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What is Jewish About America's "Favorite Pastime"?

*Essays and Sermons on Jews,
Judaism and Baseball*

EDITED BY
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and
Judith Z. Abrams

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY BY
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Introduction

Judith Z. Abrams

What is so Jewish about America's pastime? Among all our national sports, why is it that it is baseball that is so prominent in Jewish life? What is it about baseball that caught the imagination of Jewish immigrants, writers and rabbis...and still does to this very day? These are the questions this book seeks to answer. For there is, undeniably, a link between baseball and Judaism. We see in the essays in this book sociological, literary and theological analyses which demonstrate how deeply baseball permeates and reflects Jewish life, culture and faith. Actual sermons, as well as a rare first-person history of a Jewish major league player's wife and an essay that accompanied a set of Jewish major leaguer baseball cards, will document that this is no mere academic or theological discussion. Rabbis are actually giving sermons on baseball. This is a real phenomenon, not just a theoretical possibility. The authors of these pieces encompass the full spectrum of Jewish life, from Reform to Orthodox, from secular scholars to mystics.

One of the earliest works of kabbalah (*Sefer Yetsirah*) establishes three realms of being: space (*olam*), time (*shannah*) and the human soul (*nefesh*). It is as esoteric as halakhah is prosaic. Hillel Goelman explores the correlation of baseball to these three Jewish mystical concepts. He demonstrates how the game of baseball has mythic powers to give meaning to human life by explaining the most profound mysteries of our existence. An individual, through baseball, can locate himself in space, in time and in God's plan for all human souls. His evocation of classical texts, secular scholarship and literary analysis combine to explain why baseball, more than any other sport, is so intrinsically meaningful for Jews. His postscript reveals that his essay is no mere academic treatise: he has lived, and is still living, in baseball's boundless sea of time that transcends space and even the death of his father.

While the role of Jews in baseball is frequently examined in literature, it is seen in visual arts as well. Ori Z. Soltes examines the role of Jews and baseball in the visual arts as testimony to baseball's utility as a means by which Jews could attain a comfortable identity as mainstream Americans. Focusing particularly on Hank Greenberg, he notes that the player had many messianic qualities, going so far as to liken him to Bar Kochba and Theodore Herzl. Greenberg played in Detroit, home base to the antisemites Father Coughlin and Henry Ford. By not playing in a crucial game that fell on Yom Kippur, he openly subscribed to his religious identity and powerfully enfranchised Jews to express their Judaism more openly.

The confluence of the World Series and the High Holydays is an issue that yearly faces Jewish baseball fans. Tracing the decisions of Jewish players and owners through the decades, Jeffrey S. Gurock analyzes the meanings that Hank Greenberg's, Sandy Koufax's and Shawn Green's decisions to play or not to play on the High Holydays reflected about Jews' comfort in American society and culture. Though major league baseball has yet to take account of the Jewish calendar, it has accommodated Jewish fans by providing kosher food and even *minyanim* (prayer quorums) at various ballparks. As Jews' position in society changes, and particularly as the acceptance of Jews in mainstream society has grown, so Jews, and especially Jewish baseball players' decisions to play or not to play on Yom Kippur has changed. What was considered messianic by Soltes (Greenberg not playing on Yom Kippur) becomes a decision to balance Jewish and American identities in a different era, as seen by Gurock.

“Generation to generation” is the theme that Rebecca Alpert investigates in her examination of baseball in Jewish American writing. Her thorough exploration of baseball and the connection of generations includes the way baseball mediates not just between fathers and sons but between mothers and daughters, grandparents and grandchildren. She cites many newspaper articles and a sermon, which was apparently delivered and then published, to document the reality about which she writes in Jewish life, not only in Jewish writing.

While it is the players that may, perhaps naturally, be the focus of our attention, Jews have had a large role to play behind the scenes. Eric Schulmiller’s presentation of his “*Avot*” and, one might add, “*Imahot*” of baseball is a delightful, yet substantive, double play of classical biblical and rabbinic texts and an encyclopedic knowledge of baseball history. He fleshes out, in great detail, the back-stories, so to speak, of many of the legendary Jewish figures in baseball history. In his biography, he, too, acknowledges the importance of passing on a love of baseball from father to son.

Our holiest texts, especially Torah and Talmud, often come down to us through the mediation of commentators who make these sometimes-epigraphic texts comprehensible and loveable. Jordan Parr argues that the experience of baseball is likewise made memorable, and desirable, through the mediation of radio commentators. A baseball game is like a session of Talmud study, opines Parr, and one’s fondness for the commentator can translate into deeply etched memories and an enhancement of the inherent meaning of the moment.

Joshua Segal’s article examines the physical, spiritual and intellectual aspects of baseball that are similar to Judaism. Stephen Fuchs’ essay testifies to the power his baseball idols had on him. His role models actually affected the way he participated in sports. He did not play a competitive tennis match because of what his role models, Hank Greenberg and Sandy Koufax, did.

Both Reuven Goldfarb and David Wechsler-Azen concentrate not only on the correspondence between the players’ positions and the usual schematic diagram of the Zohar’s *sefirot* (processes within God) but see similarities to Jewish spirituality in all sorts of other aspects of the game and Judaism as well. Again, the fact that we have two articles supports my contention that these connections are real and meaningful....not just a theoretical conceit.

Dan Gordon also sees mystical aspects of Judaism in baseball, particularly the four-leveled interpretation of Torah known as *Pardes* and the four bases of a baseball diamond. In addition, he explores the parallels between Maimonides’ seven levels of charity and the seven ways of contributing to one’s team.

The article of Shmuel Jablon and the responsa written by him and his elementary (!) school students testify to the reality of baseball in Jewish education today in a day school setting. Martin Abramowitz documents his (successful) quest to create a set of Jewish Major League Player baseball cards. A unique piece of oral history is provided by May Abrams, widow of Cal Abrams, a Jewish major leaguer. Rabbis Avi Schulman, Louis Rieser, Michael Cohen and Andrew Klein (the latter basking in the miraculous World Series win of the Boston Red Sox in 2004) contributed sermons they gave on the topic of baseball. All these are testimony to the potency of baseball in Jewish America’s religious and social life.

Even with the bounty of writing we have here, there is still more left to cover. Articles that were not included in this book, but should be in any truly exhaustive examination of Judaism and baseball would include an exploration of baseball in Israel, the similarity of the baseball field to the Biblical tabernacle and the Temples and the way a baseball

stadium resembles a standard page of the Babylonian Talmud. (The infield is the Mishnah and Gemara, the outfield is the commentaries of Rashi, the Tosafists, etc., and the people in the stands are the students.) An article documenting the engulfing loss generated by the Dodgers leaving Brooklyn, a wound that is felt by some to this day, and its similarity to the feelings engendered by the destruction of the Temples, would be needed to make this volume complete. More pieces documenting the importance of baseball in Jewish life would have been welcome. For example, Rabbi Mindy A. Portnoy not only wrote a children's book, *Matzah Ball* (KARBEN, 1994), about a child taking Pesach food to a baseball game, but celebrated her twentieth year in the rabbinate by throwing out the opening pitch at Camden Yards in Baltimore, an event arranged by her congregation.

Truly, America's pastime has uniquely strong bonds with Judaism; bonds stronger than that of any other sport with our faith. And baseball, uniquely among our major national sports, fosters a bond between the generations. Indeed, that was the motivation that started me on the path to editing this book: I wanted to make a connection to my son through baseball. He is an avid Astros fan and, in order to understand his world better, I came to be a fan myself. Both he and I could see the connections between Judaism and baseball, connections far beyond the issue of playing on the High Holydays. Thus, the reality became a book and hopefully the book will foster the reality: a connection of generation to generation of Jewish baseball fans.

Mythic Baseball, Mythic Judaism: Time, Space and the Journey of the Soul

Hillel Goelman

It is clear that baseball has captured the imagination in powerful and unique ways. The deeper meanings of baseball have been explored by novelists,¹ poets,² historians,³ art historians,⁴ and essayists.⁵ There are journals that are dedicated exclusively to the study of different aspects of baseball and numerous articles on baseball have appeared in the scholarly, refereed literature as well.⁶ There are credit courses on baseball offered in colleges and universities⁷ and perhaps the most singular indication that baseball is a legitimate area of intellectual discourse is the fact there is an article on baseball in the *Encyclopedia of Semiotics*⁸.

