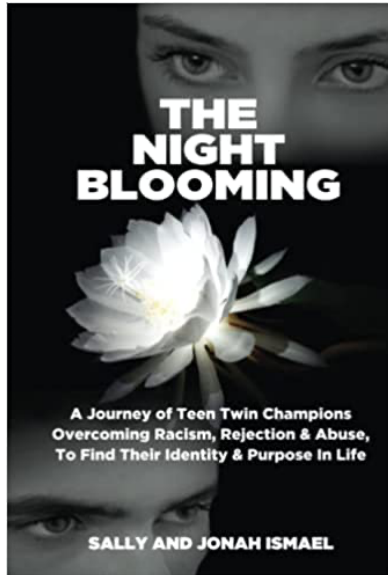


## Twin Teen Sibling Taekwondo Champs Overcome Bullying, Abuse & Racism To Excel In School, Serve Their Community, Form A Non-Profit. & Pen An Inspiring Book



Most teenagers hang out at the mall, binge-watch streaming television shows, stay glued to their phones, and find ways to entertain themselves. For Sally and Jonah Ismael, they went a different route: pouring themselves into being honor students, writing a book, forming a non-profit, competing successfully at international championship sporting competitions. They discovered their inner strength, resiliency, and a positive attitude by overcoming bullying, and tell their motivational and touching story in their new book, *The Night Blooming*.

“No matter how many times you have felt defeated by obstacles, challenges, rejection, or stuck in a hopeless situation, remind yourself that you are stronger than any barriers you face because you have strength and power within you,” encourages Sally Ismael, co-author.

Their new book is an inspiring look at how two twin teenage siblings courageously battled the odds to rise up and become young Taekwondo champions. Along the way to victory, they discovered a resilient strength within themselves that they now want to give back to others with their non-profit, The Power Within.

Their path to success is a little unusual. After being mentally, emotionally, and verbally abused by their coach, they were unfairly ostracized by the Taekwondo community to the point they couldn't train at another dojo nor get anyone to coach them. They were afraid to compete in the United States and found their greatest success overseas. Their book is a profile in courage, revealing how a brother and sister leaned on one another to become not only champion athletes, but prized students and citizens.

### **Sally and Jonah are available to speak about how they:**

- Trained – physically and mentally – from a young age --to become true champions
- Aspire to compete in the Olympics after becoming national Taekwondo champs
- Fought to overcome rejection, isolation, pain, doubts, fears, and chronic PTSD
- Discovered a path of resiliency, positivity, and success despite the obstacles
- Overcame racism and prejudice as Arab-Americans in Texas
- Endured abuse from their coach and from within a youth sports power structure
- Formed a non-profit that helps impoverished children gain an education and support

“In *The Night Blooming*, we provide motivation, techniques, outlets, encouragement, and empowerment to those who disbelieve in their abilities, says co-author Jonah Ismael. “We aim to turn their doubts into confidence, weakness into strength, and despair into power. We all have powers within us to rise and conquer any hardship that comes our way, and our mission is to further that message as far as we can through our book. Our book aims to inspire, empower,

and advocate for the importance of believing in the capabilities we all have within ourselves, especially among the generation of our youth.”

Jonah and Sally have been model citizens, students, and athletes. They earned The Award of Excellence by Noble Laureate in Science and Medicine, Dr. Mario Capecchi. Sally and Jonah are both Congressional Award Medalists, one of the highest honors bestowed upon young people from the United States Congress, and both earned a STEM Star as well. They are the founders of the non-profit organization, “The Power Within,” and former members of the AAU/USA National Team. Both have been training without a coach in their small garage since 2016; and both hold black belts. Sally and Jonah are active advocates on social media platforms as they spread awareness about mental health, abuse and how to cope with bullying. The two also write daily motivational blogs to encourage young people to find the strength within themselves.

*The Night Blooming* is a motivational story written to inspire young people to rise against bullying, racism, or any kind of challenge. It offers many take-aways and advice on the ingredients they used to make changes and to act from a place of positivity, despite the negativity thrust upon them. They share guidance on: \*Problem-Solving \*Exuding Confidence \*Leadership Skills \*Developing Vision \*Strong Mindset \*Open-Mindedness \*Positive Attitude \*Good Core Values \*Resilience Over Adversity \*Taking Responsibility and \*Finding Purpose.

Featured by The World Taekwondo for Academic and Leadership Achievements and by “Inside The Games,” an Olympic Worldwide Sport Magazine for Leadership and Academic Success, Jonah and Sally want to now help others blaze their own trail.



