

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Ki Teitzei
August 22, 2026 *** 9 Elul 5786

Ki Teitzei in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2286/jewish/Ki-Teitzei-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Ki Teitzei," means "when you go out," and it is found in Deuteronomy 21:10.

Seventy-four of the Torah's 613 commandments (mitzvot) are in the Parshah of Ki Teitzei. These include the laws of the beautiful captive, the inheritance rights of the firstborn, the wayward and rebellious son, burial and dignity of the dead, returning a lost object, sending away the mother bird before taking her young, the duty to erect a safety fence around the roof of one's home, and the various forms of kilayim (forbidden plant and animal hybrids).

Also recounted are the judicial procedures and penalties for adultery, for the rape or seduction of an unmarried girl, and for a husband who falsely accuses his wife of infidelity. The following cannot marry a person of Jewish lineage: a mamzer (someone born from an adulterous or incestuous relationship); a male of Moabite or Ammonite descent; a first- or second-generation Edomite or Egyptian.

Our Parshah also includes laws governing the purity of the military camp; the prohibition against turning in an escaped slave; the duty to pay a worker on time, and to allow anyone working for you—man or animal—to "eat on the job"; the proper treatment of a debtor, and the prohibition against

charging interest on a loan; the laws of divorce (from which are also derived many of the laws of marriage); the penalty of thirty-nine lashes for transgression of a Torah prohibition; and the procedures for yibbum (“levirate marriage”) of the wife of a deceased childless brother, or chalitzah (“removing of the shoe”) in the case that the brother-in-law does not wish to marry her.

Ki Teitzei concludes with the obligation to remember “what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt.”

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Isaiah 54:1 – 10

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/555429/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftarah is the fifth of a series of seven "Haftarot of Consolation." These seven haftarot commence on the Shabbat following Tisha b'Av and continue until Rosh Hashanah.

Forsaken Jerusalem is likened to a barren woman devoid of children. G-d enjoins her to rejoice, for the time will soon come when the Jewish nation will return and proliferate, repopulating Israel's once desolate cities. The prophet assures the Jewish people that G-d has not forsaken them. Although He has momentarily hid His countenance from them, He will gather them from their exiles with great mercy. The haftarah compares the final Redemption to the pact G-d made with Noah. Just as G-d promised to never bring a flood over the entire earth, so too He will never again be angry at the Jewish people.

"For the mountains may move and the hills might collapse, but My kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall the covenant of My peace collapse."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Parameters of Justice by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l (5769)
<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/ki-teitse/the-parameters-of-justice/>

In Deuteronomy 24, we encounter - for the first time - the explicit statement of a law of far-reaching significance:

“Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for parents. A person shall be put to death only for his own sin.” Deut. 24:16

We have strong historical evidence as to what this law was excluding, namely vicarious punishment, the idea that someone else may be punished for my crime:

For example, in the Middle Assyrian Laws, the rape of an unbetrothed virgin who lives in her father's house is punished by the ravishing of the rapist's wife, who also remains thereafter with the father of the victim. Hammurabi decrees that if a man struck a pregnant woman, thereby causing her to miscarry and die, it is the assailant's daughter who is put to death. If a builder erected a house which collapsed, killing the owner's son, then the builder's son, not the builder, is put to death. Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, p. 176

We also have inner-biblical evidence of how the Mosaic law was applied. Joash, one of the righteous kings of Judah, attempted to stamp out corruption among the priests, and was assassinated by two of his officials. He was succeeded by his son Amaziah, about whom we read the following:

After the kingdom was firmly in his grasp, he [Amaziah] executed the officials who had murdered his father the king. Yet he did not put the sons of the assassins to death, in accordance with what is written in the Book of the Law of Moses, where the

Lord commanded: “Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sins.” II Kings: 14:5-6

The obvious question, however, is: how is this principle compatible with the idea, enunciated four times in the Mosaic books, that children may suffer for the sins of their parents?

“The Lord, the Lord, God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in kindness and truth, extending kindness for thousands of generations, forgiving sin, rebellion, and error, but who does not acquit the guilty, holding descendants to account for the sins of the fathers, children, and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.” Ex. 34:7; see also Ex. 20:5; Numbers 14:18; Deut. 5:8)

The short answer is simple: It is the difference between human justice and Divine justice. We are not God. We can neither look into the hearts of wrongdoers nor assess the full consequences of their deeds. It is not given to us to execute perfect justice, matching the evil a person suffers to the evil he causes. We would not even know where to begin. How do you punish a dictator responsible for the deaths of millions of people? How do you weigh the full extent of a devastating injury caused by drunken driving, where not only the victim but his entire family are affected for the rest of their lives? How do we assess the degree of culpability of, say, those Germans who knew what was happening during the Holocaust but did or said nothing to help? Moral guilt is a far more difficult concept to apply than legal guilt.