As this volume demonstrates, there is also an increasing fascination with the surface expressions and underlying intentions of baseball and how those expressions and intentions resonate with Jewish thought and practice. This essay explores the ways in which some of the implicit and explicit meanings of baseball might also map onto aspects of Judaism. In a sense, what I am trying to do is to identify the strands of symbol and signifier that might connect the collective unconscious within baseball to the collective unconscious within Judaism, and to explore the interweaving of imaginations that draw them together. As the rabbis taught, *Ha davar omer darsheini* – this matter calls out to us and says, “Explore me.”

It is an exploration that needs to be undertaken with equal parts enthusiasm, imagination, logic, creativity, knowledge - and humility. There is an almost involuntary tendency to approach a complex topic like this in a simplistic and reductionistic way (e.g., “Moses and Aaron are the ideal double-play combination”) that can only end up disappointing both the reader and the writer. My approach is not to draw direct one-to-one correspondences between isolated aspects of baseball and Judaism, but rather to uncover shared elements of a deeper understanding of myth and consciousness that are manifested through Judaism and baseball. It is something akin to exploring, for example, pottery and poetry. Potters and poets work in different media, different materials and different technologies and yet both art forms resonate with a number of common elements: aesthetics, balance, integrity, context, intention and meaning. Poets and potters, in their own respective ways, draw on these largely unconscious elements when they use words, clay, phrases and ceramics to express their inner visions and voices. Baseball and Judaism share elements of a deep structure of meaning and myth and their respective surface structures can be traced back to those same shared deep structures.

One shared feature in both baseball and Judaism is the dynamic tension between two broad categories of knowledge: explicit or “revealed” knowledge, referred to in Hebrew as *niglah*, and implicit or “hidden” knowledge known as *nistar*. The dynamic interplay of both levels of knowledge contributes to our fascination with the multiple levels of meaning and interpretation that we bring to our understandings of baseball and Judaism. Judaism and baseball both have law and lore; rules and imagination; statistics and myth; a surface structure and a deep structure; a level of intention and a level of expression; a physical level and a spiritual level. In Judaism *halachah* is the collective and accumulated body of Jewish law that describes, prescribes and proscribes Jewish practice in civil, spiritual and ritual matters. *Halachah*, for example, governs all legal matters relating to the lighting of the Hanukkah candles: precisely where they must be lit, precisely how many candles must be lit on each night and the placement, order and direction of the candles in the Hanu-

kah menorah. This legal consciousness is complemented by a knowledge that is more *aggadic* in nature, a word that derives from the Hebrew word for legend or telling, and *aggadic* knowledge is often represented in the form of parable, metaphor and narrative. The most hidden of all knowledge in Judaism is found in *kabbalah*, the Jewish mystical tradition that is concerned with the deepest questions regarding the creation, meaning and destiny of the entire universe

I use the term “myth” a great deal in this essay. It is far beyond the scope of this essay to even begin to properly define, discuss and analyze the many different meanings of the term “myth” in such disparate disciplines as literature, psychology, religion and anthropology. In this chapter my own understanding and use of the word “myth” relies heavily on the work of James Hollis, the Jungian analyst who has written extensively on the topic. It is worth quoting from Hollis’s book, *Tracking the Gods: The Place of Myth in Modern Life*, at some length to try and capture his approach to myth:

The Greek word *mythos* means word, story, and speech, related to the notion of expression. But expression of what? What myth ultimately expresses is the human take on things, that is, the imposition of dramatic structures on the flux and chaos of nature. Quite possibly, nature has no inherent meaning: it simply is. But humans bring a psychic structuring process which is part of our nature, to that chaos in order to establish a meaningful relationship to the world. Myth is substance of symbol, rhythm and metaphor, bridges from the unknown to the knower and helps the human stand in some sort of meaningful relationship to the mystery. Myth has a mediatorial function, as implied by the etymology of symbol and metaphor (*syn* + *ballein*, to project toward sameness, and *meta* + *pherein*, to carry over or across).⁹

In order to explore the mythic meanings for Judaism and baseball, the organizing rubric I’ve chosen draws on the concepts of space (*olam*), time (*shannah*), and the human soul (*nefesh*) that appear in a number of different kabbalistic texts¹⁰. These three elements are referred to in the *Sefer Yezirah*¹¹ as cosmological “witnesses” to the creation of the world, and in other places they are used as a means of defining three major epochs of Jewish spiritual history. Our oldest (biblical) spiritual traditions emphasized the importance of specific approved physical *spaces* and places where we were to worship God. With the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE rabbinic Judaism made a major shift in our spiritual life by teaching that holiness was no longer situated in specific places but at specific *times* during the Jewish calendar. Many have argued that we are now on the cusp of the third major epoch which will be characterized by a deepening personal understanding and insight in which the inherent holiness of God will be revealed to be part of each individual soul – *nefesh*. I use these concepts in a much more prosaic way but I find them helpful in my attempt to explore Judaism and baseball by considering the mythic meanings of physical *space*, the flow of *time* and what the intersection of time and space might teach us about the journey of the *soul* through both time and space.

Before exploring these more esoteric aspects of baseball I begin with a discussion of the explicit knowledge that is revealed in both baseball and Judaism.

Explicit knowledge: Laws, rules and boundaries

In baseball, explicit knowledge is manifested most clearly by the rules of the game. Baseball has the precision of batting averages, earned run averages, and box scores that tabulate and record for posterity the lived experiences and movement in baseball. The explicitness of baseball is quantifiable in the number of innings in a game, the number of outs per inning, the number of balls and strikes in “the count” that measures the begin-

ning, middle and end of an at-bat. There is only one correct way to round the bases and all players' performance can be reported, analyzed and interpreted based on a carefully calibrated set of statistics which also permit comparisons of players and teams from different leagues and *time* periods.

This explicitness in baseball is based upon an epistemology of objectified knowledge that is reported through a dualistic ontological paradigm whereby the observer/recorder is separate from the phenomena which s/he is observing. The methodology that is used is based upon the accurate and objective tabulation of events and occurrences in the game. A batter's success is tabulated on an equal interval scale based upon increments of one (single, double, triple, homerun). This objectified stance requires an accountant-like precision where every statistic (e.g., a batter's homerun) directly and necessarily impacts upon a complementary statistic (e.g., the pitcher's earned run average). The explicit knowledge within baseball is also predicated upon fixed and mutually exclusive categories: fair and foul; safe and out; ball and strike; hit and error.

Just as the rulebook in baseball is designed to provide clear and consistent definitions, boundaries and categories, *halachah* in Judaism also defines clear mutually exclusive categories of activities that are either permitted, obligatory or forbidden. *Halachah* determines the ways in which *Shabbat* and the other holidays are to be observed and carefully defines the precise differences between food that is kosher and food that is not kosher. The objective is to provide an objective and consistent framework within which explicit behaviours, actions, and rituals can be practiced. The same epistemological, ontological and methodological considerations that govern the explicit within baseball – an objective, dualistic and quantifiable reality – apply to much of *Halacha* as well. In summary, rules are intended to provide order and predictability by establishing clear guidelines that can be followed by practitioners of baseball and Judaism even when they all are separated from each other by time and space.

Hidden knowledge in time

The contrast between the revealed and hidden levels of knowledge in Judaism is described in the following way. The Torah scroll is made up of words written in black ink on white parchment. Explicit knowledge is found in the words in black ink and the hidden knowledge is revealed through the white spaces *between* the words and letters in the scroll. There are three aspects of the white spaces in both Judaism and baseball: the elements of *time*, *space* and the *journey of the soul*. Each of these dimensions contributes to our understanding of Jewish thought and practice and to an understanding of thought and practice in baseball as well. Each of the dimensions separately provides a helpful way of understanding what we are studying but it is primarily the interaction and intersection of the three that draws our attention. That is, one's spiritual life can be situated within the temporal boundaries and the spatial boundaries of one's life but it is within the nexus of *time* and space that we embark upon the most fundamental task of our existence, the journey of our own individual souls *nefesh*.