“My first encounter with Sally and Jonah was during my mentoring training for the Peer Assistance and Leadership program. Their selflessness was on display right from the start by making everyone feel welcome no matter what school they attended. ... Sally and Jonah have the healthiest reaction of any teenagers I've seen in quite some time. Their mentoring efforts were life-changing for the younger student and

the community. Students didn't have to audition for their friendship, and that gift helped them remove weaknesses in the lives of many. I've seen their powerful work ethic and the mental strength to use struggles in life as a stepping stone and not a tombstone.”

--Tory Gant, Motivational Speaker to Students for 30 Years

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For more Information, please consult: [www.thenightblooming.com](http://www.thenightblooming.com)

## Sally & Jonah Ismael

### Biography



At just the tender age of 10, twin siblings Sally and Jonah Ismael, won gold medals at AAU/USA National Taekwondo Championship. They earned their first black belt before they went to nationals. The high school juniors are earning top grades in school, applying for college shortly, training in their garage for the Olympics, recognized by awards from Congress and Nobel Prize winners, published authors of *The Night Blooming*, inspiring their peers, and the co-founders of an international non-profit, The Power Within, where they advocate for mental wellness, the power of education, and the resiliency of individuals. They empower, inspire, and advocate for youth, helping the underprivileged to develop and thrive. They are just 17.

In 2019, they participated in the World Cadet Championship for Taekwondo in Uzbekistan. It is the highest-ranking championship. Jonah finished fifth out of the 64 countries participating. A dual citizen of the United States and Israel, and because of a falling out with their American coach (master) and feeling closed out/bullied out of competing in the US, the Arab-Americans competed for Israel. They did not feel safe competing in the US.

In 2018, they competed in the European Cadet Championship in Spain. Sally placed fifth.

In order to train for the championship, they competed across the globe, including Spain, Belgium, Canada, Mexico, Luxembourg, Israel, Costa Rica, and the Netherlands. Since 2016, they have trained in their family's garage, primarily without the supervision of a coach.

They reside in Plano, TX (by Dallas). For more info, see: <https://www.thepowerwithinsj.org/>

# Sally & Jonah Ismael

## Q & A

### *The Night Blooming*



**1. Sally and Jonah, what is your new book, *The Night Blooming*, about?** The Night Blooming is the story of two twin siblings who were forced to take an unknown journey together to find their identity, the one they created, not the one they have been labeled and stigmatized with. It is the story of two twin athletes who undergo a traumatic experience of emotional, mental, and verbal abuse by their former master, who in every way prevented them from training in other dojos using his power and authority. These athletes had to create a dojo in their garage after being rejected by several coaches and dojos who refused to let them join their teams. Together in the garage, the twin athletes embark on a journey of self-discovery on their own. Together they empower themselves, develop skills, compete internationally, and find their identity and purpose in life. They have traveled the world and discovered a world of powers that live within themselves.

**2. You are both just 17. What inspired you to pen your book?** We have come to the understanding and realization that there are many other individuals who face struggles just like us - just a different situation or scenario; however, they may not have an outlet to voice their struggles and express their feelings. We wanted to provide this book to help encourage them and allow them to know that they are never alone and that although they may be victims of abuse, racism, discrimination, bullying, and hardship, they are much more potent than these obstacles. We want them to believe in their capabilities and truly understand just how resilient they are, how strong they are, and how innovative they are. Through this book, we voiced our struggles and, more importantly, how we overcame those obstacles.

**3. As twins, you have done some amazing things together in the competitive sport of Taekwondo. You both finished in the Top 5 at the World Cadet Championships and European Cadet Championship at the age of 13. What was it like to compete at such a high level on such a huge stage?** Traveling to Uzbekistan and participating in this massive global competition involving more than 62 countries let us see and feel our strength despite the limitations that were stifling our dream. It gave us confidence and embraced our inner strength. It allowed us to navigate a high-level, new, challenging, and competitive

environment, especially coming from a small dojo in our home garage. It tested the brainpower we've developed in the garage for many years of training. It gave our journey meaning and let us come to the realization of what our purpose in life is. This experience allowed us to reflect on our journey and motivated us to move forward and not give up on our dreams, no matter what obstacles, limitations, or rejections we may face. Most importantly, it let us live an honorable moment of declaring our victory over our former master, his abuse, and the many coaches and masters who rejected us alongside him.

