



Torah Reflections on *Parshat Ki Teitzei*

Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19

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Some *parshiot*, weekly Torah portions, contain captivating narratives, relatively coherent stories of individuals, families, love, hardship, loss and triumph. Others do not. This week's Torah portion, *Ki Teitzei* (Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19) is among the latter. Eitz Hayyim Torah and Commentary titles this *parsha* "Miscellaneous Laws." A fitting caption given its assortment of seemingly disjointed topics which include some troubling and violent scenarios. All of this is to say, *Ki Teitzei* can be challenging and disorienting.

Such can be our personal experience in life. At times, we may feel the trajectory of our life story, our life, makes sense. But as the Yiddish expression so aptly points out: *Mentch tracht und Gott lacht*, people think and God laughs. In other words, life doesn't always go according to our plans. When our personal story takes a turn we find disorienting and perhaps troubling, what might we do?

Nestled among the choppy waters of this week's Torah portion, floating on its own, is a simple line. It can be easy to overlook it among the clamoring verses that precede and follow it. Deuteronomy 22:12 states, "You shall make twisted threads [i.e. tassels] on the four corners of the garment with which you cover yourself."

Elsewhere in *Torah*, (*parshat Sh'lach L'cha*) there is a more elaborate discussion of the commandment to wear tassels. In Numbers 15:37-41, God commands Moses to tell the people of Israel that for all generations, they are to wear *tzitzit*, fringes, on the corners of their garments. They are to look at the *tzitzit* and then remember all of the *mitzvot*, commandments, God has given and then do the *mitzvot*. The *tzitzit* is like a string tied around a finger, an external object that helps us remember. We are to remember and then act.

Just as *tzitziot* are attached to the *tallit* that we traditionally wrap around ourselves, the *tzitzit* whether actual or in our mind's eye can remind us that we are surrounded and held in love even when we are feeling disoriented, overwhelmed, numb. *The tzitzit* attached to the four corners of the *tallit* also remind us that we are connected to God, to all Creation, all of humanity including those who have gone before us. Love is in these mysterious, intricate connections.

In *Ki Teitzei*, Deuteronomy 22:12, Torah keeps it simple: make tassels on the corners of your coverings. Sometimes, all that we can handle, all that we can process is a bite size amount of information. Sometimes simple is not just desirable, it's necessary.

Whether you have an actual *tallit* with *tzitzit* or not, you can tap into the power and opportunity of this verse. It invites us to pause and think about something that will nourish our soul. What might nurture you?

(over)

You may want to use a tassel and/or you might choose a different object that will serve as an external reminder for a source of nourishment for your being. Or it could be one simple action that you want to remember and do such as taking a few slow, deep, cleansing breaths. *Ki Teitzei* invites us to reconnect in a moment among moments to something that will help nourish our being, our soul, our self.

Source of Life, where do our stories begin and end? Even, when our present doesn't seem to flow smoothly from our past, and/or when our future is unimaginable, help us to hold on. May we find the strength and stillness for even a brief moment, to experience some sort of healing.

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This Torah Reflection was written by Rabbi Erica Steelman, Staff Chaplain and Director of LGBT+ Initiatives, at the Abramson Center for Jewish Life in North Wales, Pennsylvania. The Torah Reflections series is published by the Bay Area Jewish Healing Center, a beneficiary of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties. More information and healing-oriented resources can be found at www.JewishHealingCenter.org.

