

[Kohelet Discussion](#)

D'VAR TORAH: Ki Teitse

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Once again we begin a Torah portion with our symbolic **movement from here to there**. Ki Teitse -means "**when you go out**" – Suggesting again that - when you leave the synagogue, when you leave the sacrificial alter, when you leave the comfort of the encampment - when you go into **the world of your fellow citizenry** - then there are rules governing how you to behave. – This is **our covenant, our agreement** with God. We will agree and then we will be rewarded. Mundane **Secular behavior** among individuals becomes religious in nature and it would seem that these rulings governing our very personal lives are paramount. Our acquiescence is what it means to be a Jew.

And so with Ki Teitse, Moses, as he lectures the throng in the amphitheater at the shores of the Jordan river reaches into the heart of the **provisions of this covenant**. This Parsha contains no fewer **than 74 commands**, more than in any other place in the Torah. Among them are laws about **family dysfunction**, moral and legal obligations toward neighbors and fellow citizens, **sexual misdemeanors**, punishments for adultery, moral behavior in relation to financial matters, property rights, appropriate dress, capital punishment, and shooing the mother bird away when you collect eggs, honest weight and measure, building a fence and the leaving of gleanings and on and on. So much to discuss individually but we will be more general. .

So in Ki **Teitse**, we leave the world of ritual and specific spiritual practice and enter the world where the rubber meets the road **where we will be accountable** for all of our actions be they be deliberate or inadvertent

Ki Teitse instructs us in the compendium of rules of engagement to sustain a society lest we devolve into **chaos and anarchy** with a **failure of the social order**. With adherence to a code of conduct, societies build **cohesion and trust**. Reasonable expectations will ensue and constructive conformity will give us **confidence in one another** and hopefully fewer surprises.

Historically, a respected **organizing authority** governing social interaction would seem to be necessary to allow for peaceful progress. However, a large gap of almost **2 millennia passed after Moses** spoke until Western thought wrote more extensively on the subject. It was not until the 17th and 18th C that political philosophers Thomas Hobbes, Rousseau, and John Locke, giants among others, knew that **we would sink into a state of nature** where **self-satisfaction** would overtake communal cooperation if a social contract did not govern. Life, liberty and property rights and other similar fundamental concerns of a **just society** would only then become paramount if a fruitful society was to advance.

But the Torah was aware of this from the very beginning and Ki Teitse spells it out for us in black and white. - Consider the well known basic Talmudic lengthy discussion that addresses

when two people **find a garment in the marketplace** – each claiming ownership. How is this to be resolved? Tractate Bava Metzia begins with this concern and goes on and on to get the resolution right and here in Ki Teitze we are **commanded to return any property** that is not rightfully ours. Basic stuff, but the resolution is critical to maintaining a social fabric that does not shred. Torah, Talmud., Midrash, and our oral tradition offer a path forward. America's founders **knew Hebrew and Hebrew texts** and incorporated many biblical provisions into their ideas for the foundation of our country.

A few weeks ago David spoke at length as he emphasized listening as a basic critical trait to be cultivated. . Here in Ki Teitze we are the audience listening carefully but here the emphasis is on doing as Moses lays out a **plan for of action for participating and** paying attention to all we do without being indifferent. Moses, not a man of words, **now seems to have found his voice** having a conversation with us in the first person. This is our canon and the exhortations of God through his servant Moses are made palpable and direct from one human to another with the authority of the creator of it all.

We **breathe easier** if we can be reassured we are all on the **same page** supporting and encouraging the others. So far, all is well and good, and we recognize in the directives our Jewish heritage and we are on board. But now **in the middle of the parsha** , in the middle of all this fairly straightforward codification it gets more difficult and problematic as a new admonition appears in 23:8, **an admonition much more subjective** and for many quite confusing.

