



DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

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There are certain common Hebrew words and phrases that no matter where you are in the world, you can hear Jews using them. Everywhere you go, you can expect to hear words like “*shalom*,” “*boker tov*,” and “*betach*.” One particular word stands out to me as a fascinating one. “*Halevai*.” *Halevai* means something like, “I wish!” or, “If only...!” It represents a sense of hope, a sense of striving, a sense of a belief that a greater day can come. That optimism, that belief and wish for what could be, is so, so important. Young children often dream so big. Whether as a parent, a teacher, or a friend, God forbid that we should throw their dreams away and tell them that they are not to be. If they are motivated, and strive, they will succeed in what they put their mind to, as long as we are there to support them in their growth.



At OU Israel, we see this all the time in our programs for teens. Whether in NCSY, The Pearl and Harold Jacobs Zula Outreach Center or our OU Israel Teen Centers, those running these programs want to help every one of our *chanichim* achieve their goals and aspirations. On the other hand, a good educator doesn't let a student bite off more than they can chew, and get hurt in the process. The key is understanding their talents and capabilities, and helping them achieve fulfillment where they can be their best self.

When we look at this week's parsha, we see a fascinating example of this. Yosef HaTzaddik has dreams. Dreams of bundles of wheat and of the sun, moon, and eleven stars all bowing down to one in the middle - him. He tells the brothers and he tells his father, Yaakov, who responds in quite a peculiar way: (Bereshit 37:10-11) “And his father reprimanded him, and said to him: ‘What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and your brothers indeed come to bow down to you upon the earth?’ His brothers were jealous, but his father kept the matter in mind.”

Which is it? Did Yaakov believe these dreams were nonsense, or did he “keep the matter in mind”? The answer is that to be a good parent, a good teacher, a good aunt, uncle, grandparent, we need to do a little of both. It is not good for us to hear a young child say “I want to be king” and say, “Of course! And you will be!”, no matter the kid and no matter their capabilities. Good

parenting and good teaching is to follow the potential of the child and understand where they stand now, with a belief that their potential will allow them to grow in amazing ways in the future, according to their talents, skills, and dispositions. Yosef's dreams were not feasible where Yosef was now, seventeen years old and still in many ways immature. But Yaakov also saw his potential and kept it in mind.

Also, think about Yosef's siblings' perspective here. When Yosef shares these dreams, what message are his brothers receiving? They're hearing: "I'm going to be everything, and you're going to be nothing. You're going to bow down to me." And suddenly, their own dreams feel crushed. Where are they supposed to place their hopes? What are they supposed to strive for in life? Yaakov recognizes this tension. He sees one child dreaming in a way that comes at the expense of his siblings, that minimizes them in order for Yosef to achieve greatness.

Yaakov's response is a message to all of us. The level of achievement we encourage in our children and students must be rooted in understanding the nefesh - the soul - of each and every one of them. It must be holistic, taking into account their own abilities as well as that of their friends and communities.

I am currently in Miami, Florida and spent an incredible and inspiring Shabbat by Rabbi Donald Bixon at his shul, Beth Israel. During this past week here in Florida, I had the opportunity to speak with teenagers in Miami Beach and I shared with them the following idea. Last week's parsha tells us that the Sar of Eisav changed Yaakov's name to Yisrael. Yet throughout the Torah, we continue to see him called both Yaakov and Yisrael. Many

commentaries discuss what these names represent and when each is used. What I explained to those teenagers - and what we emphasize with all our teens, whether in our OU Israel Teen Centers, in NCSY, The Zula, or in any of our programs throughout Israel - is that they should strive for greatness, because they can be great at what is perfect for them. The name Yaakov comes from the word "ekev" - heel - suggesting one who follows. This is not a very high goal.

