



Am I Imprisoned By My Dreams?

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“I have a dream that one day I will be a leader. And my family will bow before me in submission.”

Who am I?

“I have a dream that one day I will enter this blessed land, be it for just a single moment. I would give anything for that to happen.”

Who am I?

When it comes to our personal freedoms, the words “follow your dreams” and “no dream is too big” are often used to describe breaking free of one’s limitations, real or perceived, and not letting anything hold you back from achieving anything you want to. In fact, one of the great speeches in American history which describes the hope of breaking down racial barriers is known simply as the “I have a dream” address.

However, much like technology, which broke many barriers and yet, at the same time, created many new forms of slavery and addiction, perhaps, as unlikely as it sounds, our dreams can be a form of slavery as well.

In the Torah some of the great stories of true freedom are about people who chose not to be trapped by their dreams.

As a child, Yosef had elaborate dreams. He described them in detail to his father and brothers, indicating his anticipation of a time when he would be a great leader and his brothers would bow to him.

Yet, just a short time later, due—in part—to him revealing

those dreams, the very opposite happens.

Instead of leadership and kingdom, Yosef experiences slavery and imprisonment. He was sold by the very brothers that his dreams promised would be subservient to him.

Let's take a moment to visualize Yosef the slave, and not just any slave, but a slave sold by his brothers, his own flesh and blood, and then Yosef the prisoner, and not just any prisoner, but one imprisoned on false, slanderous charges.

One can only imagine that for Yosef the dreamer this would be the ultimate downfall, and would lead to depression, disappointment, and absolute despair.

And yet, clearly, this is not what happened. The Torah describes Yosef's upbeat attitude, his concern for others, and his finding favor in the eyes of the warden, all of which point to a positive and optimistic demeanor.

How could someone with such big—and now dashed—dreams, in prison for an indefinite amount of time, perhaps for life, maintain a positive attitude?

One can argue that the key to Yosef's optimism was his belief that his dreams would eventually come true and that, despite all odds, the day would come when the stars, moon and sun would yet bow to him.

However, it seems that there is something deeper than that, which allowed Yosef to remain upbeat in prison.

Yosef, while maintaining hope for the realization of his dreams, did not allow himself to be limited by his dreams.

He understood that while man has hopes and aspirations, there is a Divine plan of which we are often unaware.

Yosef understood that stubbornly clinging to his dreams and assuming that success could only be achieved through them would constitute a rejection of *hashgachah protis*, Divine providence and direction.

Who among us can't relate to this? Be it in minor pursuits (a business meeting, a birthday party planned, or a family vacation) or in more significant life issues (the city I intend to live in, my job, my marriage, my health, my vision for how my children will grow up), most people at some point find they cannot make all their dreams come true.

While we certainly have dreams (and we should) for how events will unfold, often, some of these dreams must necessarily go unfulfilled, and we must not allow our dreams to be the ultimate decisor of success. As difficult and as painful as it may be, we must try, as Yosef did, to have the flexibility and humility to accept that G-d's plan for me supersedes my dreams, and that my potential to succeed lies in the situations in which G-d has placed me.

It would be easy to dismiss this idea by pointing out that, ultimately, Yosef's dreams materialized; his brothers and

father *did* eventually bow to him. So how does this compare to the broken dreams in our lives which never came true?

This brings us to our other example, Moshe Rabeinu, the very Moshe who was the catalyst of the greatest moment of freedom in our history, Moshe who saw to it that the notion of freedom that generations of slaves in Egypt dreamed of was fulfilled. That very Moshe never lived to see the fulfillment of his own greatest dream, the dream of entering Eretz Yisroel, a dream that Moshe endlessly beseeched G-d to fulfill.

Did that discourage or deter Moshe in his service to Hashem? He was disappointed, to be sure, but the Torah tells us (*Devarim 34:7*) that even the very day of his death "his eyes had not dimmed nor had his energy diminished" even a bit. This despite knowing quite certainly that his personal dream would not come true. (On a different front, as well, Moshe's dreams did not come true. *Midrash Tanchuma* tells us that Moshe was saddened when Hashem notified him that his sons would not succeed him in leadership.)

Back to Yosef. It is notable that it is not Yosef the prime minister whom the Torah describes as "*ish matzliach*," a successful man.

Rather, it is Yosef the prisoner, Yosef the slave, Yosef the falsely accused, whom the Torah describes with those words, *ish matzliach*, a successful man (a description not found anywhere else in Torah!).


Precisely when he was experiencing the opposite reality from his dreams is when he described as "successful."

The empowering message of freedom the Torah wishes to impart is that our most successful moments in life will be when we are open to accepting the purpose of whatever position Hashem has put us in, and that we must not be tied down by our own dreams but rather work to achieve whatever we can as integral pieces in G-d's master plan.

Teddy Roosevelt once said, "Do whatever you can, with whatever you have, wherever you are."

Perhaps the Jewish version would alter that statement to be:

"Do whatever you can, with whatever G-d gives you, wherever G-d put you."

Some of the ideas expressed in this article are based on a course called "How Success Thinks," by the Rohr Jewish Learning Institute (myjli.com). 



N'shei Chabad Newsletter emailed readers asking for their dreams (with just their ages, no names). Here are a few of the many responses we received. (If you would like to receive our emails, visit nsheichabad-newsletter.com and click on "Sign up to get our emails," on the home page. We would love to include you!)