**4. Several years earlier, at the tender age of 10, you both competed in the national tournament and were both Black Belts. What do you attribute your meteoric rise to?**

We can sum up our most important character quality in one word, self-discipline. Discipline has given us the strength to stick to our goals and follow our plan to achieve those goals. We persevered through a set of actions, followed specific behavior that allowed us to avoid distractions and planted positive thoughts in our minds. We visualized these thoughts and used them as a source of motivation to help us move forward despite the pain, rejection, and isolation we felt. We drew training guidelines and implemented a program that led us to success and improvement, allowed us to achieve our goals, and guided us to our life-purpose.

**5. What advice do you have for people who are bullied?** Don't let any struggles or obstacles stop you from what you have in mind, what you want to do later in life, and what your goal is. Face through the hard times, and you'll get to the good times. Every battle or obstacle we face determines our passion for success; regardless of what comes our way, we are the only ones who can decide to confront it and continue to move forward. Disappointments are the most powerful lessons we can learn from. Obstacles, limitations, and rejection do not define who we are or our success. What sets us apart is our attitudes toward these challenges. No matter how difficult life is, always hold on to the things that make you happy and express your appreciation and love for the people who stand by your side daily. You must know that in dark times, strength is born.

**6. When you competed at the world championship, why were you on the team from Israel, not America?**

We had to escape from our former master's power, authority, opposing forces, and allies. We had to find a new place that could nurture our talent and bring us peace of mind and heart when playing the sport, we love. Continuing to fight in the same place where we were rejected, to keep fighting battles that we had no interest in engaging with, and constantly being surrounded by a tremendous force of negativity was useless. It will never add any growth to our minds and body. We realized it had a negative impact on us as children as it threatened our mental health and planted fears and doubts in our hearts and minds. Instead, we wanted to avoid negative forces that were trying to push us toward quitting our sport. We needed to compete in a new, healthy, motivating environment that would not judge or reject us. We needed to take our mindset to the next level, where we feel motivated, innovative, and empowered.

**7. So, you had to travel to other countries in order to be able to compete because you were blacklisted in the US?** Unfortunately, we have been subjected to many negative emotional disturbances that have taken a toll on our mental health. We were labeled with

stereotypes and stigmas that followed us like ghosts everywhere we went to compete. In addition, our former coach spread rumors about us and warned many coaches and dojos not to initiate any contact with us. He used his power and authority at that time as the head coach of the national team and one of the leading coaches of the Taekwondo Association in our state to block all the ways for us to practice our sport in a free, healthy, and natural environment. Unfortunately, everyone believed him, and we were treated like a contagious virus or a terrible disease, as many coaches who allied with him abandoned us. After our case against him was rejected by USA Taekwondo Safe Sport, we hit a dead end. Therefore, we were unable to compete in an environment that kept rejecting us and treated us as outsiders, “troublemakers,” as our former coach told others about us, so for the sake of our mental health and inner peace, we had to look for other opportunities to let our dream breathe freely and to protect our mental health which was targeted by our former coach and many other coaches who are friends with him.

**8. You both have been working out of your garage-turned-gym for the past eight years without a coach. How come you were exiled from the sport that you love? Did you contemplate quitting?**

The silent rejection targeted our self-confidence, planting threats, doubts, and fears in our hearts and minds. We were followed everywhere by opposing forces aiming for a single goal, to force us to quit the sport we love. Yet we were young, passionate about our sport, and optimistic about a bright future, imagining ourselves standing on the Olympic podium celebrating many years of hard work. Despite the overwhelming forces of rejection, abuse, bullying, and the hours, days, months, and years of agonizing isolation we spent training alone in a small, dusty, dark garage, we were more motivated than ever to thrive and grow stronger, promising ourselves that one day the Olympic dream would come true. That moment We can say that those broken twin siblings who committed no crime to be punished and rejected for daring to say no to their abusers have made it to the Olympic stage through their effort, hard work, resilience, and most importantly, their admiration and respect for the sport they love most.

**9. How have your parents supported you in your bid to compete at the ultimate level, the Olympics?** Our parents were the backbone that kept us from falling apart. Their motivating voices awakened our minds, opening our eyes to see our path even in dark places. Have positivity and encouragement and motivate us to pursue our dreams and satisfy our passions. Their spiritual support was the solid foundation on which we were able to plant the seeds of our dreams.