23:8 states “You shall not reject an Edomite for he is your brother; You shall not reject an Egyptian, for you were a sojourner in his land. The word is reject in the Artscroll but elsewhere we find - you shall not despise, you shall not abhor,, or abominate. Others have used the word hate. **You shall not hate your enemy.**

Here we have a **specific directive against hatred** of the other; hatred of the other who has **oppressed you** but then perhaps even for those with whom you strongly disagree or who have morally offended you. What would be an expanded Jewish discussion on this subject as we try to understand “hatred” and what do we learn from **understanding the restriction on this emotion.**

We were enslaved, lives embittered, and while in Egypt subjected to a ruthless program of attempted genocide. Then centuries of cruel antisemitism, restricted access, inquisition and Holocaust and yet now we are instructed by Moses **not to hate the Edomites**, the descendent of Esau , the members of the Roman empire who slaughtered us by the thousands, crucified us, kept us in ghettos and then put the **blood libel on us for perpetuity.**.. But for these offenses we are not to hate!

Of course **there is no simple answer here.** The **lawn signs** announcing that hate has no home here or that love is love – sounds a bit **simplistic** to me , something from the **flower children** of the 60s. It is all a bit confusing. Perhaps we learn that **carrying interminable** or exacerbated

anger in your heart is **self-destructive**, tension laden and counterproductive to advancing and moving society forward. **Grudges will defeat** us and offer no resolution. The parsha ends with reminding us to wipe out the memory of Amalek but never forget it. . But is the Amalek “hatred” an internal perceived battle with our own self-doubt whereas the Edomite battle a real external confrontation.

We do **carry our pain forward** but we must not let it paralyze or cloud the discussion. . Moses insists **we must not forget**. We tell our story every year, but not begrudgingly. We relive the bitterness at our seder table but it is **taught as a teaching experience** and as a culturally binding requirement. And even then we **dip our finger in the wine** removing some, to limit our joy at the expense of the Egyptian. We are reminded we were strangers and must empathize with any who feel similarly.

The instruction is **to not hate the Edomite** and their descendants and others in our community who wish to cause us harm. Perhaps we can better understand the teaching by saying we **listen to our anger**, we try to understand our outrage to better sublimate it to bypass a state of unexamined emotion, hatred which can be debilitating or leading on to rage and emotional upheaval. .

The Proverbs of Solomon offer another avenue to understand the teaching. This idea appears in Proverbs 24:17 where it is poetically stated :

***When your foe falls, be not glad and when he stumbles let not your heart be joyous.
Lest Hashem see and it be displeasing in his eyes.
And he turns His anger from him to you.
Do not be vexed or incensed by evildoers or the wicked,
For there is no future for evil.
The light of the wicked will be extinguished.***

Certainly **we pay attention and act to oppose sources of evil in our world** , but we are warned not to be overwhelmed with hatred and its consequences. There is some mystical feeling that God will take care of this issue **relieving us of any ultimate responsibility**. Are we on board with this teaching?

Nevertheless, we remain vigilant but, in some manner, by not hating the Edomites we are taught to not **waste valuable time** with any such penchant . We have more important things to do to keep our light shining bright and not get mired in the quicksand of hatred.

But is this commentary entirely fair. Is there some sort of turn the other cheek attitude acting in this assessment? Should there be a **debt of gratitude** for some measure of **Egyptian hospitality**?. For here we are now as a Jewish people with this legacy of oppression which has **empowered** our entire journey and **given grit** and purpose to who we are as a nation. Rather than hate, can we understand that **our suffering** helped to forge a new culture and a new society with **lofty moral values**. We do remember the **hostile treatment** through which we

persevered; Tet we should rise up to subsequently **refrain from reprisal** and not hate our enemies in perpetuity .

We have all felt the pain when we have ben wronged. . How do we let go of any desire for revenge or for the idea of schadenfreude when we hope for our enemy to fall. As the proverb teaches – **perhaps we should leave this to God. .**

How do you see it.?