

Shabbat Shelach L'kha
It'll Be Good For You!



To those who supported me on this journey, thank you.

To those who had confidence in my ability to serve this community commensurate with your expectations, thank you.

To those with whom I've prayed, studied, and shared sacred moments, thank you.

To those with whom I've traveled to Israel and Eastern Europe, thank you.

To the Temple Sinai board, to the Temple Sinai staff, and to my rabbinic colleagues, thank you.

To my sons Joshua, Sam, and Jakob: thank you for giving me the time and the space and the encouragement to pursue my dreams.

In Pirke Avot 1:6 we read: *עֲשֵׂה לָךְ רֵב, וְיָקִינָה לָךְ חֵבֵר*, *Find yourself a teacher of Torah, and you'll acquire a friend....* Rick: Although technically I have seniority since I was ordained a year before you, you are my Rabbi. Your scholarship and your passion for Judaism were evident all those years ago at HUC, as they are today. Thank you for being my inspiration, my support, my critic, my mentor, my husband and my best friend. I think we make a pretty good team, on and off the *bimah*.

These past four years have been quite a journey. One can't assume that every adventure will be a success, but I think this one has. Journeys are inherent to our history as a people. Long ago, God tapped Avram on the shoulder saying, *Lekh l'kha*, go on this journey. It'll be good for you. Avram could have refused. He could have run away like Jonah generations later. Worst case scenario, he could have stayed in Mesopotamia, modern day Iraq. But Avram didn't stay. He and Sarai took a risk. They had confidence in themselves. They had faith in God's promise that the adventure would be good for them.

This week's Torah portion describes a different adventure. In *parashat Shlach L'kha*, God instructs Moses to send a representative from each of the 12 tribes to check out the land of Israel. Moses commissions them with specific instructions. He gives them a checklist of where to go, what to look for, and what to bring back. Let's read these

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verses, which begin with a roster of who from each tribe was appointed to scout out the land.

The ETERNAL spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Send men to scout the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the Israelite people; send one man from each of their ancestral tribes, each one a chieftain among them." ³ So Moses, by the ETERNAL's command, sent them out from the wilderness of Paran, all the men being leaders of the Israelites.

⁴ And these were their names: From the tribe of Reuben, שְׁמוּעַ בֶּן-זִכְוֹר,

⁵ From the tribe of Simeon, שִׁשְׁפַּט בֶּן-חֹרִי,

⁶ From the tribe of Judah, קָלֵב בֶּן-יִפְנֵה,

⁷ From the tribe of Issachar, יִגָּאֵל בֶּן-יֹוסֵף,

⁸ From the tribe of Ephraim, הוֹשֵׁעַ בֶּן-גִּדְוֹן,

⁹ From the tribe of Benjamin, פִּלְטִי בֶּן-רְפוּא,

¹⁰ From the tribe of Zebulun, גְּדִיאֵל בֶּן-סוּדַי,

¹¹ From the tribe of Joseph, namely, the tribe of Manasseh, גְּדִי בֶן-סִיסִי,

¹² From the tribe of Dan, עַמִּיאֵל בֶּן-גַּמְלִי,

¹³ From the tribe of Asher, קִתְוֹר בֶּן-מִיכָאֵל,

¹⁴ From the tribe of Naphtali, נַחֲבִי בֶן-נֹפֶסִי,

¹⁵ From the tribe of Gad, גָּאוּאֵל בֶּן-מְכִי,

¹⁶ Those were the names of the men whom Moses sent to scout the land....

Here's the assignment:

¹⁷ When Moses sent them to scout the land of Canaan, he said to them, "Go up there into the Negev and on into the hill country, ¹⁸ and see what kind of country it is. Are the people who dwell in it strong or weak, few or many? ¹⁹ Is the country in which they dwell good or bad? Are the towns they live in open or fortified? ²⁰ Is the soil rich or poor? Is it wooded or not? And take pains to bring back some of the fruit of the land."

