

SIMPLE AND OBVIOUS

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Let me tell you a secret. When G-d said to Avraham (Ber.21:12) "Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her," G-d was revealing the secret for a lasting and productive relationship.

This Shabbos we will complete the Sefer (book of) Shemos (Exodus). Sefer Shemos is the record of G-d's coming out from behind the veil of nature. As Rav Hirsch explains, Shemos is where G-d revealed His expectations for humanity.

Taking center stage was Matan Torah (giving of the Ten Commandments). All the events that preceded and the events that followed were to frame that singularly most unique moment in history. Creation, the Avos (patriarchs), and the descent into Egypt were the prelude to the Bnai Yisroel becoming a nation. 210 years of estrangement, enslavement, and persecution forced separation on the Jews and gave them cause to follow Moshe into the wilderness without water or protection. The 10 plagues, Yetziat Mitzrayim (exodus), Kriyas Yam Suf (parting of the sea), singing Shira (song), food from heaven, water from rocks, clouds of glory, doubts and more miracles, brought them to the foot of Mt. Sinai. Then, as a single entity, the descendents of the Avos and Imahos (matriarchs) greeted the dawn of Revelation and collectively trembled at the power of G-d's voice.

Elevated to heights impossible to sustain they crashed after a mere forty days and nights. Confusion, questions, fears, and the ever emerging ego, created a golden mirror that reflected the latent animal within them. Given the choice, most humans choose to live docile lives of burden working from meal to meal with little desire for nobility or sanctity. They believe that there is nothing more and that to aspire to greatness is at best delusional and foolish. The notion of an eternity of elevated service, meaning, and purpose is foreign to them as it would be to the beasts in the field. Yet, G-d persisted.

"Build Me a Mishkan (tabernacle) and I will dwell among them!" If you wish Me to be close to you, if you desire that I forgive your human foolishness and dwell among you, make room for Me in your hearts. Proclaim out loud so that your children can hear, "In my heart I will build a sanctuary to the glory of His honor..." Gather gold, silver, and other fine metals and materials and fashion for Me a Mishkan wherein I will dwell, wherein you will always know where to find Me. No longer will I overtly reveal Myself to the public eye. Instead, I reside behind the raised curtains and walls of the Tabernacle. At times I will invite you to My home and expect you to arrive in time for dinner. At all other times My door is wide open; however, you will have to follow the rules of My home in the manner that you prepare to enter and in the manner that you greet Me.

Appointed to maintain My residence and facilitate our relationship is the same man you chose amidst your confusion and questions. Clearly, you trusted him; otherwise, why did you turn to him? Aharon and his children will be the Kohanim (priests) and their tribe, the Leviyim (Levites), will aid in the upkeep and teaching. However, you will have to listen to the rules or else there will be dire consequences. That is the only thing that I ask. I demand that you listen to My rules. I do not expect perfection and I am prepared in most instances to extend forgiveness and opportunity; however, you must desire to have a relationship with Me. You must desire to grow and become more that you presently are. If you seek Me out you will find Me. "

G-d is very consistent. In all of history He never once changed His expectations for humanity. With Adam and Chava He made it really simple. Do whatever you wish, go wherever you like, just do not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Simply put, just listen to what I say to you and all will be better than good, All will be perfect. They did not listen; yet, He forgave them.

To Adam, Chava, and the rest of humanity G-d then gave the seven Mitzvos. Most of the seven involved not doing something and only one demanded that they do something; and that something - the establishment of a court system - was solely for their sake. All told it was pretty simple; nevertheless, they did not listen. This time He did not forgive most of them.

Noach emerged with his family, humbled and determined to serve the world as G-d intended. For the most part it was still very simple. It still only involved seven basic Mitzvos; yet the next ten generations did not listen. This time G-d forgave them but they would no longer receive His Torah.

Avraham was the only one who wanted to listen. He was the only one who sought out G-d. Avraham sought and he found. Still, for the most part there was only seven Mitzvos and Avraham listened to the voice of G-d and did as he was instructed to do. G-d went so far as to test that simple expectation and resolve. Ten times G-d tested Avraham and each time he passed with flying colors. Each time Avraham proved that a human can listen to G-d and do whatever He asks - even the seeming impossible. Avraham knew that G-d's statement, "Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her," was intended to better train him to listen to G-d, not just Sarah.

Four centuries later the chosen descendents of Avraham and Sarah numbered in the millions. The time had come for redemption. Moshe was chosen to lead but he first refused. G-d said to him. "In the end I only need you to listen to Me and do as I tell you. So stop arguing with Me and do as I tell you." Moshe listened to G-d. Aharon rejoiced and listened to G-d. The Bnai Yisroel listened to Moshe and believed that it was the time of redemption. (4:31) "And the people believed and they heard that G-d had remembered them..."

Then came the tests - some obvious and some not so obvious. "Do as I tell you and take a lamb, the god of the Egyptians, and tie it to your bed post." They did so, they listened to G-d. "Ask your neighbors for their gold, silver, and fine clothing." They did as they were told." It's time to leave. Take your children and left over Matzo and follow Moshe into the desert." They did as they were told.

"Stand silent and witness the glory of G-d," They stood silent and then crossed the sea between towering walls of water. They did as they were told. They burst forth in Shira proclaiming to themselves and the world that there is only G-d in the universe and their job is to listen to Him. It could not have been more obvious or simple. They had been tested and they proved, as did Avraham before them, that they could listen to all that G-d asked of them.

Then came the thirst and the hunger. The test was not so obvious. G-d had not made a specific request. It was now a question of the trust that should have been. Would they complain or would they trust that G-d would take care of them? They complained and they failed the test. G-d forgave them and sent them toward Mt. Sinai. Time and time again the same scenario played itself out. They had the chance to trust the relationship and they did not do so. The not so subtle message that listening to G-d also meant to trust Him was not getting through. Nevertheless, G-d forgave them their imperfection and brought them to Mt. Sinai.

Something changed. Suddenly they were ready. "Do you want My Torah?" "Yes! We will do all that You ask of us!" G-d revealed Himself to the nation and they trembled before Him. Moshe ascended the mountain to receive the first Luchos (Tablets) and the Bnai Yisroel waited to hear more of what G-d wanted from them. It was so simple - whatever He would ask they were prepared to do. Perceived delay, confusion, fear and finally betrayal with the Golden Calf - the Bnai Yisroel forgot to simply listen and trust.

Two more trips to the mountain top and Moshe came back with the second Luchos. Yom Kippur would forever be the day when we reconfirm the simplicity of "Naaseh V'Nishmah" - "We will do and then we will attempt to understand." We are prepared to do whatever G-d asks of us. We will listen and we will do because "G-d is our G-d." However, along with the forgiveness came the opportunity of constructing a place for G-d to dwell among them.

Quickly they assembled the necessary materials. As fast as they contributed to the Eigel (calf) they contributed even faster to the Mishkan. "Enough! Enough! Hold back your donations. We have enough!" Here are the plans and the instructions; here is the chief architect and his assistant, go build G-d His home. However, make sure that you do exactly what G-d commands! Listen and do as you are told!

(39:43) "And Moshe inspected all the work of the Mishkan... behold, it had been done exactly as G-d had commanded. Moshe blessed them." (See Tehilim 90)

It is really that simple. "Whatever Sarah tells you, listen to her."

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