**10. Is youth sports corrupted by polarizing personalities and other power-play issues?**

We cannot generalize that all youth sports are corrupt. Many great coaches and organizations support and work tirelessly to push their players to perform their best in a positive and healthy environment. However, there needs to have a higher authority responsible for monitoring coaches and youth sports to ensure that every athlete participating is protected, and their voices are heard without discrimination. In addition, youth sports should have a committee responsible for cases where athletes are subjected to abuse and bullying. This committee shall have members separate from the sport and have no relationships with the coaches or state and local organizations. Most importantly, they must be educated and professional in articulating the athletes' needs or making their voices heard. Racism and discrimination are two themes

that exist in every aspect of our lives, not just in sports. So, what makes the difference in whether youth sports are more corrupt is the answer to the question, do youth sports authorities listen to these young people speaking out to get help from the authority that was created to help them? Or do these authorities treat young athletes based on personality, race, ethnicity, and religion? Discrimination occurs when this authority does not take instances of bullying and abuse equally and treats young athletes based on race, ethnicity, or if they are on good terms with the sports authorities; here, corruption occurs.

**11. You both formed a non-profit, The Power Within; why did you launch it – and what do you hope it accomplishes?** Through our non-profit organization, we empower, inspire, and advocate for the importance of knowledge, education, and the power within us. Our target community is the underprivileged young people who lack the means to discover these powers; we want to take these young minds to the next level where they can thrive and develop. Our nonprofit focuses on the importance of knowledge and education in helping young people develop skills and methods to cope with their daily obstacles, limitations, and mental and emotional distress. We advocate for many young people by emphasizing that stigmatization, race, and religion are not the final definition of who we are. However, our actions, beliefs, values, points of view, and impact on others determine who we are, which shapes our identities. In our nonprofit organization, we want to stress the importance of our rights as kids and young people to practice our sports in a healthy and positive environment, no matter who we are or our background. We aim to magnify the importance of having a positive mindset and implement positivity in every aspect of our lives. We aim to empower education in low-economic communities and enable literacy in underrepresented and underprivileged communities. Education is the key to opening the door and embracing the power within.

**12. What does the title of your book mean?** The Night Blooming is a unique flower that blooms beautifully at night. The color of the flower is white, and it needs a lot of care and love for years to bloom. We are like this flower. We thrived in the dark in our garage and grew strong through the love, care, and inseparable bonds of togetherness we share with one another. We are like The Night Blooming; it took us many years to bloom and reflect the light hidden within us. We reflected our powers, our minds blossomed with knowledge, and we shaped our identities the moment we blossomed in our garage through the many years we trained alone in the dark. We've faced isolation and rejection, and we're working hard to grow wings to enable us to fly freely and shine.

**13. What about the martial arts are you drawn to?** The discipline. Martial Arts is a sport that teaches life lessons, shapes our character, and embraces our mental strength. Martial arts Promote personal growth, mindfulness, and inner peace. It helps us practice meditation and mindfulness, which leads us to find our inner strength and focus.

**14. What advice would you give a teenager struggling in school or life?** When life becomes chaotic and full of negative voices, we must block out all the noise and listen carefully to our inner voice, reminding us of who we are. We may struggle and face challenges, but with a clear vision, a definite goal, and a solid determination to work hard, we can achieve the goals we set for ourselves despite the obstacles we face, thrive, and move to the next level. The mind is the most powerful force that can help us overcome our doubts

about our abilities. So, we have to embrace our brain, feed it knowledge, and read as many books as we can.

**15. What type of racism have you both experienced growing up as Arab Americans in Texas?** Yes, we have been treated unfairly, we have been targeted for years, and we have been subjected to psychological, emotional and verbal abuse. We were isolated in our garage and rejected by many, yet we worked tirelessly to carve our way out of the darkness and forged our identities despite the challenges and obstacles we faced. The silent discrimination and racism we faced was just one of the many challenges we faced. Our goal in media coverage is to inspire, empower and advocate for young people who face many battles and struggles to survive in a world that tries to weaken their identities, instill fears and doubts in their hearts, believing that because they are minorities no one will want to stand by their side, defend them and they are willing to crush them as if they were no one.

**16. How did you find the inner strength and resolve to cope with obstacles, limitations, isolation, and verbal, mental, and emotional abuse?** Reading was the only fuel to feed our minds and empower our bodies. Reading taught us how to meditate, adapt to stressful situations, and magnify positivity and dim negativity. We created drills that can bring mindfulness and inner peace inside us. We changed our perspective on our garage and limitations and started to look at the garage as our lap where we perform experience to strengthen our mindset. We looked at our limitations; the four walls surrounded us as a protection, not a prison. These walls were like shields that protected us from distractions and made us focus on our mission. We started to look at our pain as our ally; we trained with our pain, ran, cried, and laughed with our pain. Our pain has become our friend, not our enemy. Changing our perspective around every negative element of our journey has us strengthening our inner peace, developing a growth mindset, and enhancing a clear vision to the next level of our journey.

