

Sermon for Parashat Pekudei 5765

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There two extraordinarily popular books out today that deal with similar issues. The more famous of the books is *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* by John Gray. And the better one is entitled *He's Just Not That Into You* by Greg Behrendt. Both books have catapulted their authors into international acclaim. Both say the same thing: men and women often misunderstand each other. *He's Just Not That Into You* puts forth the proposition that the reason some women have difficulty finding the right mate is that they haven't learned to read the basic clues that the person they are pursuing just is not interested. I am sure the theories that Behrendt establishes work for both women and men, and I wish there had been such a manual when I was dating. I can't tell you how many times I heard the line "I just want to be friends." Never mind. But the truth is, we often have difficulty picking up on the most obvious signs that we are sending to each other. We mistake a gesture and we misunderstand a look. It would be a lot easier if we could just ask Greg Behrendt to come with us and watch our date's body language and let us know if he or she is interested in at least another date or even just another course to the dinner, or if they would like to bolt after the appetizer. If Greg could simply have sat next to me and whispered in my ear, "she's just not that into you," I would have gladly paid the check and moved on. I wish Greg could come with me to meetings, and after I put an idea out there, he could scan the room and say, "they are just not that into that idea." I wish Greg could join me at the dinner table and when I ask the kids to do something, Greg could measure their response and simply lean over and say, "They are just not listening to you."

I am sure that like me, many of you would love to know how our behavior is being accepted. And in the even more complicated circumstance where we know that what we have done in the past has been wrong and we are trying to make amends, we desire to know how our remediation is being observed. We want to know how those we love feel about us now. They say they accept our apology, but we see something different in their eyes. We are honest and we express ourselves to the best of our abilities and they acknowledge our sincerity, but there is still a distance.

The golden calf is the sin against which all other sins in the Torah are measured. The construction and the celebration surrounding the *egel hazahav* is the greatest fracture between God and the Jewish people ever and became immediately the moment of greatest distance between us and God. That is why nearly every Midrash and commentary reminds us that the building of the Tabernacle was done as a measure to show the reconciliation of the people with God. The construction and execution of the Tabernacle, the *mishkan ha'edut*, becomes a testimony to the reestablishment of a line of communication between us and the Almighty. The Jewish people recognize because of Moses' overwhelming response that they have sinned in forcing the building of the golden calf. Moses descends the mountain and smashes the tablets, the gift from God, and the people recoil. They know they have done wrong and they refocus and complete the building of the Mishkan. But all the while they wonder, have they made it up to God yet?

You know the feeling. You are all in relationships and have done something wrong. You have apologized and your apology has been accepted, but you still wonder. There is a moment between the time confidence-building measures are put in place and the time when real connection is reestablished. At every look, every gesture, every

movement, you question the other's motives. What did he mean by that, what did she mean by that? The same is true of our bond with God.

At the end of this week's reading, God appears again in the same manifestation as He did when the book of Exodus began – in the manner of a cloud. God as seen through a cloud is our God of protection, our God of shade, our God of care. But this time there is no room in the cloud for us, and the Jewish people are left to wonder, what does this mean? *V'lo yakhol moshe lavo el ohel moed, ki shakhan alav he'anan; u-kh'vod Adonai maleh ha-mishkan.* (Exodus 40:35) - Not even Moses could enter the Mishkan because God has completely filled the space. And the people become paralyzed. They are confused by the mixed signals, and they cannot move. The Torah continues, *v'im lo ye'aleh he'anan v'lo yis'u ad yom he'aloto.* (Exodus 40:37) And the people would not move until the cloud lifted. The Jewish people are paralyzed in uncertainty. Is God's fully and completely filling the holy space of the Tabernacle a sign that God has accepted the apology, the *teshuvah*, of His *am segulah*, His chosen people, and has Himself returned to them, or is it a sign that there is no longer any room for us under the tent?

That is where Hizkuni [France, 13th century] and Rashbam [France, 12th century] offer us insight. Both of these great commentators explain the action in the most positive of terms. Both of these sages add the word “immediately” to the text of the Torah, suggesting that God inhabited the tabernacle *immediately*. *Ki shakhen elav ha-anan miyad, l'harot et hibato shel ha-Kodesh Barukh Hu al yisrael.* Because of God's love for the people of Israel, He *immediately* inhabited the sacred space they had created. No pause, no reluctance, no waiting – *immediately* God uses that which the people had created *Ki shakhen elav ha-anan miyad, l'harot et hibato shel ha-Kodesh Barukh Hu al yisrael.* God's response is fast – no pause, no

moment of uncertainty, no reservation. God does not withhold His love for His people for a second.

Oh, that we could be a little more Godlike! You have an argument with a friend, with a child, with your spouse, with your parent – you pick the relationship. The conflict concludes and the apology is offered and you reluctantly accept the admission of guilt. But you wait. You pause to see if their actions attest their language. You wonder and you evaluate. You are cautious and defensive. You have already accepted their apology, but you are still distant.

When you are on the other side – when you are the one who has apologized – you wait. You wonder about the other’s actions and you evaluate. Maybe you watch from a distance trying not to push the issue. You have done your part and you wait to see if the person is really going to reconnect. You ask, “Are we all right?” You look into their eyes for a glimpse of how they are truly feeling. And the silence is deafening. The quiet is painful. The uncertainty is palpable. So we linger and time passes and then there is a little smile and the true return occurs and we are grateful. God does not wait. God does not withhold affection and connection and we must learn from that. God accepts the return immediately. The moment we turn to God, God rushes to embrace us, longing always for our return.

You choose how you are going to interpret behaviors. You have the choice of deciding another’s sincerity and whether or not their actions support or destroy your perception of their genuineness. But I urge you to give those you love the benefit of the doubt and seize every opportunity to embrace them. Rush in and take hold of your son, your daughter, your husband or your wife. Fill their lives with a love that is divine in its origin and delightful in its expression. We all have choices. No one is

forced to accept another's apology, no one can be manipulated into reconnecting when they believe, they truly believe the connection is lost. But if you can find it somewhere – anywhere – whether it is superficial or deeply embedded, I insist you act on your desire for a bond and rush in. Be like God and fill that void. We may be receiving a mixed signal – so find some clarity and fill the indecision with love and a commitment to a future that understands the past and moves forward.