

In the movie *17 Again*, we meet a man named Mike who on the brink of becoming a college basketball star had given it up to marry the woman he loved. Even though at the time he was sure it was the right thing to do, he spends 18 years regretting his decision, blaming that regret on his wife, alienating his children and wasting his life in a dead end job. Because of his intense unhappiness, his wife finally throws him out and his kids reject him. He quits his job when he is passed over for a deserved promotion and he walks back into the high school that was the scene of his last glory.

While looking at a photo of himself as part of his high school basketball team, he wishes for a chance to be 17 again and do things differently. As happens in movies, the next thing we know, he is 17 and returning to his senior year in high school but in the present not in the past.

The point of this movie is to show the virtues of blending the boldness and openness of youth with the wisdom and maturity of adulthood. This magic combination shows us the pitfalls of each of these ages. The pitfall of teenagers is their narrow sightedness, thinking that they are immortal and that all their decisions will be good ones. The pitfall of adults is jadedness, believing that the best is behind us and we will never recoup our losses.

Our 17/45 year old is able to see the mistakes of the teens around him and counsel them to do things differently. In several scenes our hero publicly humiliates and physically fights the dumb school jock who bullies his son and, to his horror, is dating his daughter. We are, of course, glad to see this bully brought down and we admire Mike and his courage of youth for doing this. The adult Mike would never have done it. He had become beaten down over the years because of his lack of self confidence and failures in his life.

In our Torah reading this week, Vayishlah, we learn from our ancestor Jacob how to be an adult and still have the courage to fight for what is right. As Jacob sets off on his own, away from his father-in-law, with his family and all his considerable possessions, he discovers that his brother, Esau, is coming toward him with 400 men and understandably he's scared. The last time he saw him, Esau threatened to kill him because Jacob stole his blessing. Jacob has no idea what to expect but assumes that the arrival of 400 men does not bode well for him.

He sends his family ahead of him and spends a night by himself, presumably trying to figure out how not to be killed the next day. He meets a man, actually an angel of God, who wrestles with him all night. It is very unusual for a human to prevail over an angel but that is exactly what Jacob does. Unlike our movie hero, he does not need to go back to his youth to remember how to fight, how to defend himself. Even if life has not always been kind to him, he still has the strength and courage as a mature man to fight for his life and prevail. This victory is not without its cost. The angel dislocates Jacob's hip, leaving him with a permanent injury causing him to limp for the rest of this life.

Like Jacob, none of us become adults without some permanent injuries to our bodies and souls. But like our ancestor Jacob, we do not have to go back to our youth to summon the strength it takes to defend and protect ourselves, our families and friends.

Our movie hero is finally able to see that his mistakes were not fatal, that he can have a meaningful life as an adult with all the decisions that really cannot be changed. He finally learned what Jacob instinctively knew, that he did have the courage for fight for what was right in his life and in the lives of his family.

We have to remember that even with our mistakes of youth and our missed opportunities; we can still have a life that is meaningful and whole. And we can learn from Jacob that we always can summon our physical and emotional strength when we need it.