As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel has written with such elegance, whereas modern civilization places great emphasis on building great edifices in the physical world, Judaism strives to create holiness in *time*.¹² From biblical, rabbinic, mystical, ancient and modern sources we are continually reminded of Ecclesiastes' teaching that "There is a *time* for every purpose under heaven." The Jewish calendar is neither wholly lunar nor wholly solar, but is a carefully balanced mechanism that allows for both the natural monthly rhythm of the moon's appearance and disappearances as well as the year-long journey of

the Earth around the sun. In my translation of and commentary on the *B'nei Yissasschar* by the Dynover Rebbe,¹³ a classic hasidic text on finding spiritual meaning in the flow of time I wrote,

Time, cosmic time, in the Jewish sense, is not a linear sequence of moment strung together. Time is a pulsating energy that ebbs, flows, and manifests itself in different ways. Divine energy manifests itself in time as it does in space. The Dynover's teachings are designed to help us attune to the Divine presence in given moments of experience and awareness and insight.¹⁴

Beginnings are important in both baseball and Judaism. Opening Day marks the beginning of every baseball season and the first pitch initiates a new reality full of potential and possibility. In Judaism we count *time* from the beginning of *time* itself, the creation of the world which, by our current reckoning, was more than 5,765 years ago. The monthly *Rosh Hodesh* prayers mark the beginning of each new moon cycle and the annual *Rosh HaShanah* celebration marks the beginning of each new solar cycle. These dynamic, pulsating rhythms of sun-*time* and moon-*time* create the temporal boundaries within which we express and experience our lives. The three pilgrimage festivals in our tradition (Passover, Shavu'ot, and Sukkot) attune us to seasonal changes throughout the year by aligning each of them respectively with celebrations of spring, early summer and fall. All of this is a way of saying that the sacred within Judaism is manifested through the organic, natural and mystical flow of *time* and our ability to attune this flow of time.

Like Judaism, baseball is also shaped by the invisible rhythms of *time*. Virtually every other sport is governed by a clock, ticking off the minutes and seconds within an arbitrarily set *time* limit of the half, the quarter or the period in which play is conducted. Other sports permit strategies of "controlling the clock" or "running out the clock". In baseball, there is no clock, there is just *time*. A baseball game is measured in non-temporal units embedded within other non-temporal units: a game is nine innings; an inning is three outs; an at-bat can constitute four balls or three strikes. None of these actions is governed by a time limit. Theoretically, a batter can continue to stand in the batter's box forever by fouling off an infinite number of pitches. It is also theoretically possible that a baseball game might never end if the score remains tied inning after inning. The clock can never stop the play. Neither the individual at-bat nor the game itself can be arbitrarily terminated because of a clock. Just as Judaism has a pulsating organic rhythm that corresponds to seasonal variation and personal experience, baseball is also based upon an organic and experiential *time*. The *Encyclopedia of Semiotics* discusses the role of *time* in baseball in this way:

The key to the semiotic unity of baseball is the structural asymmetry by which a fixed beginning is poised against an open and contingent end...Baseball is not so much a slow game as one that unfolds in alternating pulses...Baseball's open-ended *time* frame is complemented by its insistent fixing of its beginnings. The asymmetry of baseball is linked to the tension between open ends and closed beginnings. Within the game itself, the start of play is always marked ritually. This need to demarcate clearly baseball's beginnings must have been behind the creation of a mythical American starting point for baseball.¹⁵

The basic unit of Jewish *time* is the seven day week which is seen as both remembrance and recapitulation of the six days of creation followed by *Shabbat*, the seventh day, the day of rest. It is almost as if time itself has come to a halt on *Shabbat*. The idea and practice of *Shabbat* have always been central to Jewish existence. One teaching has it that *Shabbat* is not the end of the week but the middle, for we spend Wednesday, Thursday and Friday

preparing for *Shabbat* and Sunday, Monday and Tuesday basking in the glory of *Shabbat*. The dual commandment of “protecting and remembering” the Sabbath day is seen as an instruction to “protect” *Shabbat* on the day itself and to “remember” and stay conscious of *Shabbat* during the other six days of the week.

And within the day of *Shabbat* itself there are distinct moods, intentions, prayers, and practices that subtly differentiate one *time* of day from another. Friday night, the “welcoming of *Shabbat*” is a time of expansiveness and joy. *Shabbat* morning has energy of clarity and focus in both the prayers and the weekly Torah reading that constitute the morning service. Late *Shabbat* afternoon, with the shadows growing long, is a time for our own longing and yearning for *Shabbat*, a time of hesitation before we must let her go for an entire week. And as *Shabbat* ends prayers and songs celebrate the beginning of a new week of light, hope, of possibilities. The week is governed by the presence and energy of *Shabbat*; *Shabbat* itself is governed by a subtle yet perceptible flow of holy time through our own individual physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual selves.

The *Encyclopedia of Semiotics* describes how baseball can “overcome time” and create bridges across generations:

Baseball is repeatedly associated with the power to overcome *time* and to reunite estranged generations and eras through a mystical evocation of the recuperative power of the ball field. Baseball is America’s nostalgic game, with an ability to fold the past into the present. Baseball’s capacity to bridge generations for American men is an important reason why fathers value playing catch with their sons.¹⁶

Judaism also resonates with these same kinds of intergenerational aspects of time. Central to Jewish faith is belief in a God “who was, who is and who will always be” so that all Jews in every generation, past, present and future will see themselves in a living relationship with God. In Judaism the passing down of the written and oral laws, the customs and practices, the stories, tragedies, and victories lead us to say on every Passover, “In every generation – past present and future - all Jews must see themselves as if they themselves had actually been slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt.” The notion of bridging generations is yet one more connection between the deeper meanings of baseball and the deeper meanings of Judaism.

In a marvelous essay,¹⁷ Roger Angell describes what at first seems to be a fairly ordinary event: watching a college baseball game in May, 1981 with some friends. The game itself was of more than usual interest as the starting pitchers, Ron Darling for Yale and Frank Viola of St. John’s, were probably the two most dominant college pitchers at that time. In hindsight, many baseball fans now know that both went on to become successful pitchers in the major leagues. The game progressed into extra innings as a scoreless tie and in the process Darling set a college pitching record by pitching eleven innings of no-hit baseball. Despite his heroics, however, he eventually lost the no-hitter and the baseball game by the score of 1-0.

Woven into the significance of the game, however, is the fact that sitting beside Angell as his guest in the stands is none other than “Smokey” Joe Wood, a pitching hero of the 1912 Boston Red Sox and, later when his pitching arm died, a successful outfielder as well. As the Darling/Viola game progresses Angell, Wood and others in their party begin to reminisce about an earlier match-up of pitching stars when Smokey Joe Wood took the mound against, the most dominant pitcher of his generation, Walter “Big Train” Johnson of the Washington Senators. Wood was on a 13-game winning streak while Johnson’s streak was 16 games. The Red Sox were poised to win the pennant if they could win that day, against the seemingly unbeatable Johnson. The Wood/Johnson game was also

a masterpiece by both pitchers but Johnson in 1912, like Darling in 1981, lost to Wood by the same score of 1-0. The intergenerational connection between Darling/Viola and Wood/Johnson is beautifully drawn by Angell in this way:

I think I will remember it (the 1981 game) the rest of my life. So will Joe Wood. Somebody will probably tell Ron Darling that Smokey Joe Wood was at the game that afternoon and saw him pitch eleven scoreless no-hit innings against St. John's and someday – perhaps years from now when he, too, may possibly be a celebrated major-league strike out artist – it may occur to him that his heartbreaking 0-1 loss in May 1981 and Walter Johnson' 0-1 loss in Fenway Park in September 1912 are now woven together into the fabric of baseball. Pitch by pitch, inning by inning, Ron Darling made that happen. He stitched us together.¹⁸

The Hidden Knowledge of Space

In a chapter entitled “*The Mythopoeitics of Place and Memory*”, Charles F. Springwood gives voice to a question about hidden knowledge of space that has hovered in the collective unconscious of many of those who ponder questions of meaning and myth in baseball.

