



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM
SHELACH / שלח
WE SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED

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The Six Day War. Everyone is familiar with this war and also with the terror that gripped the land of Israel before it, for fear of the terrible tragedy it would be. The miraculous victory was a complete surprise to the Jewish nation, in Israel and all over the world.

In recent years, I've read interviews with officers of the Israeli army from that time. From these interviews it seems clear that within the army a completely different atmosphere prevailed. There was no fear; in fact, they wanted this war to begin and felt they would win. For the military, the enormity of the victory was a surprise, the victory itself was not.

In this week's torah portion we read about the spies that were sent by Moshe to explore the land. Moshe chose great people, specifically leaders from each tribe, as it says "Each of them was a head of Israel." And Rashi adds "At the time they were all righteous people."

Among them was Moshe's beloved student, Yehoshua ben Nun, and his nephew, Calev ben Yefuneh. However, right from the start we see that Moshe felt something bad would come of this excursion. In the beginning of this episode Rashi



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explains G-d's phrase "Send for yourself men" to mean "According to your own understanding. I am not commanding you, but if you wish, you may send."

Moshe understood that if G-d wasn't commanding it, they were talking about an unsuccessful mission here. Also we see that "Moshe called Hoshea ben Nun - Yehoshua." In Jewish traditions there is a custom that when a person is ill we change or add to his name in order to save him. Moshe chose, therefore, to change the name from Hoshea to Yehoshua, as Rashi explains "He prayed for him 'May G-d save you from the counsel of the Spies'." All of these show us that Moshe knew from the start that there were problems and the spies would not come back with a good report.

Moshe was not the only one with this premonition. We read about Calev, who did not merit direct messages from G-d, that he went to Chevron on their way in to Israel. Rashi explains "Calev alone went and prayed at the graves of the Patriarchs that he not be enticed by his peers to follow their counsel." Calev, therefore, also felt that something wasn't right here. So although it seemed that it came as a surprise that the spies brought back a bad report, if we examine the text we know that Moshe expected this kind of outcome. How did he know?

The answer is in the beginning of the book of Devarim. Moshe reveals something very interesting: "The Lord our God spoke to us in Horeb, saying, 'You have dwelt long enough at this mountain.'" Rashi explains that G-d requested of them that they travel to Israel.



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The Rebbe says, "Moshe wanted to clarify that the Jews were actually supposed to enter the land right away. While they were still in Chorev they were commanded to travel to Israel. It is understood, then, that every extra day they spent at Mount Sinai was considered too much, for G-d wanted them to enter Israel immediately." The Torah writes explicitly that their entering the land was not delayed because of G-d's command, but on the contrary, the Jews were the ones who did not want to leave Mount Sinai.

When we see how long the Jews were camped at Mount Sinai, it seems a bit strange. They left Egypt on Pesach and by Rosh Chodesh Sivan reached Sinai, received the Torah and then Moshe ascended the mountain for forty days. During those forty days, matters became confused and the sin of the golden calf happened. Moshe was delayed another eighty days, praying, until finally on Yom Kippur, G-d said "I forgive you." And on the very next day, Moshe gives the command to begin building the Mishkan.

Seemingly this is hard to understand. If the whole purpose of their being taken out of Egypt was to be brought to "a land flowing with milk and honey", then why are they hanging out in the desert? Immediately after Yom Kippur they should have begun the Journey to Israel. Could they not have built the Mishkan in Israel? Is that not the most fitting place to build a dwelling place for G-d?

Even if we say that G-d wanted them to first build the Mishkan and only then enter the land, in the Midrash we find "Rabbi Chanina says that the work on the



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Mishkan was completed on the 25th day of Kislev and it remained dismantled until the 1st of Nissan." This time between Kislev and Nissan would seem like the perfect time to travel to Israel! Instead, they waited till the 1st of Nissan, erected the Mishkan, celebrated Pesach and only on the 2nd of Iyar did they finally leave Sinai!

Moshe noticed already at Sinai that the Jews were in no rush to enter the Land of Israel. They had a difficult time departing from Mount Sinai. Therefore, when we read "And all of you approached me and said, "Let us send men ahead of us so that they will search out the land for us" Moshe realized immediately that this was another stalling tactic by the Jews and that something bad was bound to come of the spies' trip.

In essence everyone knew this, it didn't come as a surprise to anyone- the Jews wanted to stay at Sinai, whereas Moshe wanted to go into Israel and build the Temple on Mount Moriah.

Mount Sinai symbolizes the place where the Jews received. They received the Torah, the manna, water, clouds of glory for protection; in short, they were busy receiving. But Mount Moriah, where they would build the Temple, symbolized giving; there they offered, gave, provided. The Jews did not want to leave this place of receiving to travel to a place where they would need to give. Obviously the result of the spies' trip came as no surprise to anyone, not to Moshe, not to Calev and not to the Jews.



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What is the lesson here for us? Often people complain that they send their children to a Jewish school but it doesn't seem like they will continue to keep what they're learning there. They don't show interest in the synagogue or in other matters of Judaism and what they actually do is done as a favor to their parents. It's become very common to hear "I wasted \$100,000 on a Jewish School and have nothing to show for it."

Ladies and gentlemen, one thing is for certain: Judaism won't come as surprise to them! People who today are in their forties or fifties are constantly surprised. I ask someone, "Will I see you in synagogue on Shavuot?" and he's surprised: "I never heard of this holiday!" I speak to someone about Mezuzah and he's surprised: "I never knew there's supposed to be a scroll inside the case!" Another never heard of tefillin and on and on! Every day I have the opportunity to surprise someone else.

But for children who've gone to a Jewish School, even if they aren't religious, will never be surprised by something in Judaism. They've heard of Lag B'Omer, they know who Rabbi Akiva was, they know what a mezuzah is, they know what a mikva is and that it's not only for conversions. This is the purpose of our generation; to give the children what the generation before them was lacking. To fix this terrible lack of knowledge that is so prevalent in our times! We need to make sure that they are never surprised by anything Jewish.