

Parashat Ki Teitzei: The Choice To Fight

Preparing for Rosh Hashanah and Parashat Ki Teitzei

Hello everyone. We're getting closer and closer to Rosh Hashanah, and I can't believe that in little more than a week we shall already be starting to say *Selichot* according to the minhag of the Ashkenazim, while the minhag Sefard is to begin already from Rosh Chodesh Elul.

Of course, I am sending you this message **le'ilui nishmat Shlomo ben Ben Rav Yitzchak**

The Abundance of Mitzvot in Ki Teitzei

Parashat Ki Teitzei is a parsha overflowing with mitzvot — an abundance from all areas of life. We wonder: when Moshe Rabbeinu speaks to all of Israel, why does he go into such detail?

The answer is that many of these mitzvot deal with **personal struggles** — family life, harmony in the home, and even what happens during the engagement period.

Moshe Rabbeinu speaks about:

- *Hashavat aveida* — returning lost property.
- The dignity of a poor person who cannot pay his debts — the lender may not enter his home but must wait respectfully outside.
- The prohibition of a mamzer marrying into the congregation — reminding us that parents must consider the long-term consequences of their actions.
- The mitzvah that the camp must remain clean, so that Hashem's presence will dwell among us.
- The importance of keeping our vows: *motza sefatecha tishmor*.
- Remembering Miriam's punishment for lashon hara, even spoken with good intentions.
- The exemption of a new husband from war during his first year, so he may remain with his wife.

Chazal tell us there are **74 mitzvot** in this parsha (some say 72, others 74).

Witnesses to Hashem

The number 74 in Hebrew letters is **ע"ד**. These are the enlarged letters in *Shema Yisrael*: the **ע** in *Shema* and the **ד** in *Echad*, spelling **eid** — witness.

We testify to Hashem's kingship not only through lofty ideals, but by observing the mitzvot in every detail of life.

The War of Life

Ki Teitzei begins: *Ki teitzei la'milchama al oyvecha* — when you go out to war against your enemies.

Rashi explains that this refers to a *milchemet reshut*, a voluntary war, unlike *milchemet mitzvah* such as conquering Eretz Yisrael or fighting Amalek. In such a war, if a soldier encounters a beautiful captive woman (*eshet yefat to'ar*), the Torah makes allowances, recognizing human nature in times of battle.

But why is this law placed here, during Elul as we prepare for Rosh Hashanah?

Because this is not only about physical wars — it is about the **war of life**. Each of us wages an inner battle with the yetzer hara. From birth, the yetzer hara drives a child's every demand. Only at bar or bat mitzvah does the yetzer tov arrive to balance the struggle.

The Torah writes *oyvecha* in plural, teaching that life seems full of countless enemies and struggles. But in truth, they all stem from one source — the yetzer hara. And Hashem promises: *Unetano Hashem Elokecha beyadecha* — Hashem will help us overcome.

Elul: Choosing to Fight

Rashi emphasizes: this is a *milchemet reshut* — a war not commanded, but chosen. Hashem cannot force us to fight the yetzer hara. As Chazal say: *hakol bidei Shamayim chutz miyirat Shamayim* — everything is in Hashem's hands except our fear of Heaven.

The avodah of Elul is to **choose** the battle. The strength is within us, and Hashem will help when we reach out to Him.

Tehillim in Elul: Hashem as Our Light

That is why, throughout Elul until Hoshana Rabbah, we recite *LeDavid Hashem Ori Veyishi*. David HaMelech describes Hashem as:

- His light when all seems dark.
- His salvation when enemies surround him.
- His deepest desire: *shifti beveit Hashem* — to dwell in Hashem's house and learn Torah.

Even if those closest to him abandon him, he knows: *Hashem al ta'azveni* — Hashem will never abandon him.

David's Struggle in Tziklag

Chazal reveal that David composed this perek in one of the hardest times of his life. Fleeing Shaul, he lived in Tziklag under Philistine rule. While he and his men were away at war, Amalek raided the town, burned it, and took all the women and children captive — including David's own wives.

His men turned on him in anguish, blaming him. But instead of despairing, the pasuk says: *Vayeitchazek David* — David strengthened himself in Hashem and composed *LeDavid Hashem Ori Veyishi*.

This was not sung in joy, but in trust. He calls Hashem *Ori* — my light — even in darkness.

The Power of Hashem's Name

In this perek, Hashem's name appears 13 times:

- Corresponding to the gematria of *ahava* (love).
- Alluding to the 13 attributes of mercy.

David teaches us that even when we do not understand, Hashem's ways are ultimately for good.

“Lulei” and Elul

Near the end of the perek, we find the word *lulei* — spelled with the same letters as **Elul**, but backwards.

David hints that when life feels upside down, that is when we must hold on to emunah and remember Hashem is our light.

From Knowledge to Heart

Elul is not only about knowing we must change. It is about **feeling** it: *vehashevota el levavecha*. Intellect alone is not enough; our hearts must awaken with the desire to return.

A Parable of Teshuvah

Chazal connect the *eshet yefat to'ar* to this inner war. The soldier must strip away her beautiful garments, shave her head, and let her nails grow — symbolic acts teaching us how to do teshuvah:

- Remove superficial layers and face our true selves.
- Cleanse our thoughts of false ideas.
- Distance ourselves from clinging too tightly to materialism.
- Cry for a full month — the month of Elul — as we yearn to return to our true Father in Heaven.

Through regret, vidui, and sincere resolution, we can renew ourselves.

The Power of a Single Cry

A moving story illustrates this. A mother sat by her young child in the hospital, gravely ill. Doctors told her there was no hope, perhaps only amputation could prolong his life. In desperation, she cried to Hashem:

“Hashem, You are my partner. Please save my child. I promise You, from this day forward, I will keep my legs covered in tzniut for life.”

That very night, another doctor proposed a new experimental treatment — and it saved the child. She attributed the miracle to the power of one sincere cry to Hashem.

Returning Lost Objects — Returning Souls

Even mitzvot that seem small can spark miracles. A woman once found a bag of tefillin left behind in shul. She tracked down the owner's family in Israel. The boy had abandoned Torah and mitzvot, but just before she called, he told his mother he wanted to put on tefillin again. The return of that bag of tefillin helped him return to Hashem.

Conclusion: Strengthen Yourself

Elul reminds us: even when life feels overwhelming, even when we fear we haven't grown enough, we must never give up. As David HaMelech said: *Kaveh el Hashem, chazak v'ya'ameitz libecha, vekaveh el Hashem* — strengthen yourself and trust in Hashem.

May we all merit a meaningful Elul, heartfelt teshuvah, and a year filled with light, love, and closeness to Hashem.