

December 29, 2022

Weekly Message, Rabbi Wexler

*Shalom* from Israel! Cantor Cohen, Jared Kaufman (our High School Director), John Imhof (our Youth and Teen Engagement Coordinator), and I are currently in Jerusalem with 22 TBS 10th, 11th, and 12th graders as well as students and staff from Beth El and Adath Israel on the Main Line. In total, we are traveling the country with 47 students. We are approaching the end of our very special two-week trip during which our students got to experience the many faces and facets of Israel. From the south to the north, and many places in between; from old cities to new cities; from thousands of years of history to new innovations and technologies. Our trip gives a taste of all that Israel has to offer. For many of the students, this trip marks their first time in Israel, and it has been particularly special to experience the beauty, the depth, and the awe-inspiring elements of Israel through their eyes.

As a TBS community, we are deeply committed to this trip because we want our teens to fall in love with Israel, we want to help them learn and grow, and perhaps most of all, we want to help light the spark of their Jewish souls. It is a trip of searching, growth, and ultimately, transformation. After needing to postpone the trip for two years due to the pandemic, it feels so good to be back in Israel, and the blessings of this trip are even more evident.

During our trip, we have been talking a lot about dreams. Israel is the realization of a several-thousand-year-old dream. And we as a Jewish people have always been a people of dreams. There is perhaps no greater dreamer in the Torah than Joseph and in this week's Torah portion, *Vayigash*, Joseph's literal dreams of rising to power comes true. His story begins two *parshiyot* ago, dreaming of ruling over his brothers, followed by those same brothers leaving him in a pit to die, then being sold into slavery and put in jail. This week, we find Joseph in a top leadership position in Egypt and reuniting with his family in a dramatic and tearful moment where he forgives their past actions because their behavior helped lead to his success.

At this point, Joseph could have said "mission accomplished" and lived happily ever after. Instead, he acknowledges God's role in his path and then prepares for an even bigger challenge – saving Egypt from famine. He realizes this is not the end of his journey but just a stopping point along the way. This has been an important message for our teens during the trip and I hope, resonates for you as well. Dreams remain only dreams unless we act on them. The story of the Jewish people is one of activating dreams.

Yesterday in Tzfat, one of our tour guides told our group the story of a woman named Savta Yocheved. Savta Yocheved passed away a number of years ago, but for many years she would wake up each morning and make two cups of tea. One she would drink and the other she would take outside with her and sit in a chair. As passersby would see her sitting with a cup of tea but not drinking, they would ask what she was doing. To which she would reply: "I'm waiting for the *mashiach*. Perhaps today will be the day that he will arrive, so I must have a drink ready for him." Our tour guide concluded: "every single person is waiting for their dream to turn into a reality. But what we must realize is that our dreams depend on our actions. What are you going to do today and, in the weeks and months ahead to turn your dreams into a reality?"

As we approach the new year of 2023, this is an important question for all of us, and especially for our teens. It has been a dream trip; one in which I have witnessed our teens connect to Judaism and to Israel in deep, meaningful, and AWESOME ways. Now our challenge is to work to ensure the continued realization and activation of the dream of connection to Israel, to their personal Jewish identities, and to our TBS communities. Like Savta Yocheved, I pray that our teens continue to wake up each day ready to turn their dreams into a reality and that they will continue to inspire us to do the same.

I am deeply grateful to Cantor Cohen, Jared Kaufman, and John Imhof for all of their hard work on this trip. Our teens are so lucky to have them as Jewish role models. Most of all, I am proud of and inspired by our students. It is a privilege to be in Israel with them. They give me tremendous hope that the future of Judaism is in good hands.

We look forward to sharing so much more about our trip once we return to Cherry Hill in a few days.

*Shabbat Shalom* and Happy New Year.