

THE TOP KNOT

by Rabbi Label Lam

And they told him (Yaakov), saying, "Yosef is still alive," and [they told him] that he ruled over the entire land of Egypt, and his heart changed, for he did not believe them. And they told him all of Yosef's words that he had said to them, and he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, and the spirit of their father Jacob was revived. And Israel said, "Enough! My son Yosef is still alive. I will go and see him before I die." (Breishis 45:26-28)

all of Joseph's words: He (Yosef) gave them a sign, for example- in what topic he was engaged when he (Yosef) separated from him (Yaakov). [That was] the section dealing with the heifer that was to be beheaded (עֵגֶלָה עֲרוּפָה) (Devarim. 21), and this is what the verse says, "and he saw the wagons that Yosef had sent," and it (Scripture) does not say, "that Pharaoh had sent." [from Breishis Rabbah 94:3]

What was it that revived Yaakov's spirit and assured him Yosef was still alive? It was the tiny and subtle hint that accompanied the wagon that was sent by Yosef. Since a wagon is an "agala" and Yosef had last learned about the "egela arufa" from his father then the word play- the sound signaled that Yosef was still aware of a private conversation they had shared. Who else could have sent that private piece of information? Is that why Yaakov was convinced then that Yosef was still alive?

Every week in school we do a unique and profound exercise in every class in the school. I would love to share all the splendor of the experience but I'll spare the readership in the meantime. It's called, "The Pitgam HaShevuah"- "The Phrase of the Week". A statement of the sages is selected, usually of three or four words length and preferably one that has to do with something topical in the world or in school. The phrase is written in Hebrew atop a page along with an English language translation. Below that an appropriate picture is copied and pasted to add the dimension of a visual anchor for the idea above. Then in the bottom third of the page there are 100 boxes, ten rows of ten, counting from 1 to 100 and on the bottom-bottom row is in big and bold font the number 101.

Then I have the great pleasure to enter each class, one at a time, and give a brief explanation/story about the Pitgam. After that the class thunderously and rhythmically recites the statement 101 times. That's it! Ask any child from Pre1A to 8th Grade weeks later and they will happily finish any phrase and tell you what it means on their level of course. It's a brief but powerful curriculum and it acts as a unifying force in the school while subtly sewing great and lasting lessons into the hearts of Jewish Children.

Last week the Pitgam was a statement from Menachos, "Keshet Elyon D'Oraisa"-"The Top Knot is from Torah". There I included a picture of the top knot on the Talis-Tzitzis. That's the simple intent of the Talmud. The top knot of the Tzitzis is the Torah obligation while the other knots are Rabbinical. I shared with the students the explanation a friend from Yeshiva days shared at an alumni dinner... "Keshet Elyon D'Oraisa"- The top connection two people can have is through studying Torah! It could be that the most profound relationship in life is with those we studied Torah with and from. Also the highest and deepest relationship with HASHEM too is Torah. "The top knot is D'Oraisa". Ain't it true!? Going out for pizza and bowling is nice but ten years later it's hard to remember it ever happened. Not true with Torah. Decades pass and those relationships are as alive today as then and easily revived.

One of the Rabbis suggested that this very idea is right there in this week's Torah portion. When Yaakov got a wink and a nod from Yosef about the last thing they had learned together it showed that not only had he physically survived the ravages of a lonely exile but that they were still connected by **the top knot!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).