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Parashas Bereishis

בראשית

Just Do It

וּמִעֵץ הַדַּעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ

*But from the Tree (of) Knowledge of what is good and evil, you
shall not eat from it*

2:16-17

SIX DAYS OF CREATION. LIGHT, WATER, sky, dry land, fish, birds, animals of every kind: a whole world switched on, everything in it simply doing what it does. Then, at the very end, comes the human being, and the moment he shows up, something happens that had never happened before in the history of the world: he is handed a *rule*.

Eat from anything you like, Adam is told. Anything at all. Except that one.

Nowhere in the six days before him does anyone get an “except that.” The animals don’t. An animal runs on a simple program: if it looks good, smells good, and tastes good, indulge. There has never in history been a lion who chased down a zebra, got him cornered, and then paused to think, “You know what, I really shouldn’t. This is a little beneath me.” No leopard mid-chase has ever thought, “Uh-oh, if I eat this now I’ll be fleishig for six hours.” That’s not a thing. The animal wants, the animal takes. End of story.

Man is the first creature in the world who gets told: you can want something, and still not take it.

No sooner is the rule given than someone shows up to argue with it. The snake.

The talking snake makes people nervous — a serpent having a philosophical debate in a garden. Yet listen to what the argument actually *is*, because it's the most familiar argument in the world. The snake comes over to Chava and, stripped down, his whole pitch is one line: *It's a perfectly good fruit. It looks good, it smells good, it tastes good. What in the world would stop you?*

In other words: *you're an animal. Indulge. That's what the appetite is for.*

Chava answers him with what may be the first moral sentence a human being ever spoke: *No. There's a rule. We don't just eat because it's there. We're not only animals.*

Back and forth it goes, *just take it* against *but there's a line*, until the snake finally wears her down, and she eats, and hands it to her husband, and the whole story of the world begins.

Yet don't file that away as ancient history, something that happened once to two people long ago. Because that conversation, *just take it* versus *but there's a line*, is a conversation you have with yourself a dozen times before lunch.



The alarm goes off. A small voice says, “Get up, there’s a whole day of good to do.” A second, much more persuasive voice answers, “Stay in bed. You’re tired. You earned it. Big day ahead, you’ll need your strength.” By the third round you’ve already hit snooze.

The second helping you don’t need. The comment you know you shouldn’t make but it’s *right there* and it’s so good. The screen you shouldn’t open. Every one of them arrives as the same little negotiation: *should I, or shouldn’t I*.

That “should I or shouldn’t I” — that flicker, that half-second of hesitation before you act — *that* is the snake, still in business, still working the same corner he worked in the garden. His entire job, then and now, is to get you to skip that half-second.



The most famous advertising slogan ever created, a slogan a sportswear company built an empire on, is three words long, and it happens to be the snake’s entire philosophy in three words.

Just do it.

That is a whole philosophy compressed into three words. Don’t weigh it. Don’t ask whether you should. Don’t think about how you’ll feel about it afterward. Don’t check it against any rule. Just — do — it. That is not a shoe slogan. That is the serpent’s mission statement.

Then there’s that little swoosh they stamp on everything. Squint at it. Doesn’t it look, just a little, like a snake?



This is the reason the Torah opens the human story exactly this way.

The animal *just does it*. That's not a flaw in the animal; it's simply what an animal is. It has no half-second. It wants, and it takes, and it is completely innocent, because it was never given a rule to break.

You were given one. The entire dignity of being a human being, the whole difference between you and a very clever, very hungry animal, lives inside the exact half-second the snake is trying to get you to skip. The pause where you ask *should I?* That pause is not a cage the Torah put around your life to make it smaller. That pause **is** your life. It is the one thing in all of creation that only you can do.

The snake has been selling “just do it” since the first afternoon of the world, and business has never been better. The whole job of a human being is to slow him down — to hold that half-second open just long enough to ask the question no animal ever asks: *should I?* Learn to live inside that little pause, and you are doing the one thing in all of creation that only you can do. That is the story of Adam, and it is why the Torah chose to open with it.