Human justice must work within the parameters of human understanding and regulation. Hence the straightforward rule: no vicarious punishment. Only the wrongdoer is to suffer, and only after his guilt has been established by fair and impartial

judicial procedures. That is the foundational principle set out, for the first time in Deuteronomy 24:16.

However, the issue did not end there. In two later prophets - Jeremiah and Ezekiel - we find an explicit renunciation of the idea that children might suffer for the sins of their parents, even when applied to Divine justice. Here is Jeremiah, speaking in the name of God:

In those days, people will no longer say, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes - his own teeth will be set on edge. Jeremiah 31:29-30

And this, from Ezekiel:

The word of the Lord came to me: "What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: 'The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? "As surely as I live," declares the Sovereign Lord, "you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to Me, the father as well as the son - both alike belong to Me. The soul that sins is the one who will die." Ezekiel 18:1-3

The Talmud (Makkot 24a) raises the obvious question. If Ezekiel is correct, what then happens to the idea of children being punished to the third and fourth generation?

Its answer is astonishing:

Said R. Jose ben Hanina: Our master Moses pronounced four [adverse] sentences on Israel, but four prophets came and revoked them ... Moses said, "He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." Ezekiel came and declared: "The soul that sins is the one who will die."

Moses decreed: Ezekiel came and annulled the decree! Clearly

the matter cannot be that simple. After all, it was not Moses who decreed this, but God Himself. What do the Sages mean?

They mean - I think - this: the concept of perfect justice is beyond human understanding, for the reasons already given. We can never fully know the degree of guilt. Nor can we know the full extent of responsibility. The Mishnah in Sanhedrin (4:5), says that a witness in capital cases was solemnly warned that if, by false testimony, a person was wrongly sentenced to death, then he, the witness, **“is held responsible for his [the accused’s] blood and the blood of his [potential] descendants until the end of time.”** Nor, when we speak of Providence, is it always possible to distinguish punishment from natural consequence. A drug-addicted mother gives birth to a drug-addicted child. A violent father is assaulted by his violent son. Is this retribution or genetics or environmental influence? When it comes to Divine, as opposed to human justice, we can never reach beyond the most rudimentary understanding, if that.

Two things are clear from God’s words to Moses. First, He is a God of compassion but also of justice, for without justice there is anarchy, but without compassion, there is neither humanity nor hope. Second, in the tension between these two values, God’s compassion vastly exceeds His justice. The former is forever (**“to thousands [of generations]”**). The latter is confined to the lifetime of the sinner: the **“third and fourth generation”** (grandchildren and great-grandchildren) are the limits of posterity one can expect to see in a human lifetime.

What Jeremiah and Ezekiel are talking about is something else. They were speaking about the fate of the nation. Both lived and worked at the time of the Babylonian exile. They were fighting a mood of despair among the people. **“What can we do? We are being punished for the sins of our forefathers.”** Not so, said the

prophets. Each generation holds its destiny in its own hands. Repent, and you will be forgiven, whatever the sins of the past — yours or those who came before you.

Justice is a complex phenomenon, Divine justice infinitely more so. One thing, however, is clear. When it comes to human justice, Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all agree: children may not be punished for the sins of their parents. Vicarious punishment is simply unjust.

[Leave the Corners of the Field by Rabbi Kari Tuling, Ph.D](https://truah.org/resources/kari-tuling-ki-tetze-moraltorah_2026_/)
https://truah.org/resources/kari-tuling-ki-tetze-moraltorah_2026_/

Jewish ideas about poverty are derived in large part from an injunction found in this week's Torah portion: "When you reap the harvest in your field and overlook a sheaf in the field, do not turn back to get it; it shall go to the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow — in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all of your undertakings." (Deuteronomy 24:19) This commandment to leave the corners of the field for the poor is known in Jewish law as peah (or corner). As it happens, the Jewish legal tradition has invested a lot of energy in determining how to ensure that this redistribution of resources occurs in a fair and equitable manner.

When we read this injunction in the Bible, we think that the rule itself makes sense: It seems reasonably clear that we need to be leaving a certain percentage of our harvest for the poor. But when you start thinking about it, questions arise. For example: Do we have to leave peah for every field we own? Or can we leave a large amount in one field and harvest all the others? Can the poor come whenever they want to gather the peah, or do we have the right to define when and where they might gather? Are the poor allowed to pool their resources, so that the

most able-bodied do the collecting, or does each person have to gather it themselves? Can you eat what someone else has gathered?