**17. You say that you refuse to let other people define who you are. How so? How did your struggles help you to find your purpose?** When we were under ten, we faced massive mental, verbal, and emotional abuse from our former Taekwondo master. The master used his power and authority to prevent us from participating in our sport in other gyms or dojos. He swore that he would ensure we wouldn't get anywhere without him after we left his dojo due to his abusive acts toward us. Many dojos and coaches had rejected us because they acceded to our former master's request not to accept us in their dojos. So, we had no place to train. However, we were determined to deliver on our promise to ourselves that we should make the AAU/USA/National Team, our State National Team, and reach the Cadet World Championships. Therefore, we started training independently, with no team, teammates, or dojo. We practiced our sport everywhere, regardless of the circumstances: in the driveway of our house, on the school's track and field, in the park, and inside our house when the weather couldn't cooperate with us. We felt hopeless. The rejection was painful, and the isolation was unbearable. However, something inside us constantly pushes us not to give up and pursue our dreams.

After nearly a year of training on our own, we came up with the idea of building our dojo. We told our parents about our plans to develop our dojo in the garage. They thought it wouldn't take long for us to feel we needed to switch to another sport. However, they were surprised by



our determination to continue training and building our dojo. The rejection of many of the masters in our sport planted the seeds of perseverance within us, and we decided not to allow our former master to determine our fate. We creed our actions upon our belief that giving up something we love to do now will become a habit later in life. It would then become easy to give up the things we love to do that matter to us, so we built our dojo and became the masters of our sea. Training in our garage at the age of eleven wasn't easy. However, our positive attitude during difficult times made us think of other children who faced injustice, bullying, obstacles, and daily challenges alone. This long journey sparked the creation of our nonprofit organization, The Power Within – in the garage, to help many children find the strength hidden within them. Through the long years of training on our own in the garage, we have realized the importance of the mind in the self-exploration of our abilities and capabilities, as well as in books, where we have found answers to many questions about how to overcome our obstacles.

**18. In your travels to Costa Rica, Canada, Netherlands, Mexico, Amsterdam, Belgium, Spain, Israel, Luxembourg, and Uzbekistan, what did you learn about yourselves?**

Traveling around the world and visiting different countries with different cultures has given us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reveal the many strong qualities hidden within us. We realized how strong we were both mentally and physically. Even though we were alone in the garage, isolated and rejected, we were able to train at such a high level that we confidently stood before the best athletes from many countries and accepted the challenge to fight with honor and dignity. We saw our potential and felt our growth mindset through the journey we came from traveling, working on maintaining our weight, competing in different environments, and most importantly, we learned a vital truth about ourselves; despite the painful experience we went through, we didn't lose our positivity, and managed to build a long-term friendship with many athletes around the world. We have learned that obstacles do not define us but can shape our personalities. Limitations don't stop our dream from growing within us, and rejection will never prevent us from pursuing our goals. We knew that we were more powerful than our former master and that his abuse did not kill us but made us stronger and wiser because we did not let his negativity consume our minds.

**19. What was it like to write your memoir and reflect back on certain pains and challenges in your life?**

Embarking on the journey of writing our memoir has been the most rewarding and valuable journey we have ever undertaken. Reflecting on our feelings and thoughts and going back to where we started, how we survived abuse, and what we have become is an opportunity for a real-life lesson to learn about our inner strength and power. The experience of living through pain and abuse was traumatic, but remembering the traumatic experience again taught us how to face our fears, doubts, and pain. We learned that we could heal ourselves by reflecting on our journey. Writing was an influential component of the healing process. We remember when after every training session at our garage our mom told us to go and write in our diary about our training to reflect on any negative feelings we had; At the time, we didn't know writing was a gift.

## **Takeaways From *The Night Blooming***

We have always believed that it is through positive behavior that change can occur. Children are the future, and if we work together to improve each other's lives our world will be a better place. We both have been through many difficult experiences, which have made us realize that we all need each other to grow. We can fulfill our dreams at the same time we pave the way for others to succeed-as seeing others happy, makes us happy.

**Motivation:** We can motivate ourselves and others-especially young children-to have confidence in their abilities and to believe in themselves. The belief we had in ourselves and our abilities helped motivate us to keep going even when we felt all alone. Many times, we had to give ourselves encouraging pep talks to carry on. We had to push away the negativity so that we wouldn't get lost in despair.

