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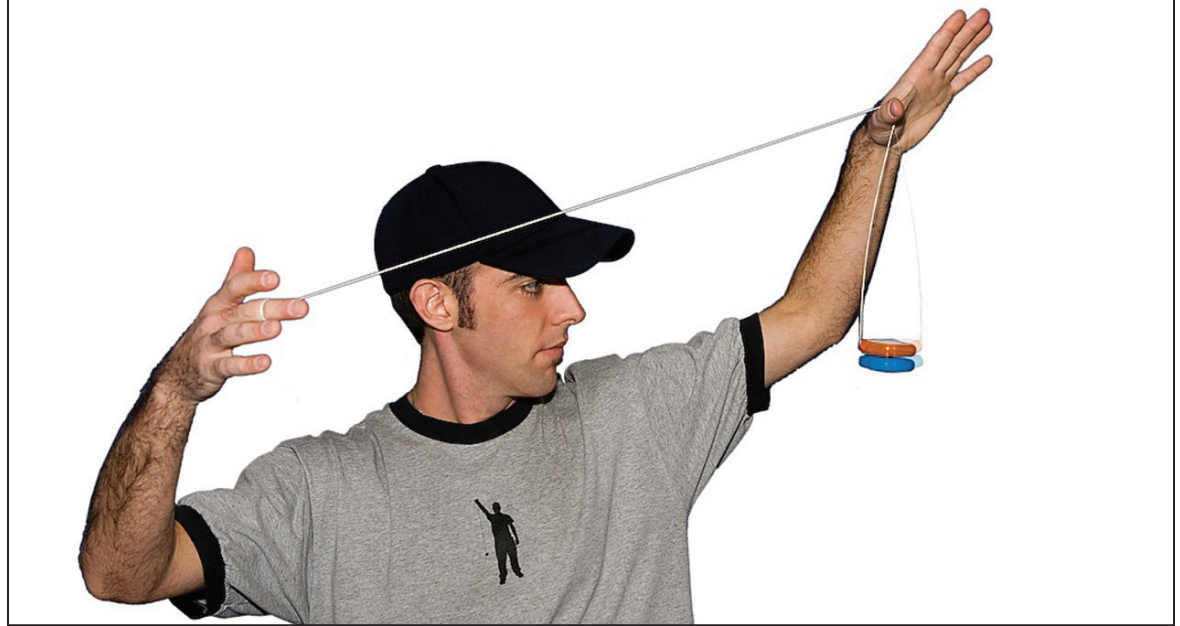
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When he talks to kids today, Brett Outchcunis uses the yoyo that his father gave him.

A positive spin on motivating kids

Local speaker uses yoyos to connect with kids

By Stacey Marcus

When Brett Outchcunis, known as “Ooch”, went to sleep away camp, it was his first time away from the security of his loving family. While some parents fortified children with pep talks and shiny new tennis racquets, Ooch’s father had a new spin on how to overcome fears. He gave his son a yoyo and showed him how to do a couple of tricks. The yoyo became a useful tool for Ooch to unwind and make friends.

“I didn’t know anyone when I first arrived at camp. Other kids began noticing me because I had a yoyo. I was hooked from then on,” he laughed.

Ooch, who lives in Wareham, now uses that same yoyo while he talks to kids about important issues they face everyday, from bullying to gossiping. He travels and works with kids as a fun version of a motivational speaker.

“I like to think of myself as a modern day Mister Rogers with a twist of cool. My performances are like a TV show without the TV,” said Ooch. “I really want kids to connect and believe in themselves. I think children are so full of potential.”

He performed at the Cohen Hillel Academy in Marblehead this week for a group of middle-schoolers, helping them empower themselves to see the positive in every challenge they face. Through the use of comedy, music, dance and yo-yos, Ooch will share his techniques of dealing with issues in an interactive way.

“We recruited Brett to perform because his goal to empower children to celebrate their originality and respect their peers is so consistent with what we teach every day,” said Carrie Berger, director of Recruitment and Admissions at Cohen Hillel Academy. “He uses his yoyo, along with fun songs and dances to teach kids about being a mensch. His messages resonate in a unique and entertaining way with everyone who has seen his performance. What better imprint can you leave on a child than to believe in themselves?”

Ooch has been performing throughout the United States, Canada and Europe and hopes one day to have his own TV show. Ever since he was a little boy, he said he wanted to be famous. “I took dance lessons to become a tap dancer. I know what it feels like to be made fun of. My weird last name Outchcunis got morphed into ‘oochie oochie’ by other kids,” said Ooch.

He put a positive spin on the mean-spirited moniker by calling himself “Ooch.” He also honed both his yoyo skills as a demonstrator with Omega Yoyos and his dancing skills as a motivational dancer at Bar Mitzvahs for Siagel Productions. Ooch soon realized that he had a unique gift for connecting with children. Thus was the genesis of his production company, Nine Points Entertainment.

He looks back on his experiences with bullying and name calling to help kids through the same sorts of issues, all the while spinning his yoyo.

Fathers teaching sons by example

Continued from Page 8

to not pass on to the next generation what the American philosopher Henry David Thoreau described: “Most men lead lives of quiet desperation and go to the grave with the song still in them.”

Jewish tradition teaches that men are supposed to be the primary teachers of Torah to their sons. Today, this task has been farmed out to synagogue religious schools, but that does not completely fulfill the responsibility. Men must also teach their children by bringing the Torah at home, unafraid to express everything that the Torah displays. In other words, that heart-heart talk that you have been avoid-

ing is more important than you can imagine.

Perhaps the best way to evaluate whether or not a father is getting through to his son is to ask himself some soul-searching questions: How did my father talk to me? Was he silent, or was he expressive? Did he tell me his hopes and dreams? Did he share the times when he was sad or angry? What made him so and why? How did it feel to be a son to a father who expressed himself this way?

Still deeper, a man might ask: If this is how my father was with me, how am I with my child? What parts of my father do I want to emulate?

What parts do I want to leave behind? At what have I succeeded in fatherhood? What might need a change?

One of the ways the Torah teaches is by being a mirror to the human condition. Fatherhood is no exception. The Torah asks us to search our souls to be the most open, communicative, and best parents we can be.

Rabbi Meszler is the spiritual leader for Temple Sinai of Sharon. His book, *A Man’s Responsibility: a Jewish Guide to Being a Son, a Partner in Marriage, a Father, and a Community Leader*, is available through *Jewish Lights Publishing*; www.jewishlights.com.