The ancient sages, who convened in the town of Yavneh on the banks of the Kinneret in the first and second centuries of our common era and worked on answers to these questions, created the document known as the Mishnah. Yes, you must leave peah for every field you own. Yes, you may restrict access to the field to set times and seasons and to specific public access points. Yes, the poor may pool their resources. Yes, a person may eat what someone else has gathered. Note the abiding concern for giving the poor a predictable form of access to foodstuffs, but it is done in such a way as to allow the landowner some control over how and when.

But the Mishnah does not address every question. What if, for example, the poor individuals want to sell the harvested goods, rather than eat it themselves? The rabbinic discussion continues for the next 300 years, through about the year 500 on our secular calendar. This rabbinic discussion is known as the Gemara, which in turn forms the basis of the Talmud. The poor may sell their goods and buy other goods with it. You don't have to eat the grain if you don't like or don't need the grain. And so on.

In the medieval period, the rabbinic sages wrote legal codes to summarize these questions of Jewish law, and to adapt it to a more urban setting. One of the first to do so was Moses Maimonides (1138-1204), who wrote the "Mishneh Torah" to summarize the state of Jewish law (and in some cases, to create his own precedents). Maimonides, for example, set the maximum amount you should give to the poor at 3%, unless, of course, you are independently wealthy. Then you may indeed

give more — and probably should.

What evolved out of these medieval codes was a series of practices relating to feeding the poor: Every medieval Jewish community was expected to set up two things: a tamchui (charity plate) for feeding all comers week-to-week, no questions asked, and a kupah (welfare fund) to support the resident poor. The charity plate normally would be collected on Fridays and would be offered to anyone who was hungry, regardless of origin. The welfare fund, on the other hand, would be restricted specifically to residents of the city, and it would involve an investigation into the resident's circumstances. Those supported by the welfare fund would receive a monthly set stipend, plus extra for the celebration of holidays (the rabbis were clear that the poor should be able to buy wine as part of the celebration, if they so choose). The community thus had the right to assess a tax on all residents to provide for the welfare fund. Additionally, a larger community might create a burial fund and a poor brides' fund out of these taxes. These experiences form the basis of Jewish ideas of what we owe to the poor: We take it as an obligation to feed them and provide for their basic needs. We're not at liberty to turn away.

Interestingly, even those residents who were supported by the welfare fund were expected to pay a (reduced) tax into the community funds. It was an expression of dignity: No one is so poor as to be completely unable to give to others. Anyone who has worked on alleviating poverty knows that this statement is also sociologically true: The poor are often the first to give, and that impulse should be honored, as a matter of dignity. In this regard, an abiding concern for human rights, and for upholding the inherent dignity of even the poorest among us, has been a key feature of the Jewish tradition, originating with this Torah verse and carrying into the present day. (*Kari Tuling received*

rabbinic ordination in 2004 and earned her Ph.D. in Jewish Thought in 2013, both from the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, and a Master's degree in Jewish Professional Studies from Spertus Institute in 2022. She has served as a congregational rabbi in Connecticut, Indiana, New York, Ohio, and Washington, D.C., and has taught Jewish Studies courses at Hebrew Union College, the Louisville Seminary, the University of Cincinnati, and the State University of New York.)

Ki Teitzei: The Rebellious Son Who Never Was
by Shoshana Ruerup

<https://yeshivatmaharat.org/ki-teitzei-the-rebellious-son-who-never-was/>

A few years ago, I witnessed a small but memorable argument between a friend and her fifteen-year-old son, Amir. His mother was explaining something to him when, out of nowhere, Amir interrupted her with a rather cheeky, disrespectful reply: “What are you even yapping about?!” His mother looked stunned. So was I. I had always known Amir to be a thoughtful, affectionate teenager who treated his parents with kindness and respect.

As I prepared this week’s Torah portion, Ki Teitzei, I found myself thinking back to that exchange. The parsha contains one of the Torah’s most unsettling laws: the law of the ben sorer u’moreh, the “wayward and defiant son.”

For just a moment, I wondered—half in jest, of course—whether Amir would have qualified.

The answer, thankfully, is no. But the question is worth asking, because it forces us to confront one of the Torah’s most difficult passages.

Parshat Ki Tetzei contains more commandments than any other parsha. It moves rapidly through laws governing warfare, lost property, inheritance, divorce, shaatnez, sexual ethics, the protection of escaped slaves, and dozens of other aspects of

communal life.

Almost hidden among them is the law of the rebellious son:

If a man has a wayward and defiant son, who does not heed his father or his mother and does not obey them even after they discipline him... his father and mother shall bring him to the elders of the town... Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death (Deuteronomy 21:18–21).

These verses sound extremely troubling! Can the Torah really be advocating the execution of an adolescent for defying his parents? What happened to teshuva—the possibility of repentance that lies at the very heart of Judaism? And what responsibility do parents bear for the child they themselves have raised?