**Problem-Solving Skills:** Through our many trials and challenges we developed far-reaching problem-solving skills. We learned to respond quickly and professionally to issues we encounter, as well as, find valuable and immediate solutions to our problems. The Covid-19 Pandemic, which began in March 2020, was challenging for all of us-especially students. Distance learning was difficult and required students adapt and learn new skills. We found ourselves applying some of the same problem-solving techniques we developed training alone in our garage, to the issues we faced on account of quarantine. Maintaining a healthy mindset through it all was key.

**Strong Mindset:** We are determined athletes, students, and human beings. This determination helped us achieve our goals and defeat our challenges, and through this quality, we were able to reach out to children and other athletes and help them work toward their goals and dreams, impacting them positively and providing techniques that can help strengthen their mind sets.

**Open-Minded:** We had to train for over five years in the garage because our former master and his fellow coaches punished us for something we didn't do-and because we called them out to "Stop bullying and abusing us." The behaviors of our former master and other coaches made us realize that respect is based on people's willingness to be open-minded toward one another, and ready to receive criticism, or listen to a different opinion. We grew up in a family with different values, norms, and cultural beliefs than those of our neighbors and peers. This unique experience allowed us to understand that there are differences between people. We opened our minds to accepting these differences, finding the right way to adapt, as well as discovering a variety of positive solutions and ways to interact with others. We were taught to respect everyone, even if their beliefs differed from our own.

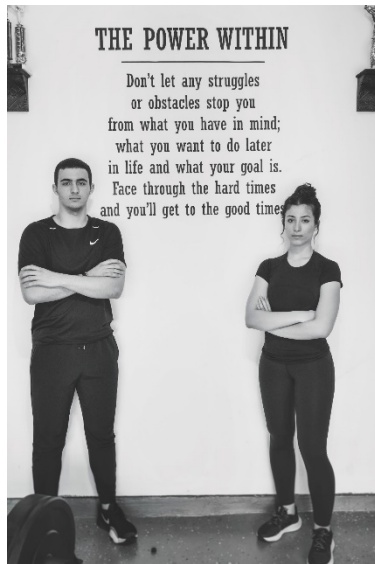
**Positive Attitude:** Maintaining a positive attitude has made all the difference in our lives. With all that we've been through it would have been easy to let the negativity seep in but we remained determined to find the right path to overcoming our difficulties. As a result, we have become goal-driven people, who have helped many children- both older and younger than us--direct their focus on setting goals and working toward those goals rather than concentrating on the problem itself.

# Wisdom From Sally & Jonah

- Without a deep belief in your abilities, you cannot overcome your fear of stepping out of your comfort zone.
- Never underestimate the power of your mind.
- The greatest champion is the one who constantly competes with himself.
- Obstacles are essential to mental development, and it is through these obstacles that we learn to push ourselves away from our comfort zone.
- Life doesn't come with a road map or instructions; we must travel through life alone, trying to reach our chosen destinations. What ultimately makes someone strong is how they react to the twists and turns that life throws at them.
- Don't let any struggles or obstacles stop you from what you have in mind, what you want to do later in life, and what your goal is. Face the hard times, and you will get to the good times.
- A dream is never just a dream, it is a goal with high expectations and continuous hard work.
- Your inner strength is the most powerful motivational force you can have. Believe in yourself.
- Because we have such a strong belief in our purpose, we never give up on overcoming the obstacles we encounter.
- Be the champion you always look up to. Be the catalyst for your success. Be the person you want to be. Be yourself.
- We face darkness and limitations during our journey, but what keeps us excited about our journey is our belief that we can overcome our limitations and make ourselves better than we were yesterday.
- Your inner strength is the most powerful motivational force you can have. Believe in yourself.

# The Power Within

<https://www.thepowerwithinsj.org/>



The Power Within is a non-profit organization that helps educate children through fundraising and awareness programs. It was founded in 2019 by two teenage twin siblings who rose above all challenges to become Taekwondo champions who accelerated in school and in life as well.

They advocate for individuals by providing knowledge on how to find strength within themselves and overcome obstacles. They empower education, and they believe that the mind is the only powerful force to defeat obstacles and challenges.

At the age of 10, they were forced to train in their garage, as it was the only option for them after all the doors were closed on them. They managed to train alone without a coach or a team. They built a positive defense mechanism to help overcome their obstacles and challenges. They managed to find the power within them and they succeeded in defeating adversity. Using a positive attitude towards their obstacles, they gained the strength and motivation to conquer their dream. They participated in the World Championship coming from a small, dark garage and they competed against the top athletes in the world. Their positive attitude strong mindset helped them to find the power within themselves. They now help others to overcome obstacles and find the power within themselves.