My dream? One word: Money. Enough of it. (68)

I am longing to finally be able to hold and snuggle my FIRST healthy grandchild, soon to be born at a good and auspicious hour, G-d willing (68)

I would like to see my son married. (66)

I would love to conquer my chaos and be organized. So far it's only a dream. (66)

I wanted to be an archaeologist when I was in 6th grade. Later I realized I wanted Yiddishkeit: unearthing secret, old treasures and sharing them with the world. (65)

When I say *Modeh Ani*—I want to mean it. I want to appreciate not just waking up but all the goodness, big and small, that I have been blessed with. I want to be *same'ach b'chelki*. I want to be able to say *gam zu l'tovah* and mean it. I want to use the power of *tracht gut vet zein gut*. I want to have real *emunah* that everything will work out and sincerely say *baruch Hashem*, even when life gets tough. I want relationships to be my number one priority, beginning with my relationships with Hashem and the Rebbe. I want to be confident that my *Chayenu* will arrive on time each week. And a chocolate bar should always be within my reach. (65)

To dance at all my grandchildren's weddings. (64)

I have a great desire to see and taste the *mann* that Hashem sent down from the sky during the 40 years in the *midbar*. (64)

My dream is to be healthy and active enough to be able to dance at my great grandchildren's weddings, celebrating with Moshiach as well as my entire family. (62)

To have good relationships and respect within my immediate family. (60)

I always wanted to have

more children and be able stay home with them. (59)

To see and hug all the people who died too young in my family, and to know that the tears have come to an end. (59)

As a kid I would stare longingly at old couples walking together because I knew my parents weren't going to be that. I had a three-part dream: to be part of a lasting marriage despite my background; to have a lot of children; and to live in Crown Heights. I got all three! (59)

My dream is to achieve a level of spirituality and faith that I can go to sleep at night and wake up each morning feeling true peace and calm, free of fear and anxiety. Happiness that I don't have to convince myself of, I just want to feel deep inside that everything will be okay, that everything IS okay. (57)

My dream is for my children to realize what I went through to raise them, basically alone, and for them to be appreciative of the sacrifices I made for them. (55)

I used to dream that I wouldn't have to always explain myself. (54)

My dream is for my dear father, now 97, who has suffered his whole life, to be allowed to live his last years on this earth in peace. (53)

My dream is to wake up and find that this diagnosis was just a bad dream. (49)

My dream was to teach high school at my beloved alma mater and *baruch Hashem* I have been blessed to do so for the last dozen years! My daughter will be teaching there with me this fall, *b'ezras Hashem!* (48)

My dream is to sing for women on stage but for now I'm supporting my daughter's dream to do so. (47)

My dream: I can tell my husband—and the Rebbe—that I'm pregnant. (47)

My dream is for my son who is autistic to be healthy and normal and even get married and have a job. That is a *dream*. (45)

To have a big room full of my descendants—all *erliche* people full of good *middos* and *yiras Shamayim*. (41)

My dream is to finish my conversion. (39)

My dream is that all my younger siblings should get married and have as wonderful a marriage as I do. (38)

I am living my dream: get married, have a large family, go on *shlichus*. But life has many twists and turns that were not part of the dream. When that happens I try to remind myself: hello, you are living your dream. (36)

My dream is to open a preschool where children learn through exploration. (36)

My dream is to find a good artist and get my books for children published. (36)



My dream was to go on *shlichus* but I guess Hashem has other plans that are better for me. So my dream now is to have a big house full with kids and happiness with health and *harchavah*. (34)

My dream is to see my husband and sons (*kohanim*) doing their work in the Beis Hamikdash NOW! (34)

I dream of a big house and a zillion kids. (32)

I dream that Trump grants amnesty to us “undocumented” types so I can get a real job and stop being afraid of being deported. (31)

My dream is to own my own home, not just rent, and to be able to pay the

bills easily. To be able to sleep at night without money worries. (30)

I want to live and raise my children in a healthy lifestyle—mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually—despite my own upbringing. (29)

My dream is to get married, go on *shlichus*, build a family, and bring Moshiah. (28)

I want to have enough confidence to be myself. (24)

My dream is to see the Rebbe. (22)

My dream is to be a wife, mother, teacher, author and *shluchah*. Yes, I want all five, please G-d. (21)

My dream is to open up a combination flowers shop/Chabad House somewhere that it’s warm. (20)

My dream is to become wealthy, travel the world, and have perfect kids. (18)

I don’t have any dreams; just want to see how my life pans out. (16)

I dream of feeling successful... about learning guitar...about making a difference in the world, big or small. (15)

My dream is to have an X-Box. (12)

My dream is to have the shortest ride to school. (11)

My dream is to be a nurse just like my Mom when I grow up. (10)

My dream is to be a teacher and live in Eretz Yisroel. (8)

My dream is to become a famous singer and inventor. (8)

To live in a huge mansion and I’m the princess. (8)

My dream is for Moshiah to come so that my father comes back. (7)

My dream is to have no homework on Friday so that I could spend more time with my family on Shabbat. (7)

My dream is for my dad to live with me, and for my

grandma to get younger so that she doesn’t die. (7)

My dream is for Mommy to have more boys. (6, and one of four boys)

I dream of a dinocar. It’s a dinosaur that turned into a car. (6)

My dream is to be a policeman and I should have other Yiddishe policeman to work with me. (6)

I dream of a lot of candy. (5)

I dream that we are in the car on the way to Slurpees right now... can we? (5)

My dream is to be ten years old now. (5)

For the Beis Hamikdash to come to Michigan. (5)

I have a Purim dream. I can’t tell you what it is, because you have to guess. It’s about a girl but not with a tail. Yes! It’s Queen Esther! And the robbers spilled on the ground and they hanged them on the tree, and that’s my whole dream about Queen Esther. (5)

I want to meet Rabbi Burshtyn, if he’s real. Is he real? (4)

My dream? Well, I don’t really have a dream because everything is good right now. (3) 🐾