Rashi, drawing on the Midrash Sifrei Devarim (220), offers an explanation that is as striking as the law itself. The rebellious son is not punished for what he has already done, but for what he is expected to become. The Torah assumes that he will squander his inheritance, turn to robbery, and eventually commit capital crimes. Better, says the Midrash, that he die while still innocent than later as a murderer.

Whether or not we find that argument convincing, rabbinic tradition itself appears deeply uncomfortable with such a conclusion.

The Mishna (Sanhedrin 8:1) immediately begins to narrow the law's application. If the father wishes to bring the son before the court but the mother does not—or vice versa—the case cannot proceed. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 71a) goes even further. Rabbi Yehuda insists that the father and mother must have the same voice, appearance, and physical stature before their son can be

classified as a ben sorer u'moreh—an impossibility.

The result is extraordinary. The Torah legislates the law. The rabbis preserve the law. And then they make it virtually impossible ever to enforce it.

The Talmud even records the remarkable opinion of Rabbi Shimon that “there never was and never will be a ben sorer u'moreh.” If so, why was the law written at all? His answer is both simple and profound: “Derosh vekabel sachar—study it, and receive reward.”

At first glance, that answer feels unsatisfying. Surely the Torah is asking more of us than an abstract legal exercise. Perhaps the rabbis understood that the deepest lesson of this passage lies elsewhere. Its context offers us a clue.

Immediately before introducing the rebellious son, the Torah discusses the rights of the firstborn. A father may not disinherit the firstborn son simply because he prefers the child of another wife. Even where love, resentment, and family tensions are involved, justice must prevail.

The Torah then turns, without transition, to a family that has completely broken down, and maybe that juxtaposition is not accidental. The tragedy of the ben sorer u'moreh is not simply that a son rebels. Teenagers have always rebelled. The real tragedy is that the relationship between parent and child has deteriorated so completely that there seems to be no longer any possibility of repair. The parents no longer know how to reach their son, and the son no longer hears the voices of his parents. The family has reached a point where dialogue has given way to legal judgment.

That is a far more frightening prospect than adolescent defiance.

Today we understand something the ancient world could not. Neuroscience has shown that the adolescent brain undergoes enormous restructuring during puberty. The regions responsible for impulse control, emotional regulation, and long-term judgment mature more slowly than those driving emotion and reward. Teenagers sometimes say foolish things—not because they are destined to become criminals, but because they are still becoming adults.

Jewish law ultimately reflects a similar intuition. In practice, the category of the *ben sorer u'moreh* became so narrowly defined that it effectively disappeared from Jewish life. Yet the passage remains in our Torah—and perhaps that is precisely the point! Not every law exists to be implemented. Some laws exist to provoke moral reflection, forcing us to wrestle with difficult questions.

The commandment to honor one's parents is one of Judaism's foundational values. But children do not learn honor simply because it is demanded of them. They learn it through relationships marked by love, consistency, trust, boundaries, forgiveness, and respect. Parents do not merely raise obedient children. They shape human beings. The *ben sorer u'moreh* reminds us what is at stake when that process fails—not simply for one family, but for an entire community.

When I think back to Amir today, I no longer wonder whether he would have qualified as a rebellious son. Instead, I remember something much more important: His mother did not stop talking to him and he did not stop talking to her. The conversation continued. Perhaps that is the real opposite of the *ben sorer u'moreh*: not perfect children or perfect parents, but families that keep speaking to one another, even through anger, disappointment, and rebellion.

We are called, it seems, to build families and communities in which judgment never replaces relationships, where punishment is never the first language we speak, and where hope is never abandoned. Perhaps that is why the Torah preserves this difficult law: not because it expects us to condemn a child, but because it asks us to confront our shared responsibility for one another. In wrestling with this troubling passage, we are invited to cultivate compassion, safeguard human dignity, and build the kind of society in which such a law never becomes imaginable—a community living in the Divine Presence. *(Shoshana Ruerup is an artist and educator. She earned an MA in Fine Arts and a Montessori Diploma. In addition to her own painting career, she worked with children and youth for over 30 years in her arts and crafts workshop. Her love for in-depth-learning of Jewish texts led her to studying with the first cohort at the Kreuzberg Kollel Berlin and the CTP at Yashrut. Shoshana finished four years of study at the International Halacha Scholars Program at Midreshet Lindenbaum/ Ohr Torah Stone. She loves to write and is published by the Times of Israel and the Juedische Allgemeine Wochenzeitung.)*

Yahrtzeits

Merna Most remembers her husband Dr. David Most on Tues.
Aug. 25

Rabbi Lisa Vernon remembers her grandfather Arthur J. Vernon
on Thurs. Aug. 27