People, it seems, have always inscribed space with memory, mythos, and emotion in the creation of transcendent places. But why, in particular, is baseball – more than any other game commonly at the center of mythopoeitic place?¹⁹

In baseball, the mystical meaning and importance of *space* are perhaps best presented in W.P. Kinsella's *Shoeless Joe*. The book's hero, Ray Kinsella, hears a voice say to him “*If you build it, he will come.*”²⁰ Ray is initially perplexed by the voice, where it is coming from and what the cryptic message means. One day Ray gets a flash of insight and comes to understand that if he builds a baseball field in his Iowa cornfield one of the most iconic, mythic and tragic figures of professional baseball – Shoeless Joe Jackson of the 1919 Chicago White Sox – will appear and play on his field. Jackson was considered by many to be the best baseball player of his day but his career and image crashed when he admitted being one of the eight players who was involved a bribe-taking scandal that corrupted the 1919 World Series. For Ray, it became an obsession to build a place where Shoeless Joe could once again play his marvelous style of baseball and, perhaps, to atone for his sins against the game he loved so much. Ray's obsessive mission of building his “field of dreams” becomes an attempt to redeem not just Joe Jackson, but also to repair Ray's painful, life-long relationship with his own father which remained unresolved at the *time* of his father's death. The field becomes the place where historical, personal, intergenerational and mythical healing can take place. “*If you build it, he will come.*”

Kinsella's is a poignant and powerful description of the inherent power and meaning that many have observed in the shapes, dimensions, proportions and actions that are associated with the baseball field. Unlike many other team sports (e.g., football, soccer, basketball, rugby, lacrosse, polo) baseball is not played on a rectangle upon which the teams compete for and attempt to conquer territory. In these games the conquest of territory is successful only when the ball (or puck) crosses a line, a barrier/boundary in *space*. The baseball field is more complex: a combination of straight lines, curved lines, a precariously balanced “diamond” standing its point, the whole field, essentially representing one quadrant of an ever expanding universe. The comedian George Carlin has described the playing fields of baseball and football in this way:

Baseball is played on a diamond, in a park. The baseball park! Football is played on a GRIDIRON, in a STADIUM, some *times* called SOLDIER FIELD or WAR MEMORIAL STADIUM.

In football, the object is for the quarterback, otherwise known as the field general, to be on target with his aerial assault, riddling the defense by hitting his receivers with deadly accuracy in spite of the blitz, even if he has to use the shotgun. With short bullet passes and long bombs, he marches his troops into enemy territory, balancing this aerial assault with a sustained ground attack that punches holes in the forward wall of the enemy's defensive line. In baseball the object is to go home! And to be safe! "I hope I'll be safe at home!"²¹

It is the interplay of the players on the field that animates the field of play. The playing field itself represents both a balance of energies as well as a stunning set of asymmetries in its basic design. There is balance between the "right side" (first base, second base, and right field), the "left side" (third base, short stop and left field) as well as "strength up the middle" (catcher, pitcher, the second base/shortstop combination, and center field). The infield is exact, with every straight line and every 90° angle of absolutely identical dimensions. But beyond the enclosed clarity and finitude of the infield is, not yet another box of equal dimensions and proportions, but an ever expanding outfield, an expanding universe emanating from whatever big-bang triggers the motion and energy from that almost imperceptible point of origin at home plate.

What, then, is the analogous "field" of Jewish consciousness and practice? A number of writers have commented on what they see as a similarity between the design and flow of action on the baseball field and the alignment of the ten kabbalistic *sefirot*, the 10 emanations of divine energy which enable us experience a manifestation of an infinite God in a finite *time* and *space*. In my view, the very best treatment of the idea of the *sefirot* in "baseball" is in a marvelous short story by David Kronfeld²². The appeal of such a reimagination is obvious: ten players (nine fielders and a batter), ten *sefirot*; each player/*sefirah* has its own unique characteristic and each player/*sefirah* interacts in specific ways with other players/*sefirot*. And it is in the imaginative playfulness of Kronfeld's fiction that makes his piece particularly appealing to me. Yet, other work of this kind that explores specific one-to-one correspondences between the baseball field and the kabbalistic Tree of Life is, in my view, just a little *too* neat and *too* tidy and at the end of the day I am still left wondering what we have learned from the exercise. In some ways it reminds me of the use of numerology (*gamatria*) in which meanings in a text are calculated according to the numerical values of the specific words and sentences under study. This technique can yield interesting illuminations to a text, suggesting parallels with other more distant texts that yield the same numerical values. But for a very good reason *gamatria* is also lovingly referred to as the "butterflies of the Torah".²³ That is to say, the ideas are pretty and attractive but a half an hour later we are still hungry for more substance. I eagerly await more depth work on the *sefirot*/ball field parallelism.

The symbolization of space is an ancient and pervasive element across cultures, societies and religions. As Lundquist points out in the quotation below, one particularly powerful representation of space is the mandala with its combination of circles and squares that are taken to symbolize the contrasting and complementary elements of heaven and earth.

The primary expression of sacred geometry in temple architecture is the mandala. The mandala is a sacred, numinous shape consisting of the intersection of a circle (the shape of the heavens) and a square (the primary shape of the earth's surface).²⁴

Mandalas are drawn and used in numerous religious traditions and even in modern Jungian therapies as a means of concentration, meditation and personal reflection. The mandala is taken to symbolize wholeness, completion and balance: heaven and earth; male and female; the material and the spiritual; the dream world and the waking world. As a meditative tool, the mandala is considered by some to be a psychic map that can provide insight on the meaning and direction of one's life. The description below, from the *Dictionary of Symbolism* of the "sacred geometry" of the four-cornered, circles-within-squares-within circles structure of the mandala may well contribute to our understanding of what Springwood earlier referred to as the "mythopoetics of place and memory" in both Judaism and in baseball:

The symbolical opposite of the circle is the square which is associated with the terrestrial world and things material. The circle stands for God and heaven, the square for humans and the earth. (p70)...the Cabala also treats the circle and square: a circle inside the square is symbolizing the divine "spark" within a divine envelope. (p71).²⁵

This description takes on new meaning in Tom Blaess's painting entitled *Keep Your Eye on the Ball* in which he imagines the baseball field itself as part of a larger, universal mandala.²⁶

The importance of physical holy *spaces* was emphasized much more in biblical Judaism than it is today. The bible describes holy *spaces* for ritual purposes such as sacrificial altars, the Tabernacle in the desert and the two Temples in Jerusalem which were the primary focus of Jewish spiritual practice. With the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE rabbinic Judaism made a major shift by situating holiness more in time than in space. As we saw above, finding the sacred in *time* became the primary way in which Jews in far flung places all over the world could access the holiness of *time*.

The most important holy *space* that did replace the Temple as a locus of religious activity, however, was not the synagogue but the home. Although the sacrificial rite ended with the destruction of the Second Temple, much of the symbolic work of the Temple was transferred to the home. The boundaries of the *home*, the entrances and exits, are signified with the *mezuzah*, a marker, a reminder that as we pass through our space, from the public domain to our private domain, the presence of God transcends these earthly, spatial boundaries that frame our physical lives.

There are other holy spaces that frame the spiritual journey of the soul in Judaism. For example, for the holy day of *Sukkot* we build the *sukkah*, a fragile shed/hut structure made of four walls in straight lines and connected by 90° angles and with branches as the roof. On one level, the building of and "dwelling" in the *sukkah* replicates the experiences of our biblical ancestors who dwelled in these kinds of structures during their 40 years of wandering in the desert. For the duration of the holy day, the *sukkah* becomes our *home*. On the spiritual level, the *Sukkah* is also seen as dwelling place of the divine, a place of encounter with God and with our ancestors who are invited into the *sukkah* as our holy guests. Another holy space that represents Judaism's emphasis on the *home* as a place of spiritual focus is the four-cornered *huppah* or wedding canopy, under which the bride and groom stand on their wedding day. The *huppah* creates an exclusive and definable holy space, symbolizing the *home* into which the married couple will live. Both the *sukkah* and the *huppah* are seen as vessels of holiness to dwell within.

The four walls and four corners of the *sukkah* and the *huppah* are clearly defined boundaries of what we might call an "in-field of holiness". Beyond the proximity and intimacy of this "in-field of holiness" there extends a much larger "out-field" that, if

not fenced in, will extend to infinity. The spiritual “action”, the focal point where activity begins and where the soul must begin its journey – to come “home” – is played out within the parameters of the “in-field”, a space with four sides of equal length and with four corners – bases – that must be touched and connected. The *sukkah* and the *huppah* represent the *home* as a sacred space in which we strive for wholeness and holiness, to attempt to (re-)create an alignment of sacred time and sacred space, a *space* where we can encounter the divine presence. The immanence and the transcendence of God are unified where we create a physical and spiritual *space* in our lives.

