



Torah Reflections: Conversations on the Weekly Parsha
Parshat Ki Teitzei 5784 : The Divine Image

Integrating Torah into one's life through reflection and conversation can be an incredibly fun and engaging experience. It's a journey of discovery, where ancient wisdom and timeless teachings come to life in our daily experiences. Through reflection, we have the opportunity to dive deep into the rich tapestry of Torah, extracting profound insights and lessons that resonate with our modern lives. The joy lies in the 'aha' moments, those instances when a Torah verse or story suddenly connects with our personal challenges, aspirations, and values. And when we engage in conversations about Torah with others, it becomes an interactive exploration, where diverse perspectives and interpretations enhance our understanding. These dialogues often spark excitement and intellectual curiosity, making the learning process both enjoyable and fulfilling. Torah becomes a vibrant and dynamic part of our lives, offering not just guidance but also a source of endless fascination, connection, and growth.

NOTE: Don't feel obligated to go through every source or answer all the questions—unless you want to. Even one source, or one question will give you plenty of material for discussion and meditation. Enjoy this!

Some thoughts from the parsha

In Deuteronomy 21:22-23, the Torah commands that when someone is executed for a sin worthy of death, such as idolatry, and their body is hanged post-mortem, it must be taken down before nightfall. This act of hanging is meant to serve as a deterrent and not as a public spectacle or form of revenge. Unlike other ancient cultures, the Torah's intent is to remind people of the gravity of sin and the need to stay far from it, rather than to entertain or satisfy a desire for revenge. But shouldn't righteous people be given the opportunity to see that Divine Justice has been meted out?

Rashi explains why not. True, people must see that there are consequences for lawbreakers. Yet, the spectacle of a person who is hanged is considered a reproach, not to the sinner, but to G-d. This is akin to a scenario where the twin brother of a royal minister is hanged—onlookers might think it is the minister himself. Since man is created in the Image of G-d, hanging a body publicly tarnishes the representation of that Divine image, and by extension, it dishonors G-d.

Rabbi Akiva famously said, "Love your neighbor as yourself," which is seen as a foundational principle of the Torah. This teaching is further expanded by Hillel, who explained that it means to refrain from doing what is hateful to others, and, on a deeper level, to avoid actions that are hateful to G-d. Ben Azzai offered an even greater principle by reminding us that all human beings were created in G-d's image, and so the command to love and respect others extends beyond those closest to us, encompassing all of humanity.

The Torah's insistence on removing the hanged body before nightfall illustrates its profound respect for human dignity, even for those who have committed serious transgressions. This serves as a lesson that we must acknowledge and honor the Divine Image in all people, and it calls us to love our fellow humans as part of our service to G-d.



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Now, reflect upon the following questions

1. How does the understanding that every human being is made in the image of G-d shape your interactions with others, even those you may disagree with or dislike?
2. In what ways can we balance the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" with the need to prioritize self-care and personal survival, especially in challenging situations?
3. What are some modern societal practices that seem to celebrate justice or punishment as a form of entertainment, and how might these contrast with the Torah's approach to dignity and respect?
4. How might the principle of "do no harm" extend beyond our interactions with individuals to how we treat the environment or other aspects of the world that G-d has created?
5. What does it mean to "experience the Divine image in humanity," and how can that awareness transform both personal relationships and broader societal structures?

Shabbat Shalom