ואלהי מסכה לא תעשו".	(It says there), You shall have no other gods (Exod. 20:3). And it is written here, Do not make molten gods for yourselves (19:4).
"לא תשא" – וכתוב הכא: "ולא תשבעו בשמי לשקר".	(It says there), You shall not misuse [the name of the Lord your God] (Exod. 20:7) and it is written here, You shall not take an oath in My name falsely (Lev. 19:8).
"זכור את יום השבת" – וכתוב הכא: "ונאז שבתתי תשמרו".	(It says there) Remember the Sabbath day to sanctify it (Exod. 20:8) and it is written here, And you shall observe My Sabbaths (Lev. 19:3).
"כבד את אבירך" – וכתוב הכא: "איש אמו ואביו תיראו".	(It says there) Honor your father and your mother (Exod. 20:12) and it is written here, Each of you shall revere his mother and father (Lev. 19:3).

Let's try to understand the differences between R. Hiyya and R. Levi:

R. Hiyya's Position	R. Levi's Position
Lev. 19 is recited at the Hakhel ceremony because it summarizes the Torah's main principles .	Lev. 19 is recited at the Hakhel ceremony because it is a restatement of the Ten Commandments .
While certainly some of the laws in Lev. 19 are similar to the Ten Commandments, there are many laws in it that are new and different.	Laws that seem new and different are simply reiterations of the Ten Commandments and artful casuistic arguments can connect them.
These laws remind a Jew of how to think and live.	These laws remind a Jew of their covenant at Mt. Sinai.
Lev. 19 expands upon the basic laws uttered at Sinai.	Lev. 19 and the Ten Commandments are essentially one and the same.
The purpose of the Hakhel ceremony is to reacquaint the people with the basic Torah principles and to engage them in life-long learning.	The purpose of the Hakhel ceremony is to reacquaint the people with the Ten Commandments and re-enact their formative experience at Sinai.

We see that there is quite a lot separating the two positions. We might be tempted to say that they represent two fundamentally different educational philosophies regarding

the study of Torah. If we were to ask, what is the purpose of Torah study, R. Hiyya would answer that we study Torah to discover its basic ethical principles so that we can apply them to our lives. R. Levi would answer that we study Torah in order to re-enact Sinai and to sustain our connection to God at all times through a constant reminder of God's revelation. While we might lean to one position or the other, both are compelling rationales for Torah study. Alternatively, we might want to compare the different positions of R. Hiyya and R. Levi to "liberal" and "conservative" tendencies relating to the interpretation of the US Constitution. R. Hiyya is akin to a "liberal" justice (like Stephen Breyer) who views Lev. 19 as a flexible adaption of Sinai, and R. Levi is akin to a "conservative" justice (like Antonin Scalia) who sees everything in Lev. 19 as grounded in the Sinai Constitution, ie. the Ten Commandments. Setting that analogy aside, we should ask though, what are the crucial differences between the Ten Commandments and the Lev. 19? Let's compare:

Ten Commandments	Leviticus 19
אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים.	קְדָשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם.
I am the Lord your God who took you out of Egypt, from the house of bondage.	Be holy for holy am I, the Lord your God!
God is a redeemer.	God is holy.
God wants Israel to be free.	God wants Israel to be holy.
Freedom entails responsibility.	Holiness entails ethics.
Freedom is achieved through constructing a society that adheres to the Ten Commandments.	Holiness is achieved through constructing a society based on the ethical precepts of Lev. 19.
Example: The commandment to remember Shabbat precedes the commandment to honor parents. Implication: the weekly rhythm organizes life, and the family structure is subordinate to Shabbat.	Example: The commandment to revere parents precedes the commandment to keep Shabbat. Implication: the family is the primary organizing structure, and Shabbat is subordinate to the family.

Lev. 19 and the Ten Commandments in Jewish Life

There is plenty of evidence in the Mishnah that the Ten Commandments played an important role in early Jewish liturgy. The priests recited it prior to the Sh'ma when offering the daily sacrifices (Mishna Tamid 5:1) and it continued to be recited by Jews for quite some time after the destruction of the Temple. But the early Christians also recited the Ten Commandments as part of their liturgy; they thought on these commandments alone were from God and the rest of the Torah was not, especially the ritual commandments. To differentiate from the early Christians, the

rabbis abolished the recitation of the Ten Commandments. Nevertheless, we still honor the the Ten Commandments by standing whenever they are read from the Torah. In that way, the Ten Commandments eventually became more iconic. From the earliest periods, Jews depicted the Ten Commandments symbolically, and there is hardly a synagogue today without some visual reference to the Ten Commandments. Lev. 19 on the other hand, is didactic and not iconic, meaning, it is more accessible as a text for study, and many of its key phrases, such as those mentioned above, entered the language of Jews throughout history. We could illustrate the difference in how these two texts are used by looking at some statistics on the website, Sefaria, a major resource in the preparation of Jewish educational material. Let's compare how contemporary Jewish educators approach these two texts, using an important verse from each:

Verse	Lev. 19:18	Exod. 20:11
Hebrew	וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כָּמוֹךָ	כָּבֵד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמְךָ
English	Love your neighbor as yourself.	Honor your father and your mother.
Number of webpages linked	2966	2213
Number of source sheets created	546	303
Commentaries	198	119

While this is not scientific, this illustrates anecdotally that when Jewish educators invest time and effort, they prefer a text from Lev. 19, like *Love your neighbor*, to a text from the Ten Commandments, like *Honor your father and your mother* by a margin of over 3:2. We might add that the Ten Commandments are connected to the story of the Exodus and that the Israelites were terrified when they were given. When Moses remained on the mountain for 40 days, they quickly reverted to idolatry. Moses smashed the tablets, a civil war broke out, and then he went up to get a second set. Arguably, embedded in Judaism is a deep collective memory of terror and trauma when it comes to the Ten Commandments. As iconic and symbolic as they are, when it comes to the way that they are incorporated into Jewish life, there is always a vestige of terror associated with them. That's not the case with Lev. 19. On the contrary, this text and its most iconic line, *Love your neighbor as yourself*, inspire us. Our greatest rabbinic heroes like Hillel and Akiva are deeply associated with it. As heirs to the bible, we take great pride in our contribution of the Ten Commandments to world civilization; but knowing that we gave the world Lev. 19 gives us an extra measure of joy! Shabbat Shalom!

DAY 218.
May the
hostages be
freed!

This Parasha Sheet is sponsored by Steven and Barbara Parkoff to commemorate the yahrzeits of Steven's parents, Meyer and Cecile Parkoff, z'l.

