



# DVAR TZEDEK TEXT STUDY

## Parshat Ki Tisa 5772

March 10, 2012

**Something's different!** This week marks the fourth installment of a new, experimental initiative: the Dvar Tzedek Text Study. Periodically over the next several months, our weekly Torah commentary will take this interactive format. We hope that you'll use our text studies to actively engage with the *parshah* and contemporary global justice issues.

Consider using this text study in any of the following ways:

- **Learn collectively.** Discuss it with friends, family or colleagues. Try using it as a conversation-starter at your Shabbat table.
- **Enrich your own learning.** Read it as you would a regular Dvar Tzedek and reflect on the questions it raises.
- **Teach.** Use the ideas and reactions it sparks in you as the basis for your own *dvar Torah*.

Please take a minute to [tell us what you think](#) of this experimental format.

### Introduction

*Parshat Ki Tisa* includes one of the most dramatic passages in the Torah—the scene of the Golden Calf. Moses is concluding his stay on Mount Sinai and has just received the two tablets when God breaks the news that the Israelites have panicked at his long absence and are worshipping a golden idol. Analyzing Moses's response can help us examine what motivates our own choices to speak out or remain silent when faced with a crisis.

<p>Exodus 32:7-11</p> <p>7) God spoke to Moses, "Hurry down, for your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt, have acted basely. 8) They have been quick to turn aside from the way that I enjoined upon them. They have made themselves a molten calf and bowed low to it and sacrificed to it, saying: 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" 9) God further said to Moses, "I see that this is a stiff-necked people. 10) Now, let Me be, that My anger may blaze forth against them and that I may destroy them, and make of you a great nation." 11) But Moses implored God, saying, "Let not Your anger, O Lord, blaze forth against Your people, whom You delivered from the land of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand.</p>	<p><b>שמות לב: ז-יא</b></p> <p>ז) וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר כִּי שָׁחַת עַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלִיתָ מִמִּצְרָיִם ח) סָרוּ מֵהַר מִן הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִם עֲשׂוּ לָהֶם עֵגֶל מִסֶּכֶה וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לוֹ וַיִּזְבְּחוּ לוֹ וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלִינוּךָ מִמִּצְרָיִם ט) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה רְאִיתִי אֶת הָעָם הַזֶּה וְהִנֵּה עִם קָשָׁה עֲרֹף הוּא י) וְעַתָּה הִנֵּיחָה לִי וַיַּחַר אַפִּי בָהֶם וְאַבְלָם וְאַעֲשֶׂה אוֹתָךְ לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל יא) וַיַּחַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת פְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹהָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה ה' יַחַר אַפְּךָ בְּעַמְּךָ אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתָ מִמִּצְרָיִם בְּכַח גְּדוֹל וּבְיָד חֲזָקָה :</p>
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- Why does God initially ask Moses to “hurry down,” and then declare plans to destroy the people? What do you think God wants Moses to do?
- The opening of verse 9, “God further said to Moses,” implies a pause in God’s monologue between verses 8 and 9. Why do you think Moses doesn’t interject at this point?
- What do you make of Moses’s response to God? Do you think Moses should have responded differently, and if so, how?
- When have you been silent in the face of an important issue, and then decided to speak up? What changed?

<p><b>Rashi on Exodus 32:10</b></p> <p>“Let Me be:” We still have not heard that Moses prayed on their behalf [asking God not to kill the Israelites], and God said “Let Me be”?! Rather, God created for Moses an opening and made it clear to him that the matter is dependent on him [Moses], that if he would pray on their behalf, God would not destroy them.</p>	<p><b>רש"י שמות לב:</b></p> <p>הניחה לי - עדיין לא שמענו, שהתפלל משה עליהם, והוא אומר הניחה לי, אלא כאן פתח לו פתח והודיעו, שהדבר תלוי בו, שאם יתפלל עליהם לא יכלם</p>
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- In Rashi’s understanding of this passage, why does God tell Moses to “let Me be,” in spite of the fact that Moses has not said anything yet? According to Rashi, why does Moses respond to God when he does?
- What is the significance of Moses understanding that “the matter is dependent on him”?
- Have you ever felt that an important matter “was dependent” on you? How did you respond?

Just as Moses, in Rashi’s reading of our *parshah*, did not initially understand the impact of speaking up, many Americans do not realize the power of their political voices. The Congressional Management Foundation conducted a survey of Congressional offices to determine what types of communications from their constituents (i.e. petitions, e-mails, phone calls, visits) influence them most:

**Congressional Management Foundation, Perceptions of Citizen Advocacy on Capitol Hill, Key Findings<sup>1</sup>**

Citizens Have More Power Than They Realize. Most of the [Congress Members’] staff surveyed said constituent visits to the Washington office (97%) and to the district/state office (94%) have ‘some’ or ‘a lot’ of influence on an undecided Member, more than any other influence group or strategy. When asked about strategies directed to their offices back home, staffers said questions at town hall meetings (87%) and letters to the editor (80%) have ‘some’ or ‘a lot’ of influence. . . staffers also said postal mail (90%) and email (88%) would influence an undecided Member of Congress.

- Do you find these statistics surprising? If so, how? Do you think most Americans have similar perceptions of how effective political advocacy can be?
- Does knowing how impactful political advocacy can be make you more likely to engage in it? Does it change your sense of responsibility to engage in it?
- What issues do you feel passionate about but have felt hesitant to advocate on, and why?
- As Moses needed God to give him an opening, what would you need to make you feel ready to take on a larger role in advocacy?

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.congressfoundation.org/projects/communicating-with-congress/perceptions-of-citizen-advocacy-on-capitol-hill>

## Conclusion

Moses is ideally placed to advocate to God to save the Israelite people. He has access to and a relationship with the actor in power and cares deeply about the people being affected. Yet, in Rashi's understanding, Moses does not speak up until God invites him to do so. Too often we are like Moses. We wait for an invitation to become involved, to advocate to our government and abroad for causes we believe in. But decision makers do not frequently call us to solicit our opinions. And, like Moses, so many important matters are dependent on us, if only we would make our voices heard.

*Click [here](#) for a first-hand account of advocacy in action by AJWS Volunteer Summer participant Izzy Parilis and watch your inbox for more opportunities to take action with AJWS.*

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