In both Judaism and baseball, then, there are (at least) two levels of what we call *space*. There is the physical manifestation and limitations of the geometric space in the world in which baseball is played and in which Judaism is practiced. In both cases, however, the actual physical dimensionality of space is seen to represent a “higher”, more spiritual level of space. Ray Kinsella’s physical baseball field in an Iowa cornfield is but an earthly representation of his “field of dreams”. The Jewish tradition often refers to these two aspects of the holy city of Jerusalem. There is *Yerushalayim shel matta*, the earthly city of Jerusalem that is located by precise longitudinal and latitudinal coordinates and there is *Yerushalayim shel ma’alah*, the heavenly city of peace where past, present and future are all united and that will only truly be accessible in days of the messiah. Another example of different levels of *space* in Judaism is the use of the word “*makom*” which in Hebrew can simply mean “a place” in the physical world. But in religious texts and prayers “*Ha Makom*” (i.e., *THE Place*) is one of the names of God. The patriarch Jacob dreams of an encounter with God and awakens with the realization that “God was in this *place* and I didn’t know it.” It took a spiritual, out of body, dream-induced state for Jacob to encounter the divine in spiritual space and it took an awakening in the real world of earth, air, water and fire to realize that spiritual space has an analogue in the day-to-day, moment-to-moment world in which we live.

Perhaps both the biblical Jacob and *Shoeless Joe*’s Ray Kinsella needed, in their own ways and on their own spiritual paths, to journey through time and space in order to find meaning in their own lives and one key portal through which they both had to pass through was their own “field of dreams.” Coming “home”, encountering, experiencing and learning to be in awe of the wholeness of the universe; these are among the tasks that are undertaken during *the journey of the soul* in our lifetimes.

Nefesh: The journey of the soul

There is much in the Jewish mystical tradition that refers to the journey of the soul through time and space. The purpose of this mythic journey, according to Rabbi Shalom Noah Barzovsky, is for the soul to overcome internal and external obstacles that are intended to prevent the soul from determining the reason for its very existence. According to Rabbi Barzovsky, the twentieth century Hasidic author of *Netivot Shalom (Pathways of Peace)*²⁷ the question that the soul must continually ask on its journey through *time* and *space* on its way *home* to the Creator is found in Deuteronomy 10:12: “*Mah HaShem sho’el mimcha*”? - What does God want from *you*? What is the unique purpose of journey of *your* individual soul that differentiates it from all of the other souls that have ever been brought into creation?”

Though he comes from an entirely different world view, Jungian analyst James Hollis poses similar questions on the journey of the soul:

How we are to understand ourselves as ourselves is the psychological task of myth. Literally this means asking questions such as: Who am I? How am I to conduct my life?

What is my proper place in the world, my vocation? How am I to find a companion who is right for me?...Living symbols, however, can initiate us into the mysteries of our own soul...The function of myth, therefore, is to initiate the individual and/or the culture into the mysteries of the gods, the world, society and oneself.²⁸

Both baseball and Judaism resonate with this Jungian interpretation of the journey of the soul. Both baseball and Judaism depend upon an understanding of the intersection of *time* and *space* that creates a psychic landscape through which the individual travels on a journey to self-realization and completion. The journey itself is transformative that leads the individual to a higher level of spiritual and personal fulfillment. In baseball the batter's goal is to conquer *space* one base at a time and the fielders' goals are to do everything possible to prevent the batter from completing the journey *home*. In Judaism as well, the metaphor of journey home is also central. In Jewish national mythology the Jewish people must overcome natural and human adversaries on its journey back to its spiritual and physical homeland after 40 years of wandering in the desert. There is the existential and spiritual yearning for the end of our journey through exile and our return *home*. On the individual level one of the major spiritual tasks that the soul must perform is *teshuvah*, which is usually (and badly) translated as "repentance." It really means "to return." This is the primary spiritual task we undertake every year on the holy day of Yom Kippur. The practice of *teshuvah* is based on the notion that throughout the year we have wandered, spiritually and ethically, from our true selves, from God, the Source of all creation. We are implored through prayer, study meditation and by repairing relationships with others to "return" to our core selves.

The spiritual journey, however, does not come without its very real dangers and risks. A very powerful story in our tradition tells of four rabbis who entered a mystical orchard, a symbol of hidden wisdom that lies beyond the comprehension of human beings. Only one of the four rabbis who entered into this mystical orchard emerged alive, sane and with his belief intact. Of the other three one died, one went mad and one lost his faith. This spiritual journey into this particular "field of dreams" points out the very real dangers that can assault our lives, sanity and beliefs as we strive to return home. James Hollis uses Jungian language to describe both the awesome dangers and the tremendous benefits of the journey:

Often the hero of such stories sets out on an adventure in the world; sometimes the journey is internal as the hero descends into the depths of the unconscious. If the person survives the descent – and typically many predecessors did not – and the battle with whatever monsters await in the depths, then he or she is able to undertake the ascent and be transformed. This transformation constitutes a death and rebirth experience. Who the person was, and what his or her conscious world was like is no more. All is transformed²⁹.

We saw earlier that the spatial array of the mandala, with its squares and circles, reflects many of the same themes of wholeness, balance and self that find form on the baseball field as well. Similarly, the individual's journey around the bases in baseball can also be seen to reflect the spiritual journey of the soul in Judaism. When the runner circumnavigates the four 90° right angles of the diamond and returns *home*, the physical geometry itself has been transformed through the creation of a virtual circle of 360°. The square has been circled and the circle has been squared. The mythic journey of the *soul* through *time* and *space* to its *home*, in both baseball and Judaism, is a deeply and fundamentally transformative experience that guides the continuing struggle to understand the very meaning of our lives.

The significance of the mythic journey of circling the bases is captured in this short excerpt from Bernard Malamud's classic novel, *The Natural*, which recounts the efforts of the protagonist Roy Hobbs to fix the tragic events of his life that lead up to his one last chance to succeed in major league baseball. Roy's journey to date through life and through baseball has been marked by loss and failure. Roy needs this pinch hit home-run to convince his team that despite his current slump, he is in fact capable of heroic achievements and his success in doing so is no fluke but the logical conclusion to his life of struggle. The story line is further intensified by the fact that Roy has promised Mike Barney, a truck driver, that he would hit a homerun for Mike's desperately ill son, Pete, who idolizes Roy. Confined to hospital, Pete will listen to the game on radio and Mike is convinced that a Roy Hobbs homerun will save his son's life. Roy's pinch hit at bat represents an opportunity for personal redemption and to bring joy to another person. The success or failure of the journey rides on this one at-bat. The moment is full of potential and meaning and the crowd and the ballplayers, especially opposing pitcher Lon Toomey, all seem to sense this as they focus all of their attention on Roy's presence in the batter's box. A mysterious "lady" in the stadium whom no one knows stands during this at bat and no one knows why. Everything seems to hang on the magic and mystery of the moment. There are two strikes on Roy.

At the same time he [Roy] became aware that the night had spread out in all directions and was filled with an unbelievable fragrance. A pitch streaked toward him. Toomey had pulled a fast one. With a sob Roy fell back and swung. Part of the crowd broke for the exits. Mike Barney wept freely now, and the lady who had stood up for Roy absently put on her white gloves and left. The ball shot through Toomey's astounded legs and began to climb. The second baseman, laying back on the grass on a hunch, stabbed high for it but it leaped over his straining fingers, sailed through the light and went up into the dark, like a white star seeking an old constellation. Toomey, shrunk to a pygmy, stared into the vast sky. Roy circled the bases like a Mississippi steamboat, lights lit, flags fluttering, whistle banging, coming around the bend. The Knights poured out of their dugout to pound his back, and hundreds of their rooters hopped about the field. He stood on home base, lifting his hat to the lady's empty seat. Although Fowler goose-egged the Cubs in the bottom of the ninth and got credit for the win, everybody knew it was Roy alone who had saved the boy's life.³⁰

Extra innings

I complete this essay sitting in my *olam*, my physical home in Vancouver, British Columbia. In time – *shannah* - I live in the unique time frame created by the extra month of Adar Bet which is given to us in Jewish leap years. I can still hear the joyous celebration of the holy day of Purim that occurred just a few days ago and, with each passing day of Adar Bet I am drawn closer to the month of Nissan and the holy day of Passover. The great Iraqi rabbi and spiritual leader, the Ben Ish Chai, teaches that with the month of Nissan the journey of the soul goes through a significant transition. For me personally one of these significant transitions will occur on the twentieth day of Adar Bet, the sixth *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of the death, of my father, Dr. Elazar Goelman, of blessed memory. My father had the genius and sensitivity to instill me with a love of Torah and to nurture my fascination with and love of baseball from my earliest years. We shared the joy and the light of *Shabbat* and the festivals and we shared the frustrations of watching the Philadelphia Phillies lose while sitting in dirty, smelly Connie Mack Stadium at 20th and Lehigh in North Philadelphia. Listening to the World Series on radio while sitting in our *sukkah* deepened my appreciation for both the festival of *Sukkot* and for the World

Series. My father completely understood what it meant for me to invite Sandy Koufax to my bar mitzvah in 1964 and, more, what it meant to me that Koufax autographed the invitation and sent it back to me.

