

The following is a speech written on behalf of a boy's uncle, a colonel in the Israeli Defense Forces, who could not attend his nephew's Bar Mitzvah.

My dear nephew, I am sorry I cannot be together with all of you on this special day, but I am sure that you made us all proud *****. I wish, in these short words, to give you a message that will help guide you along your path to manhood. I hope they will make their mark.

When your mother, my dear sister, told me that you had been asked whom you considered your hero, and you chose me, I was touched. I hope I have been a good role model, but I want to make sure you are looking at the right things. I have served in the army and reached a high rank, fought in battles and protected my people, but that is only a part of it. In Ivrit, the word for hero is "Gibor," Strong One. You need to understand that true strength does not come from a powerful gun and military strategy.

In Pirkei Avot, the Ethics of the Fathers, our sages tell us "Who is the Gibor? The one who conquers his Will." When you are disciplined, and do not react to the urgings of the moment, you are in control. When you stay away from the bad influences in your life, and attach yourself to the good ones, you are strong. This is the true meaning of being a hero.

King Solomon, the wisest of all men, ruled various kingdoms. The Torah tells us that sometimes he was king over Jerusalem, sometimes over the entire world, and sometimes, he was king only over his walking stick. How can one be a king over a stick? Can it obey

commands and carry out orders? Rather, the point is that King Solomon was the same regal person whether he was commanding everyone, or commanding no one. He was in control of himself and knew how he was supposed to act.

I have heard that you remember getting up early to watch me put on Tefillin. I am glad this is a memory that has stayed with you and been a pleasant one. It takes discipline to put Tefillin on each day, and to pray to the Al-mighty, and it is an important part of being a Jew. It is also a warm, fulfilling act, keeping you close with your Jewish heritage and roots. When you pray, please keep in mind your Jewish brothers and sisters in Israel, and around the world, wherever your prayers may be needed. Remember that G-d desires and cherishes the prayers of His people, and He listens to them.

*****, you are indeed a soldier, but the war you have to fight is not with an enemy you can see. Rather your battle is with the enemy within. The world has many distractions and attractions for a young man, but you must focus the strengths that G-d has given you and be the best person you can be. An important part of this is learning to listen and respect your parents, elders, and teachers. That is why, in the Ten Commandments, G-d commanded us to honor our parents right next to obeying G-d Himself.

A good soldier knows that his commanding officer has more life experience than he, and the soldier follows orders because he understands that he does not know everything himself nor can

he survive on his own. You have a warm and loving family; use it and respect it. It will be an essential part of your life for all time.

I know that you can succeed, and as you grow into a man, one who is in control of his own actions and achievements, remember the confidence we all have in you. Then, like Solomon the Wise, you will grow into a king in your own right, and you, *****, will be MY hero.