-- Now it happened to be the season of the first ripe grapes. ²¹ They went up and scouted the land, from the wilderness of Tzin to Rechov, at Levo-hamat. ²² They went up into the Negev and came to Hevron.... ²³ They reached the wadi Eshkol, and there they cut down a branch with a single cluster of grapes -- it had to be borne on a carrying frame by two of them -- and some pomegranates and figs. ²⁴ That place was named the wadi Eshkol because of the cluster that the Israelites cut down there. *(The image in the header is the official symbol of the Israel Ministry of Tourism.)*

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²⁵ At the end of forty days they returned from scouting the land. ²⁶ They went straight to Moses and Aaron and the whole Israelite community at Kadesh in the wilderness of Paran, and they made their report to them and to the whole community, as they showed them the fruit of the land. ²⁷ This is what they told him: "We came to the land you sent us to; it does indeed flow with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. (Numbers 13:1-27 TNK)

Mission accomplished! The scouts return to the Israelite community unscathed and with evidence of Canaan's bounty. We might expect the following verses to describe a fabulous celebration and Moses soon thereafter triumphantly leading the Israelites from nomadic wandering in the wilderness to peaceful settlement in the Promised Land. Not so fast. What happens instead is that some of the scouts, who remain nameless, add their unsolicited two cents. They say: "²⁸ ...The people who inhabit the country are powerful, and the cities are fortified and very large...." Calev tries to shush them, saying: "Let us by all means go up, and we shall gain possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it." ³¹ But the men who had gone up with him said, "We cannot attack that people, for it is stronger than we." (Numbers 13:28-31 TNK)

Why was it Calev who tried to dissuade the naysayers? Look at verse 6. Calev was from the tribe of Judah. The symbol for the tribe of Judah is the lion, an animal associated with majesty, courage, military prowess and determination. Despite his optimism, despite his "can-do" attitude, despite his belief that the Israelites had the strength and the ability to successfully enter and settle Canaan, Calev was unable to convince those who lacked the self-confidence to believe in themselves and their abilities.

The title of our *parashah*, and the one referred to earlier about Avram and Sarai, contains the Hebrew pronoun *l'kha*: *Lekh L'kha*, *Shlach L'kha*. *L'kha* means "for yourself." The phrases *Lekh L'kha* and *Shlach L'kha* are in command form. They instruct us to act for our own well-being, to do something for our own benefit. Each of us is entitled to decide what that is, although sometimes it's hard to hear our inner voice among the clamor of presumptuous know-it-alls.

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For example, among this esteemed community were some detractors who derided Building Our Future as negligent. They claimed that the project would incur too great a financial risk, that preschool and religious families would leave in droves, that we'd have a new, state of the art facility but no one to fill it. Thankfully, others believed strongly in the project. They gave generously. They worked tirelessly, planned meticulously, and turned the dream into reality. Was the project ambitious? Yes. Was it worth it? Absolutely yes!

Also among this esteemed community were some who prophesized that my working as part of Temple Sinai's clergy team would be a disaster, that having rabbis married to one another was not in the best interest of the synagogue. To those detractors, I respectfully disagree. Granted, vacations were tricky, but Rick and I never abandoned you. In the past four years, not a day went by when, from early morning until late at night, we weren't addressing your needs. Always, the Temple Sinai community came first, even to the point of Rick or me being absent from significant events in our family's life. By dividing responsibilities, rather than shadowing one another, we accomplished all that was expected of us, and more.

Lekh L'kha: I embarked on this journey voluntarily in 2015, when the rabbinic search committee was unable to find a suitable candidate for Assistant or Associate Rabbi. For four years, I've given this position my all. I've given my professionalism, my proficiency, and my efficiency. I've shared my knowledge and my passion for what I love most about Judaism. I know: I'm a little obsessive about Israel. Thanks for humoring me. *Lekh L'kha*: I embarked on this journey because teaching Torah, turning people on to Israel, connecting Jews with other Jews, creating meaningful worship experiences, forging community, and sharing sacred time is what I love about being a rabbi. As a part of this community for 14 years, please know how grateful I am to have been your rabbi for four of them.

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Shlach L'kha: Like Calev in this week's Torah portion, I hope I've been an aspirational leader. I hope I've motivated you to challenge yourself *l'kha*, for your own good: to study something complex, to engage in a new ritual practice or holy day observance, to link yourself to the Jewish community in a more profound way. Through discussion, travel, or personal interaction, I hope I've enriched your connection to the people and the Land of Israel. Like Calev vis-à-vis the Israelites, I hope I've been a worthy ambassador of Temple Sinai, that I've brought honor to this holy congregation.

One last comment: I am not retiring. As of July 1st, I just won't be a full-time employee of Temple Sinai. It was at the invitation of Temple Sinai's leadership that I joined the clergy team four years ago, and it is at the request of Temple Sinai's leadership that I conclude my tenure as your rabbi. It has been an honor and a privilege. May we all continue to go from strength to strength on our future journeys.