The journey of my own soul continues to travel through the landscape of myth, meaning and metaphor on many different levels of my life. The journey of my father's soul will continue through the landscapes of mystery that lay just beyond our own consciousness but I know that our respective journeys will continue to intertwine, dance, kiss and then separate as we each attempt to answer the Slonimer's question about why in fact we were given the gift of life in the first place and the gift of standing in the father-son relationship that has nourished us both. "Fathers and sons; the sounds and smells of a summer night; listening to the game on the car radio; and the cosmic struggles that all games can come to represent."³¹

NOTES

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² For example, R. Souster, *Take Me Out To The Ballgame* (Ottawa, 2002).

³ For example, L. Ritter, *The Glory Of Their Time: The Story Of The Early Days Of Baseball Told By The Men Who Played It* (New York, 1966).

⁴ For example, P.H. Gordon, S. Waller, & P. Weinman, *Diamonds Are Forever: Artists And Writers On Baseball* (San Francisco, 1987).

⁵ For example, G. Will, *Men At Work* (New York, 1990); R. Angell, *Season Ticket*. (New York, 1982); T. Boswell, *Why Time Begins On Opening Day* (New York, 1984): Penguin Books.

⁶ For example, T.J. Abrunzo, Commotio Cordis. The Single, Most Common Cause Of Traumatic Death In Youth Baseball. *American Journal of Diseases of Children*, 145:11 (1991): 1279-82; R.K. Adair, The Physics Of Baseball. *Physics Today*, 48:5 (1995): 26-31; J. Albert, Exploring Baseball Hitting Data: What About Those Breakdown Statistics? *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 89 (1994): 1066-74; M.J. Albert & D.M. Drvaric, Little League Shoulder: Case Report", *Orthopedics*, 13:7 (1990): 779-781; T. Bahill, W. & Karnavas, The Ideal Baseball Bat. *New Scientist*, 130:1763 (1991): 26-31; W.J. Baker, Disputed Diamonds: The YMCA Debate Over Baseball In The Late 19th Century. *Journal of Sport History*, 19:3 (1992): 257-262; B. Brown, Waging Baseball, Playing War. Games Of American Imperialism. *Cultural Critique*, 17 (1991): 51-78; P.J. Farris, On baseball cards and literacy acquisition. *Reading Teacher*, 48:7 (1995): 626-627.

⁷ For example: *When Baseball Was a Game*, Loyola Marymount University, Costa Mesa, CA.; *Baseball and Writing*. University of Texas at Arlington. *Beyond the Diamond: Baseball and American Culture*. University of Illinois at Chicago. *How to Do Baseball Research: A Freshman Seminar*, University of Oregon. *The Analysis of Baseball: Statistics and Sabremetrics*. Tufts University.

⁸ P. Boussiac (Ed.). *The Encyclopedia Of Semiotics* (New York, 1998).

⁹ J. Hollis, *Tracking The Gods: The Place Of Myth In Modern Life* (Toronto, 1998), 8.

¹⁰ H. Goelman, "The B'nei Yissasschar: A Thematic Translation And Commentary." In S. Harris-Wiener & J. Omer-Man, (Eds.), *Worlds of Jewish Prayer: A Festschrift in Honor of Rabbi Zalman M. Schachter-Shalomi* (Northvale, 1993), 109-123.

¹¹ A. Kaplan, (1990), *Sefer Yezirah: The Book Of Creation* (York Beach, 1990).

- ¹² A.J. Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning For Modern Man* (New York, 1951).
- ¹³ Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Shapira of Dynov, 1785-1841.
- ¹⁴ H. Goelman, 1993,. 110.
- ¹⁵ P. Boussiac, 1988, 62.
- ¹⁷ P. Boussiac, 1988, 62.
- ¹⁷ R. Angell, *The Web Of The Game*. In R. Angell, *Late Innings: A Baseball Companion*, (New York, 1983), 368-88.
- ¹⁸ R. Angell, 1983, 387-8.
- ¹⁹ C.F. Springwood, C.F. (2002). The mythopoetics of place and memory. In *Baseball As America: Seeing Ourselves Through Our National Game* (Washington, D.C., 2002), 293.
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- ²⁷ S. N. Barzovsky, *Sefer Netivot Shalom*, (Jerusalem, 1997) Hebrew.
- ²⁸ J. Hollis, 1995, 17.
- ²⁹ J. Hollis, 1995, 72.
- ³⁰ B. Malamud, *The Natural* (New York, 1952) 147-8.
- ³¹ S. Waller & P. Weinman, 1987, 139.

Center Field of Dreams and Questions: Baseball and Judaism

Ori Z. Soltes

The Emancipation of Jews in Western and Central Europe between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries was a double-edged sword. The sudden array of possibilities for Jews to become part of the mainstream and get off the sidelines arrived with a significant price, the sum total of which was the impossible-to-answer question: where do we fit into the world that with one hand has allowed us in while with the other still apparently keeps us out? Our children might now attend public schools instead of the *Beit Midrash*, (“House of [Judaism-focused] Study”), but those schools are in session on Saturday. We cannot effectively keep our kids home every sixth day, merely because it is our Sabbath, so then ought we to send them on *Shabbat* with instructions not to write — unless there is an exam that day? And when Yom Kippur falls on a Tuesday? And what of the shop I run in Toulouse, which by law must be closed on Sunday (in spite of the fact that France is ostensibly a secular, not a Christian state): do I abrogate my *Shabbat* to remain in step with my Christian competitors or close it on that day and potentially sacrifice one-sixth of my business?

These kinds of questions emerged as, on the one hand, the secularizing West saw decreasing justification for marginalizing Jews and Judaism for theological and ideological reasons, and on the other, Western Jews found themselves scrambling to determine how to define themselves in purely theological terms: if Judaism may be viewed as a religion and no more than a religion — its adherents Frenchmen or Germans who happen to be Jewish, and not Jews who happen to dwell in Germany or France — than how ought they to articulate their Judaism as a religion when the West is reshaping itself along lines that, while secular, retain important vestiges of its Christian heritage with which vestiges Judaism as a religion is incompatible?

Of course the problem became only more complicated when in 1878 the German politician, Wilhelm Marr, extracted a term from the vocabulary of comparative philology — “Semitic”, referring to a family of related languages, including Arabic, Hebrew and Ethiopic, among others — and applied it to Jews. His intention was to re-marginalize them by identifying them as racially and ethnically different from “Europeans.” So the centuries’ old antipathy for Jews that had religious thinking as its basis — that had theoretically been abandoned during the previous century — was simply replaced with antisemitism, which offered an ethno-racial basis for Jew-antipathy. The implications of this shift in definition and the continued hatred sustained by that shift would be dire two generations later, in Germany and throughout Europe.

The massive emigration of Jews from Eastern Europe toward the Americas, the beginnings of which virtually coincided with the Marr formulation, encompassed the time period of both the Dreyfus Affair in what Europeans regarded as the most Western and most secularly liberated European country, France, in the 1890s; and the Beiliss Affair two decades later in the waning years of Romanov Russia. These two signal events demonstrated that, whatever its Emancipationist assertions, Europe both East and West had the capacity to find its way back to hostility to Jews easily and without hesitation. But the United States seemed to offer new possibilities for breaking out of that all-too-flexible box of hostility. Her beacon beckoned — literally, in New York harbor — to the millions seeking a new reality in a New World, including but not limited to several million Jews. And even if, by 1924, the Johnson Act had definitively shut the immigration gates, most

of those already inside by then barely noticed that they had closed, so busy were they finding their way and themselves within the New Colossus.

