

זה כלל גדול בתורה (נדריים ט:ד ל,ב)

This is a great principle in the Torah

ואהבת לרעך כמוך. (ויקרא יט:יח) רבי עקיבה אומר זהו כלל גדול בתורה. בן עזאי אומר זה ספר תולדות אדם (בראשית ה:א) זה כלל גדול מזה

What is the epitome of the Torah, the general principle which represents its gist and tells us what the Torah is all about? Rabbi Akiva and Ben Azzai dispute the answer to this question in the Talmud Yerushalmi.

Rabbi Akiva points to the Decalogue in which God commands one to love one's fellow: "and you should love your fellow like you love yourself".

Ben Azzai points to the Scripture speaking about the genealogy of man. "This is the Book of the Genealogy of Man when they were created".

For Ben Azzai the epitome of the Torah is that a person should have equal regard for his fellow as for himself. It is principle that the Torah teaches us by recording the genealogy of man.

For Rabbi Akiva it is a deeper and higher principle than regard = love. The Torah's message is that one should not just have regard for his fellow but should actually love his fellow just as he does himself.

For Ben Azzai the epitome of the Torah is ethnic and part of the natural order of the world while for Rabbi Akiva it is an ethical and moral divine imperative.