“Our mission is to empower, inspire, and advocate young minds to find their strength within themselves,” say the twin founders. “We focus on reaching disadvantaged children in low socioeconomic communities, refugees, children at risk of dropping out of school, and youth who struggle and face obstacles to pursuing their dreams or achieving their goals. We empower youth and children, advocating for the importance of education in their lives and the vital role that education plays in changing their perspective and helping them find their strengths and develop skills that will help them grow and develop intellectually, mentally, emotionally, and physically.”

When they returned from the World Cadet Championships 2019 in Uzbekistan, they shifted their goals from training for competitions to training for a cause. On the day of the competition, they took 40% of the money designed for travel expenses for the tournaments and set it aside to support their mission of funding projects for our nonprofit. They raised funds for 200 backpacks and school supplies for 200 children through a partnership with Plano ISD Foundation (Core Store) and Children’s Health. They also used funds to build two libraries for 1,000 children in Africa by providing over 1,200 books for this mission and shipping them to African community schools. Their vision of embracing the love of reading and strengthening educational literacy among children in underrepresented communities has furthered our mission of empowering children. They decided to give up on their dream of attending the World Junior Championships 2022. Instead, they have been training for a cause for the past three years to raise money. It is now funding 400 backpacks for refugee children in our community, working with humanitarian organizations, and working to build two more libraries with over 1,500 books in Africa.

## Selected Excerpts

### **Bullied At A Young Age**

Our elementary school years were our worst school years. We could not imagine that kids our age would have to experience this much negativity. Our peers were young like us happy, playful, and full of energy. At the time, we couldn't understand why some kids weren't so nice to us, but were nice to others.

Why did they bully us? Why didn't they want to play with us? As we grew, the negative feelings toward us grew as well. Everything around us was unclear as we tried to understand what caused some of our peers to act the way they did toward us. We encountered the term "stereotype" early on. Other people's negative perceptions of us, our race, and our ethnicity were the beginning of an unpleasant campaign of continuous rejection. Born in the United States to Arab parents--both of whom were well educated and respected in Israel--who immigrated more than 25 years ago from Israel to pursue their dream, we were still rejected by our peers simply because of who we were.

The silent rejection that accompanied us throughout our elementary years was like a deadly cancer slowly spreading through our bodies; while our smiling faces tried to hide the terrible pain pressing down on our hearts. Having been introduced to negativity at a very young age, we were lonely and had low self-esteem. However, what saved us was the overall positivity that our mother nurtured inside us which served as a protective shield for our mental health.

### **Lost Identity (Jonah)**

Identity. Who are we? Our behaviors, our dreams, and the way the world views us. Identity is what makes us who we are; it is a reflection of our principles, values, beliefs, attitudes, thoughts, and behavior. Identity is a unique trait that varies from person to person. Identity is created throughout our lives by the many situations we go through and the various challenges we face. Regrettably, some people allow the circumstances of their external environment to overly influence the formation of their identity, giving those characteristics too much weight. At the same time, others take control of the amount of external influence on their identification. As a result, they go through obstacles and face many confrontations to create their own identities and forge their own path. The nature of a person's identity is a choice. We choose our identity based on our interactions and reactions to the many challenges and events we face during our lives. We were among those who refused to shape their identity based on the opinions of others. We refused to be ordinary and went above and beyond to form our identities. We rejected the stereotypes that others put on us. We refused to be labeled with titles that did not represent us, our thoughts, or our feelings. Throughout our journey, we have been searching for our lost identity--the one that was scared to be seen, scarred from rejection.

### **My Story (Sally)**

"We live one life, so live a life of meaning. Live a life you will be proud of, and always remember that God has given us a blank book, so choose wisely what kind of story you want to write in the book» These words of guidance were always central to our mother's advice to

us. Everyone has a story to tell, and everyone has a journey to take. My story was one of failure and defeat, fear and doubt, love and freedom. At only eight years old I had already suffered injustice and cruelty.

### **Dreams**

We all chase our dreams into the unknown, facing obstacles, challenges, and limitations along the way. But there is something inside of us that tells us not to give up, stay focused, keep trying, stay on track, and believe we have numerous shots to take if we want to grow. We have unlimited opportunities. We have profound power within ourselves, and that energy gives us the strength to overcome our obstacles. We have the power within us to heal us and make us stronger than before. This power allows us to take a leap of faith and jump into the unknown, to discover a bright, new world in which we can create with our dreams and goals. We have a power within us that allows us to dream without fear, explore without limits, and imagine without restrictions. We just need to dare to dream, dare to make those dreams happen, and dare to soar over the walls that surround us in our garage- or any other confined space.

