



# SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

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**WHY G-D LOVES TOURISTS**

**A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE**

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In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman ז"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס זייל  
who loved and supported Torah learning.

## **SHLACH**

### **WHY G-D LOVES TOURISTS**

Anyone who visits Israel will notice an interesting phenomenon: Israelis have the greatest reverence for tourists. Locals aren't shown such shining faces—but tourists always get smiles and warmth.

Ask any Israeli – when he speaks to the locals in Hebrew, he gets the local treatment—which is to say, no treatment at all. However, if he has a good English and he addresses the Israelis in English, then he gets the royal treatment reserved exclusively for tourists.

Now, let's try to understand why this is: What is it about tourists that draws Israelis out of their crusty shells to show their warmer sides buried deep within?

Some will say it's a simple calculation: Tourists are a very important part of Israel's economy. They visit Israel, stay in the hotels and shop at the stores, and hundreds if not thousands of locals make their living off them.

But I think there's something deeper here.

In this week's Torah portion, we read about the Spies. Everyone knows the story of how Moshe sent 12 tribal leaders "to scout out the Land" and come back to the Jewish People to tell them what's going on there.

For their part, the Spies did indeed return. After 40 days of scouting out the Land, they came back and reported that the Land indeed is "a land flowing with milk and honey. However...", and here comes the big "but": The people there are fierce and strong, they live in fortified cities, and there are even giants living there.

Calev, who was one of the Spies, immediately interrupted them and declared, "Let's go up and inherit it!"—we can conquer the Land. But his colleagues didn't change their minds. They immediately proceeded with the verdict, "We cannot go up because they are too strong for us." At that point, the entire community began protesting to Moshe and Aharon, saying, "If only we died in Egypt!" It would have been better to die in Egypt or in the desert than to die by the sword in the Land of Israel. "Our wives and children will become captives!" So they immediately protested, "Wouldn't it be better

if we returned to Egypt!” And right after that came the verdict. “Let’s appoint a head and return to Egypt.”

And what were Moshe and Aharon’s comments to this mess? “And Moshe and Aharon fell on their faces”—they collapsed in front of everyone.

Now, what happened here? What kind of comment is falling down? Is that how a leader reacts? Especially when there were very similar complaints in the past: When the Jews stood at the Red Sea before the Splitting, they put up very similar complaints—almost word for word: “Is it for lack of graves in Egypt that you took us to die in the desert?” But what was Moshe’s reaction then? “Stand firm and see G-d’s deliverance!” Don’t be afraid—G-d will work miracles. So why here did he not get up and say the same thing—especially at a tough time when everybody wanted to hear something?

But the tougher question is: Where was Joshua? True, the verse later states that he joined Calev and said, “the Land is very, very good!” but that was at the end—and a little too late. Where was he at the critical moment? Why did he leave Calev alone against everyone else? Indeed, from the words of G-d Himself later in the story, Calev seems to be the main star of the story.

Let’s try to understand what happened here—why Joshua didn’t hear the call in those critical moments.

At that point, the Jewish People had lived for hundreds of years with the hope that the day would come when they would re-enter the Holy Land. G-d promised it to Avraham, to Yitzchok and to Yaakov, and they told it to their children. And so, for 210 years of Egyptian suffering, they all dreamt about the Land of Israel. When Moshe came to redeem them from Egypt, the first thing he said was what G-d had told him to say: “I shall raise you up from the deprivation of Egypt... to a land flowing with milk and honey.”

Ultimately, they had left Egypt, received the Torah and built the Mishkan. They were now ready to enter the Promised Land—when along come the Spies and tell them that it was all a nice dream. The truth is rather different. It’s not possible to conquer the land. They gave a realistic report on the current situation. So it was only natural that the Jews would have such a serious reaction: Suddenly the dream of hundreds of years was shattered against the rock of reality, which is why “the People cried that night.”

But why didn’t Moshe, or at least Joshua say something?

The Talmud (Tractate Sotah 35a) states that Joshua did indeed try to say something even before Calev spoke—but the people immediately shouted him down: “Is this decapitated head going to speak?”

Now, what do those words mean?

Some commentators explain that the Jews had already heard Eldad and Meidad prophesizing in the camp, saying, “Moshe will die and Yehoshua will introduce the Nation into the Land.” So they shouted down Yehoshua: “You’re furthering your own interests! You want to bring us into the Land so that you can be a leader! You’re not interested in our good!” That’s why they called him a decapitated head, meaning that he was not adequate to be a leader to them, and that’s why they didn’t even give him the chance to open his mouth.

This is also the reason Moshe and Aharon couldn’t say a thing. First of all, they had never been to the Land, so they had no right to speak. The Spies, on the other hand, had just come back from the Land and related what they had seen—“so who are you, Moshe and Aharon, to speak at all? You weren’t there!” And besides, Moshe, Aharon and Yehoshua were part of the establishment that had always promised that the Jews would be brought to the Land, and so it was impossible to rely upon them—they had an agenda for a number of reasons.

Calev, on the other hand, was not part of the leadership. He had no inner sanctum, no fancy office with deep carpet, no circle of party hacks and aides around him. He had no power. He was objective. He brought “a different spirit.” He was an outsider. That’s why it was specifically Calev that the people were ready to listen to. That’s why it was he who succeeded to speak—and indeed, he brought “a different spirit”: a spirit of faith in G-d that they would indeed conquer the Land.

A person who lives in Israel and lives life day by day, with all of Israel’s problems, particularly the security problems—making peace, not making peace, ceasefires, prisoner returns, etc.—for such a person, it’s difficult to see the qualities of Israel.

But tourists who come from abroad remind Israelis that “the Land is very, very good.” Israel’s economy is growing in a way we can only envy: Wherever you look you see construction. Everything is developing. Tens of thousands of youths stroll the streets. The Land looks better than ever.

It is specifically someone who comes from the outside who sees the bigger picture. That’s why Israelis are so nice to tourists: Because they think to themselves, “If so many tourists are coming to Israel, it’s a sign that there must be something good about this place.”

For our part, my friends, our job is to be the Calevs of the Jewish world: To tell Israelis—and our fellow Jews—that “the Land is very, very good.”

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