

Dvar Torah Outline — Parashat Ki Teitzei: Elul, Milchemet HaYetzer, and the Teshuvah Blueprint

Abstract

Rabbi Shulman presents Parashat Ki Teitzei as an Elul-facing roadmap for teshuvah, reading “war against your enemy” as the inner battle against the יצר הרע and the reclaiming of the יצר טוב. He explains that victory comes through עמילות בתורה—especially תורה שבעל פה—because Torah is bound up with the “name” of Hashem itself. Rabbi Shulman then maps the parashah’s sequence (shaving, removing garments, crying for a “month of days,” and ultimate closeness) onto the stages of teshuvah: חרטה על העבר during Elul, and culminating קרבת אלוקים associated with יום כיפור.

I. Ki Teitzei in Elul: the Torah speaks “right off the page”

A. Elul becomes “very real” through this parashah

- Rabbi Shulman emphasizes the clarity and directness of Ki Teitzei as a חסד ה’ instructions that feel like Hashem “talking to you right off the page.”
- The parashah functions as a seasonal guide for spiritual work in Elul.

B. Midrashic framing: the war is against the יצר הרע

- Rabbi Shulman cites Chazal’s reading:
 - “כי תצא למלחמה על איִבֶּךָ” (When you go out to war against your enemy)
 - This is מלחמה against the יצר הרע.
- The pasuk’s continuation is read as inner redemption:
 - “וַיִּתְּנֵהוּ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּיָדְךָ וְשָׁבִיתָ שְׁבִיּוֹ” (Hashem your God will deliver him into your hand, and you will take captive his captivity.)
 - Rabbi Shulman reports the Midrash: the “captivity” to be recovered is the יצר טוב, recaptured from the enemy.

C. Why does the pasuk say “your enemy”?

- Rabbi Shulman notes the peshat difficulty: of course war is against an enemy—why add אֹיֵבךָ?
 - This redundancy becomes a רמז to the deeper meaning (war against the inner “enemy”).
 - He mentions a teaching (R. Simcha Bunim of Peshischa) that this inner-war reading is close to the “simple peshat.”
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II. “אשת יראת ה'” (2:00) as a hint to “אשת יפת תאר”

A. Recasting the “captured woman” passage in spiritual terms

- Rabbi Shulman continues the Midrashic map: once the “captivity” is the יצר טוב, the next images also describe spiritual avodah.

B. Rav Tzadok: “אשת יפת תאר” reflects a level of yirat Shamayim

- Rabbi Shulman cites Rav Tzadok: אשת יראת ה' is a בחינה of אשת יפת תאר.
 - Rabbi Shulman adds a possible allusion:
 - The letters of תאר resemble the letters of יראת (ת א ר) in reverse arrangement (א י ר א ת) suggestive hint toward the theme of יראת ה'.
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III. The key to victory: Torah—especially תורה שבעל פה (3:31)

A. “וְנָתַנּוּ ה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ בְּיָדְךָ” is not passive; it has a mechanism

- Rabbi Shulman asks: If Hashem “delivers” the enemy, what do we do to achieve it?
- He answers (via Midrash): the תורה שבעל פה is תלמוד תורה כלי.

B. Torah and Hashem’s Name: the source from Berachot

- Rabbi Shulman cites the Gemara’s source for ברכת התורה:
 - “כִּי שֵׁם ה' אֶקְרָא הָבוּ גִדְל לְאֱלֹקֵינוּ.” (For I call out the Name of Hashem; ascribe greatness to our God.)
- His point: Torah-learning is bound up with “calling Hashem’s Name.”

C. “שמותיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא”

- Rabbi Shulman cites the idea (found in midrashic language): one who toils in Torah is engaged in the holy Name—אשתדל בשמה קדישא.

- Therefore, Rabbi Shulman explains (citing Rav Tzadok):
 - “ה' אֱלֹקֵינוּ” in the pasuk points to Torah as the instrument of overcoming the יצר הרע.