* * * * *

Every immigrant asks himself the question of how to begin to fit into the new world into which he has just arrived, some eagerly, others more reluctantly. Two issues distinguished Jewish immigrants to America from their non-Jewish counterparts from Russia or Italy or anywhere else. Jews carried with them from the Old World the question of where as Jews they fit into the world at large. Whether that world was overtly Christian or claimed to be secular, Jewish experience by the late nineteenth century, after a century of Emancipation in much of that Old World, was that the sense of Jewish legitimacy as fully-enfranchised citizens of the state and members of the society was still equivocal. Would America be different? How might we make sure that it is? What might we do, as New Americans, to aid the process of assurance?

On the other hand, Jews were unique in having no "Old Country" within the Old World to which to feel attached in the nationalist, ethnic, cultural and linguistic senses, and thus to which to return, should the immigration experiment fail: they had been cast and recast as a People apart: Jews, not Russians; Jews, not Italians; Jews, not Germans. So whatever nostalgia for the familiar world of Germany, Russia or Italy might prevail was interwoven with and undercut by a sense of alienation from those places. They had left not only for better economic opportunities, as members of other groups had, but in flight from one sort of religious/ethnic oppression or another. Thus, until they could be established in America, they would remain homeless: wanderers and true border creatures, caught between realms rather than residing comfortably in any one.

One sees this double-barreled issue in some of the directions taken by Jewish writers and visual artists as they begin to seek and find a place in America in the first third of the new century. One thinks, for example, of the image by Raphael Soyer of "The Artist's Parents," in which the two are formally and stiffly attired, as if still ensconced in the Old World. They are self-enclosed in a pyramidal composition the peak of which is an old photograph of a mother and child, not clearly identifiable, but obviously from the Old World. The parents' eyes tell all: they are disconnected from what is outside themselves and focus, instead, inward, no doubt on their memories; they stare at a reality beyond the canvas and beyond the viewer; their other-directed eyes offer no liaison to each other, to the viewer, or to the room in which the artist depicts them, marked in the painting by an ugly wall switch that, symbol of this New World, Soyer chose not to excise from his composition.

One also thinks of the bold paintings by Louis Lozowick that tout the industrial and urban power of America, particularly in its New York City incarnation. And one also thinks, on the other hand, of Ben Shan's constantly expanding address of social and political issues in both the Old World ("Italian Landscape", 1943) and the New World ("Sacco and Vanzetti", 1932). In this last-mentioned series of works he uses overt Christian symbols, directly connecting the Italian immigrants executed for a crime they did not commit to the Crucifixion, and crying out at the miscarriage of justice by the WASP leadership of the Land of the Free.¹

One thinks, too, of the straightforward exploration of the tensions between Old World and New World sensibilities in the Lower East Side ambience of Anza Yeziarska's novels. A generation later, New York-born Bernard Malamud would swing back to the old world (*The Fixer*, 1966) and wrestle with the new complications in Jewish-Christian relations

made feasible in the New York of mid-century (*The Assistant*, 1957). More fascinating, given the direction of this narrative, is his signal first novel, *The Natural* (1952). This last work does two things of particular significance. It carries forward the evolving tradition of baseball writing: from Ring Lardner, American-born son of wealthy, WASP American parents, the premier writing on America's National Sport is taken up by a Jewish writer, son of immigrants from Russia. And its depiction of an athlete with preternatural skills, whose life is truncated by a strange and never-explained encounter with a mysterious woman, culminates not with a heroically happy ending, but with betrayal and failure, adding a *gravitas* to the genre that had not been there before.

Why did baseball draw Malamud's novelist attention in the first place and how do we account for the direction that his narrative took? (The much later, Hollywood version of the story, with Robert Redford as the star, ends on the happy note of a killer home run that wins the championship, not the strike-out that leaves everybody lost, as in the novel). Sports at its best is the magnificent melting pot. Even in the complicated atmosphere of *fin-de-siecle* Austria, to which Jews contributed so much culturally while continuing to be sneered at socially (and whose otherwise-La Guardia-like mayor, Karl Lueger, picked up on Wilhelm Marr's idea of campaigning on a ticket that was vociferously antisemitic — so vociferous that Lueger's first mayoral victory, in 1897, was not confirmed by Hapsburg Emperor Franz-Joseph II) sports offered Jews a new path to acceptance. The championship soccer teams and gymnastic performers fed both the developing ideology of Palestine-directed "Muscular Zionism" and the effort to reshape the image of Jews within Europe itself.²

The more so in America, where so many millions, Jews among them, were arriving and striving for new beginnings and contending with each other to find a place in the light. The stereotypical image of the Jew as non-physical was one not easily left behind even in the New World. Perhaps not surprisingly, the first sport in which Jews excelled in the United States in the first third of the twentieth century was boxing. No sport more emphatically contradicted that bloodless stereotype. And no sport more naturally drew its constituent stars from the alleyways of the socio-economically disadvantaged. This is a pattern that would subsequently be emulated by the Italian and African American and Hispanic communities: boxing presented the first opportunities to move off the streets of the ghettos, which in the case of the Jews and then Italians meant the immigrant ghettos, by excelling in sports. For the entertainment afforded by two men pummeling each other senseless — a tradition that can be traced back at least as far as ancient Rome and its gladiatorial and similar combats — is too dangerous for those who wish to be entertained to engage in themselves. So middle and upper class blood-thirst is satisfied by the denizens of the lower classes too desperate to worry about the inherent dangers of engaging in fisticuffs.

The newly-arrived inhabitants of New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and similar cities offered a particularly choice range of potential pugilists, especially in the 1920s and early 1930s, the era between the wars when, in the aftermath of the unprecedented horrors of the Great War, the need to escape from ourselves and what we are as a species can be felt in every aspect of Western life from dance to aviation. As the twenties roared with escapism, boxing in America offered both a mind-numbing momentary passage out of the complicated human question of who we are for the audience and a brain-bashing passage out of poverty for the fighters. Remarkably, the ring was dominated by Jews. From Benny Leonard to Barney Ross, Jewish fighters held eighty percent of the weight-class titles during this period.³ But the brutality of the boxing ring is as antithetical to Jewish values now as it was in the Roman era, and a sport which emphasized brain-bashing and

too often led to brain-damage could not be the final goal of a people seeking not only emancipation from poverty but enfranchisement within the upper crust of the cultural, intellectual and socio-economic mainstream.

The next logical step in ascending the ladder of acceptance into America through sports was varied – including the beginnings of periodic success in basketball and football, from Dolph Schayes to Sid Luckman and Marshall Goldberg. But by the time that step was being taken, another war was in process, and in its aftermath, Jews were weaving themselves not simply into America but into the new tapestry being rewoven as suburban America. If boxing could be left behind with the ghettoed cities, then when — or even before — non-ghetto sports, university sports and suburban sports, like basketball and football and even squash and tennis might be joined, the most quintessential American sport to draw the would-be American athlete would have to be baseball. If what American Jews have craved from the moment we arrived onto these shores is acceptance as Americans, then no sports medium could come close to baseball in affording the opportunity to melt into the pot of American national identity.

This is what is expressed in the central image in Marilyn Cohen's extraordinary series of collage paintings, *Where Did They Go When They Came to America?*. Cohen focused in the early 1990s on a Jewish family in each of the fifty states, sifting through old shoeboxes of photographs and attics-full of forgotten toys and furniture to extract a layered summary of each family's transition from Old World to New. Her medium of torn paper, dipped in colors and painstakingly attached to the backing of each work literalizes the metaphor of layered memory. Again and again in her images the stars and stripes of the American flag are somehow worked into the background, together with faces and figures from the family past. And none of these is more intensely American than "Star of Local Kids: Memphis, Tennessee, 1923." For the entire image is an American flag, but peering like ghosts out of the misty blue-starred section of the flag is a couple from the Old Country. The foreground is marked by a team photograph of kids in their baseball team uniforms. Apart from them, in significance perspective, so that he is thrice their size, is another kid in uniform, bat and catcher's mitt in hand.