But Yisrael, on the other hand, comes from "sar" - a minister, an important person - a much higher status. The name connotes "yashar el," - directly to God, a close connection with HaKadosh Baruch Hu. The Zohar teaches that Klal Yisrael has moments when we are Yaakov, when we are in a position of following rather than leading, of a *galut* mentality, yet other times we must be *sarim*, we must pick ourselves up, stand strong, and fight our enemies, in a *geulah* mentality - very much like what we've been witnessing over the past two-plus years. Today, to the world, we have shown ourselves to be Yisrael.

I spoke about the programs we run in Israel to these teens in Miami Beach. I told them that the teens we work with have been convinced by their upbringing not to strive higher and reach their potential. But with the most incredible advisors working with these teenagers, getting them to dream - that they can be something in the army, stand out in Sherut Leumi, that they can lead, that they can meet their future business partners and university colleagues - then they can break out of the cycle of poverty, break out of low socioeconomic communities, and achieve greatness for themselves, for their families, and for the future families they will build.

They learn not to be an *ekav*, a heel, a follower, but to be Yisrael, a striver.

I spoke to those teenagers in Florida about standing up strong and proud, understanding that we're Jews and that we have a responsibility. We've seen so many teenagers grow up in Jewish communities around the world, come to Israel to learn Torah, serve in the IDF, become proud members of the community, and show their communities what they've successfully achieved - the respect they can bring their communities, the respect they can bring Klal Yisrael, the respect they can bring their parents and their families.

This understanding is a big element of recognizing that the Sar of Eisav did not expect Yaakov to struggle with him the whole night, *ad alot hashachar*. He expected to beat him quickly, that Yaakov would give up easily. But when he saw that Yaakov could overcome, that he could stand strong and not let him go until he gave him a *beracha*, he realized that Yaakov was no longer in the position of Yaakov, but in the position of Yisrael.

Yosef's dreams are really all of our dreams. We want HaKadosh Baruch Hu to guide us, to give us what we need, and we want to be able to trust Him while putting in all our *hishtadlut*. Yosef could have gone to the house of Potiphar and failed miserably. He could have sat in jail depressed all day. But instead, no matter where he was, he tried to be the best Yosef he could possibly be. When you work hard at being the best you that you can be - that's what changes who we are, what we will be, and what we'll be able to change in this world.

I take great pride in visiting our OU Teen Centers, as I did last week in Ariel. This Teen Center has recently been refurbished through

the generous donations of very holy Jews, as well as with the help from the municipality. Having the alumni there stand up in front of the mayor, the deputy mayors, OU Israel Director of Programs Chaim Pelzner, in front of Yaden Cohen who manages our Teen Center branch in Ariel, watching these former teens at risk stand up with such pride and talk about what they've achieved, going to the IDF, becoming advisors themselves to teens - that gave me such incredible *nachat*. It's absolutely remarkable seeing their tremendous success. It's all thanks to the wonderful staff working in Ariel and all the other Teen Centers across the country, making sure that each and every one of our *chanichim* in these branches are achieving greatness.

So many donors, past and future, keep this dream going. Whether you sent 180 shekels or \$100,000, you're part of this success. The advisors get tremendous strength from you. Because of these donations, they see that they are not alone, but hundreds and thousands of people are supporting them and caring to see them succeed.

We're extremely thankful to the OU for the support they give us from the revenue from OU Kosher and more, which, *baruch Hashem*, covers the overhead for all of OU Israel. But we assure you that the donations you send are going directly toward these teens and toward the activities we're doing with these communities throughout Israel. So I encourage you once again, as we think of the holiday of Chanukah that's about to begin, and the light we're able to bring our community and ourselves through *pirsumei nisa*, let us also show some light toward these teens who really need us.

B'eizat Hashem, let's make sure we allow

our teenagers to dream, and allow ourselves to dream. Through the support we give them, the love we give them, and the advisors dedicating their days and lives, we will b'ezzrat Hashem enable each and every teenager to reach their full potential and be true leaders of *Klal Yisrael*.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



Rabbi Avi Berman

Executive Director, OU Israel

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Israeli
Teens at Risk**




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