### **Positivity Is A Choice**

Positivity is the quality of having an optimistic attitude while living through an endless series of battles with darkness. Positivity was a behavior that we forced. We need ourselves to adapt to survive our pain and overcome our obstacles. It was not an easy path to take or an easy decision to make- especially after the bad experiences we had with our former master, along with the multiple and repeated rejection we endured at the hands of many coaches and dojos in our sport.

### **Breaking Away**

During the national team training that was held in our city, our former master directly abused us mentally, verbally, and emotionally. He didn't miss a single opportunity to humiliate us and show us that he was in control of everything, and could do anything he wanted to us without objection from any of the coaches of the national team. That day was the end of our story with our former master. Our father told him we couldn't stay with him and that he had decided to take us out of the dojo and look for another dojo and another master. Our master was very angry that day, and threatened our father that he would make sure we would not get anywhere without him; he would ensure that no coach would accept us in their dojo.

### **The Power of Education**

Through education, we learned how to be competitive. It armed us with the tools to continue to enrich our minds with knowledge. Education gave us opportunities to open many closed doors that prevented us from thriving. We became open to acknowledge our limitations and developed well-organized, useful techniques to adapt and cope with training in our garage. We transformed our perception of the garage as our gym and into our lab, the only motivational place where we train and flourish.

### **Overcoming Obstacles**

We saw our strength in our obstacles. We empowered the strength within us to conquer our limitations by overcoming our obstacles. We have been able to take the initiative and control the barriers that were supposed to compel us to quit. We believed we had the power within us to explore our capabilities, expand our journey, strengthen our mentality, and overcome the

limitations pushing to force us to give up. We traveled thousands of miles, deep in our minds, searching for mysterious power, hoping for a chance to survive. We withstood our bullies and obstacles, and we didn't stop exploring until we found a treasure within us. We possessed the strength to open new doors to new opportunities to achieve our goals and dreams. We refused to underestimate our strength, and we unlocked the door and opened it wide to free our souls from the prison in which we were dying. Our wings widened, and we flew high, up to the sky where we could see our pain, and where we could catch the stars.

### **The Power of Obstacles**

Dealing with pain and obstacles taught us that no matter what comes our way, we would not respond with negativity. We would never counter hate with hate. We would never allow negative forces control our belief in ourselves, our principles, and our faith in God. We would resist the darkness with discipline. We would fight back with respect. We would fight with a positive attitude because we respect ourselves and respect our sport.... Encountering obstacles can teach us who we really are. Our obstacles can show us a new version of ourselves, one that is undefeated and unbreakable. The more emotionally and mentally we are affected by abusive behaviors or bullies, the stronger we become mentally, as well as, more positively motivated. The realization we are stronger than we thought was becoming clear to us. Rejection was both our enemy and our motivation. Although we didn't know the secret behind this unreasonable rejection, our former master's motives became clearer to us later, during our years of isolation in the garage. We believed in God and trusted Him. He was our deepest strength. Rejection motivated us to trust God more and look for additional ways to improve.

### **Taekwondo**

At that moment, we realized that Taekwondo was no longer the sport we participated in to win medals, or to be one of the athletes who would stand on the podium. Instead, Taekwondo had become our life's journey toward claiming our existence and forming our identities. Taekwondo had become a cause for action and the tool we used to stay motivated for excellence in every aspect of our lives--whether it was in school through our academic performance, in our community through volunteering opportunities, or through our goal of carving ourselves a path and proclaiming the kingdom within us. It was a kingdom we built on the foundation of our inner strength, positivity, and confidence.

### **The Rise of Inner Strength**

The beauty of our contest lies in the process we go through. When we witness the birth of our inner strength, through struggle; we encounter powerful forces stronger than ourselves. Our failure to overcome our obstacles gives us purpose to continue. Through this process, we can reach the ultimate realization of our strength. Our obstacles serve as our motivation to overcome our limitations. We all go through ups and downs, feeling intense emotions that make us angry, sad, and frustrated, though in the end, we feel proud. We take pride in discovering a world within us, a world of possibility and growth. We fight hard to open doors that were closed before. We will see how the power of positivity can conquer fears, remove doubts, defeat obstacles, and allow us to reach our goals. Our ultimate goal is being able to solve the mystery sources of our inner strength.