



DVAR TZEDEK TEXT STUDY

Parshat Shmot 5772

January 14, 2012

Something's different! This week marks the second installment of a new, experimental initiative: the Dvar Tzedek Text Study. Periodically over the next six 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 two minutes to tell us what you think of this experimental format by completing this [feedback form](#).

Introduction

In *Parshat Shmot* we read the famous story of Moses at the burning bush. Moses's response to his first interaction with God can offer us powerful lessons about our own way of perceiving the world, and our relationship to the injustices that surround us.

<p>Exodus 3:2-4</p> <p>2. An angel of Adonai appeared to [Moses] in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed.</p> <p>3. Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight, why doesn't the bush burn up?"</p> <p>4. When Adonai saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses! He answered, "Here I am."</p>	<p>שמות ג:ב-ד</p> <p>ב. וַיֵּרָא מֵלֶאֱדָם ה' אֱלֹהֵי בְלֶבֶת אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֵּה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַסִּנֵּה בֹעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסִּנֵּה אֵינְנוֹ אֹכֵל :</p> <p>ג. וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה--אֲסַרְהָ-נָא וְאֶרְאֶה, אֶת-הַמִּרְאָה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה : מַדּוּעַ, לֹא-יִבְעַר הַסִּנֵּה.</p> <p>ד. וַיֵּרָא ה', כִּי סָר לִרְאוֹת ; וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֵּה, וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה--וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּנִי.</p>
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

- What does Moses see, hear and sense at the burning bush?
- How does he respond to this experience? What, if anything, surprises you about his response?

The medieval biblical commentator Ramban notices a strange inconsistency in the text. Verse two says that an angel appeared in the bush. Two verses later, we read that God—not an angel—spoke to Moses out of the bush. In response to this apparent contradiction, Ramban offers the following interpretation:

<p>Ramban on Exodus 3:2</p> <p>Our sages intended to say that from the beginning, [both the angel] Michael and the Divine Presence (<i>K'vod haShechinah</i>) appeared to him, but Moses didn't see the Divine Presence because he hadn't prepared his heart for prophecy. When he inclined his heart and turned to see, the appearance of the Divine was revealed to him and God called to him from the midst of the bush.</p>	<p>רמב"ן שמות ג:ב</p> <p>נתכוונו לומר שמתחלה נראה אליו מיכאל ושם כבוד השכינה, והוא לא ראה הכבוד כי לא הכין דעתו לנבואה, וכאשר כיון לבו וסר לראות נתגלה אליו מראה השכינה ויקרא אליו אלהים מתוך הסנה.</p>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

In Ramban's reading of Exodus 3:2, the presence of God was in the bush from the beginning, but Moses couldn't perceive it because he hadn't properly "prepared his heart for prophecy."

- What do you imagine Moses did to prepare his heart to see the Divine Presence in the burning bush?
- In your own life, how do you 'prepare your heart' to perceive truths in the world around you?

Preparing ourselves to see the truths around us is especially important when we're talking about the suffering of others. Homeless people live on the streets we walk; children work in inhumane conditions to sew our clothing; and people around the world lack access to sufficient food. These things exist—whether or not we see. They reach out to us, like the flames of the bush, asking us to acknowledge their presence and take action. Like Moses, we must undergo a process to sensitize ourselves to these realities before we can respond to their calls.

- What has helped you sensitize yourself to injustice in the past?
- What new steps can you take to prepare your heart to perceive injustice?

Conclusion

Between the verse describing an angel and that describing God in the burning bush, Moses "turns aside" to look more deeply at what he is seeing. Perhaps it is this very act of choosing to look more closely that prepares Moses to perceive—and be called upon by—God.

Many of us are blessed to live lives that are thoroughly insulated from the greatest injustices of our time. It is easy to avoid the hard work of "turning aside" and confronting these issues. However, like Moses, we are each charged with engaging in the process that will open our hearts to awareness. Only then can we hear, and answer, the call to serve.

Please take two minutes to tell us what you think of this experimental format by completing this [feedback form](#).

©2012 American Jewish World Service

To subscribe to this publication, please visit www.ajws.org/dvartzedek.

American Jewish World Service (AJWS) is an international development organization motivated by Judaism's imperative to pursue justice. AJWS is dedicated to alleviating poverty, hunger and disease among the people of the developing world regardless of race, religion or nationality. Through grants to grassroots organizations, volunteer service, advocacy and education, AJWS fosters civil society, sustainable development and human rights for all people, while promoting the values and responsibilities of global citizenship within the Jewish community.