D. Practical guidance: draw the יצר הרע into the בית המדרש

- Rabbi Shulman references the Gemara's directive:
 - If you encounter this “מנוול,” משיכה לבית המדרש—pull it into the beit midrash.
 - He frames the beit midrash as the arena of תורה שבעל פה, the primary battleground for this מלחמה.
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IV. Teshuvah stage 1: עמילות through עזיבת חטא (5:30) בתורה

A. The first step: regain control and stop the negative patterns

- Rabbi Shulman defines the first phase of teshuvah as עזיבת חטא—ceasing the wrongdoing.

B. The method: תורה שבעל פה as the כוח to overcome

- He explains that ongoing toil in Torah is what enables sustained resistance to the יצר הרע and the “recapture” of the יצר טוב.
 - This is portrayed as reclaiming the נשמה from “the clutches” of negativity.
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V. Teshuvah stage 2: removing “extras” and the garments of sin (6:00)

A. “וְגִלַּחְהָ אֶת רֹאשָׁהּ וְעִשְׂתָּהּ אֶת צַפְרֶיהָ” as symbolic עבודה

- Rabbi Shulman interprets shaving hair and cutting nails as removing מותרות—unnecessary extras.
- Spiritual application:
 - Scaling back indulgence in תאוות and excess physical involvement.

B. “וְהִסִּירָה אֶת שְׂמַלְתָּ שִׁבְיָהּ” as shedding soiled spiritual clothing

- Rabbi Shulman explains:
 - The נשמה is טהורה, but over the year it can acquire “soiled garments” through חטא.
 - Teshuvah requires removing that outer layer—the “garment of captivity.”
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VI. Teshuvah stage 3: Elul as “ירח ימים” of crying and regret (7:30)

A. “וּבְכֹתָהּ אֶת אָבִיהָ וְאֶת אִמָּהּ יָרַח יָמִים” = Elul

- Rabbi Shulman cites the Midrash:
 - “A month of days” refers to **Elul**, a month designated for crying and פְּנִימִיּוּת.

B. Who are “father and mother”?

- Rabbi Shulman references the Gemara (Berachot) about one who fails to make בְּרַכַּת הַנְּהִינִן being called a “thief” from:
 - **כְּנֶסֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל** and **הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא**—“father” and “mother.”
- He adds (in the name of Rav Tzadok):
 - תּוֹרָה שֶׁבַעל פֶּה is identified with שְׂכִינָה.

C. The content of regret (חֲרִטָּה עַל הָעֵבֶר)

- Rabbi Shulman explains what the crying expresses:
 - Regret that one did not use the relationship with Hashem and the כּוֹחַ of Torah earlier.
 - “I could have done this months ago; why did I wait until now?”
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VII. The culmination: “תבוא אליה... והייתה לך לאשה” as Yom Kippur closeness (8:30)

A. From distance to ייחוד and קרבת אלוקים

- Rabbi Shulman reads the final stage—entering a state of union/closeness—as the culmination of the teshuvah process.

B. Parallel to the Kohen Gadol entering the Kodesh HaKodashim

- He associates this climactic closeness with **יום כיפור**:
 - Like the כֹּהֵן גָּדוֹל entering the קֹדֶשׁ הַקֳּדָשִׁים.
 - By extension, Rabbi Shulman notes that all of Klal Yisrael shares in this closeness “by proxy,” reaching קרבת אלוקים after Elul’s work.
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VIII. In Summary

- Rabbi Shulman reads "כי תצא למלחמה על איִבֶּךָ" as the Elul battle against the יצר הרע, aiming to reclaim the "captured" יצר טוב.
- The כלי for victory is **תורה שבעל פה**, **עמילות בתורה**, particularly **תורה שבעל פה**, because Torah is intertwined with the "Name" of Hashem: "כי שם ה' אֶקְרָא הָבוּ גִדְל לֵאלֹהֵינוּ."
- The passage's steps become a teshuvah blueprint: remove excess physicality, shed the "garments" of sin, and spend Elul as "יֵרַח יָמִים" of tears and **חרטה על העבר**.
- The process culminates in profound closeness to Hashem, likened to **יום כיפור** and the כהן גדול's entry into the **קודש הקדשים**.