The gigantic kid — the star of local kids — is Benny Kaplan, age 11, who in 1923 was the Most Valuable Player of his Memphis, Tennessee Junior Baseball Team — for which he was awarded a new catcher's mitt. His father, Shlomo Zalman Kalmonovsky (the old-fashioned-looking, bearded male in that sky-blue upper left flag corner, who became Sam Kaplan, thanks to a schoolteacher for whom the original name was too long — but whose great-grandson petitioned to restore the full family name in 1990) arrived in the United States in 1902, and was followed five years later by his wife Rieva (also in the sky-blue section of the flag) and their five young children. Three more kids were born in Memphis, and Bennie was the youngest of these.⁴

Family lore tells how Bennie used to wear the baseball uniform in which he is depicted under his Sabbath clothes during Saturday morning services. The gold fringe at the bottom of the image is a visual pun: it is both the fringe on the American flag and the symbolic fringe of the traditional *tzitzit*⁵ poking out from behind the flag as it would have peaked out from under Benny's uniform. (His clothes hid the uniform which hid the *tzitzit*: they make up the layers that define Benny as an American 11-year-old and as a Jewish 11-year-old starting to think toward his Bar Mitzvah less than two years away.) The Old World seeps into the new; the Jewish world peeks out from the American; past and present bring certainties and questions into focus in equal measure.

Differently shaped, the Americanism of baseball is what drew Malamud to create a hero — a quintessential WASP hero, albeit a naive Middle America country boy WASP hero, imagined by a Brooklyn Jewish writer — whose world is baseball and no other sport. Malamud's Roy Hobbs may be a WASP, but his story rings with Jewish experience. Hobbs' talent is extraordinary, but he is an outsider, and for reasons as theologically unfathomable as the Holocaust that preceded the novel by barely a decade his career is derailed when it should be starting. But his talent is *so* remarkable that he is able to re-enter the fray and still be a star at an age when he should be retiring — even as the very teammates he elevates are, at least initially, suspicious of him. If he is a wanderer who is beaten down by unfathomable circumstances, he keeps returning to the field of play, but needing to prove himself again. And the heavens are aligned sufficiently for him to achieve that earlier-missed stardom and otherwise sufficiently for him to be crushed yet again at the moment when his salvation and that of the team he led might have been complete.

The story is fraught with unanswered and unanswerable questions, from beginning to end. Its central character is chosen as a light onto the baseball world but singled out for suffering and pain by forces neither he nor we understand. And in the end, contrary to the ideal touted by the American and sports worlds of which he is part and yet not part, winning is not everything for him. Baseball's Americanism, and the tensions for the outsider who wants in is what Cohen depicts and Malamud wrote about. It is what drew the majestic Hank Greenberg like Benny Kaplan, but translated into the rarified atmosphere of the Major Leagues, and like Roy Hobbs, but bearing a direct and not oblique Jewish burden on his shoulders to become a baseball player and a baseball star, and not seek glory on some other field of excellence.

For Roy Hobbs' real-life counterpart in excellence — Malamud's inspiration — *was* undoubtedly Hank Greenberg, the Jew who excelled at America's game, moreover playing for a team, the Detroit Tigers, at a time (the 1930s) when Detroit was marked by a pre-eminent antisemite with a loud radio voice and a large following. The notorious Father Coughlin's Sunday broadcasts spewed more antisemitic venom than Wilhelm Marr or Karl Lueger could ever have imagined, with an important technological advantage over them (radio) — at a time when Marr's lineal descendant, Adolph Hitler, was consolidating his power and beginning to direct his attention to Jews and Judaism. That attention turned on its head the Emancipation-born question of whether to define Judaism as a religion or a race or something else. But baseball offered for the Jewish player a particular form of the post-Emancipation challenge of choosing a given self-definition layered with the burden of defining how to stick by that self-definition.

If it is true that the success of a Jewish athlete in Germany such as that of track and field star Margaret Bergmann (pre-eminent high-jumper on the German team preparing for the 1936 Olympics) was a slap in the face of Hitlerian ideology — the first shoe-dropping of which the second was the success in 1936 Berlin of the Black American athlete, Jesse Owens — it is also true that every action of the Jew, Hank Greenberg, both because he was a Jew and because his sport was baseball, had gigantic implications in America, beyond its other intrinsic sports-connected significances. Thus when Greenberg chose to sit out a crucial game — because it fell on Yom Kippur in the waning days of the 1934 season — when Detroit was locked in a battle for the pennant with the New York Yankees, this constituted a larger than life assertion of his Judaism because of who he was, the enterprise in which he was engaged and the importance of that enterprise to Americanism. It represented a choice, in a grander manner than was true for Malamud's Roy Hobbs, of Jewish values over American sports values. If winning is everything, then nothing should

have stopped Greenberg from playing — except his sense of Jewish values, which dictated that winning is *not* everything.

Greenberg's out-of-the-ordinary "history" was only beginning at that point. He won the award as the Major Leagues' outstanding player twice (1935, 1940). But as Greenberg's homerun total ascended toward the magic number of 60, in 1938, and it appeared that Babe Ruth's record might be broken, pitchers stopped pitching hittable balls to him. The notion that a Jew might break the Babe's record was simply too unacceptable to that world. One might see in this the microcosmic reflection of the world of Emancipation of the previous century and a half, in which Jewish participation in the mainstream was accepted and tolerated up to a point, but denied beyond that point.

If his accomplishments on the field have led to a consensus that Hank Greenberg was the greatest Jewish baseball player ever, and one of the greatest all-time right-handed hitters of any faith, it was the decision made as he was still approaching the fulfillment of his stardom for which he is most widely remembered. The ramifications of his statement, in the era and city of Coughlin and Henry Ford,⁶ in the ultimate American sport, for its ultimate Jewish star, were far-reaching. Such largeness of statement could and did yield a most extraordinary turn of small-scale event: as Greenberg entered the sanctuary of his neighborhood synagogue on Yom Kippur, the congregation broke the usual bounds of sober atonement propriety and — led by the rabbi — applauded.

For what was Hank Greenberg to them — particularly in this moment when word of conditions for Jews in Germany was filtering across the Atlantic, and when the tone of Hitler could be heard in Father Coughlin's voice every Sunday across the region? On the muscular shoulders of his 6'4" frame rested a mantle of responsibility that could be traced all the way back — precisely eighteen centuries back — to the gigantic frame of Bar Kochba, Simeon Ben Kotziba as he was properly known, but who had been dubbed with that Aramaic epithet, meaning "Son of the Star" by none other than Rabbi Akiva himself, in the 130s CE. Akiva saw in Bar Kochba a messianic figure whose combination of athletic prowess and strategic genius would throw the extraordinary power of Rome off Judaean backs — and who did in fact manage to hold that mega-power at bay for three years (132-35) in the last attempt to re-assert an active Jewish nationalism until the end of the nineteenth century.

One of the more interesting and problematic aspects of Jewish thought and history is that, unlike Christianity, Judaism possesses a distinctly vague messianic concept. While Christianity understands Jesus to be the One who will return whenever the messianic era arrives, Judaism is not even certain that a specific individual will be involved, much less, if it is an individual, who he will be. Thus down through the centuries, Jewish history has been marked by dozens of self-proclaimed messianic figures — false messiahs. If Shabbetai Tzvi in the seventeenth century and Jacob Frank in the eighteenth century are the best-known of these, the first such figure, embraced by Jewish leadership not because he was a paragon of Torah study or knowledge, or because he asserted that God spoke to and through him — but because they felt that he could meet the majority on its own terms and defeat it at its own game — was Bar Kochba. And Bar Kochba's conceptual descendant was Hank Greenberg.

We can see this literalized in a group of paintings by Detroit-born Jewish folk-style artist, Malcah Zeldis. Her 1991 painting, "Hank Greenberg" (there was at least one further, subsequent version of the same subject), depicts her family huddled around the radio in their carefully kept house on a street of carefully kept houses. The stadium seems to grow directly out of the house as, in her folk-style there is no sense of perspectival depth and the amphitheater of baseball action rises directly above and thus out of the Zeldis

dwelling. But Greenberg's messianic grandeur is almost bigger than the stadium itself, extending in true significance perspective from Home Plate to Scoreboard. He is the One who would lead Detroit's beleaguered team and its beleaguered Jews through the green grass of baseball success to the paradise of World Series victory.⁷

It was shortly after the Jacob Frank false messianic debacle in Eastern Europe that in Western Europe Christian society began to offer Emancipation to Jews. And one of the responses to the Jewish Question raised by Emancipation was the birth of Reform Judaism in Germany in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Reform Judaism, among other aspects of its ideology, altogether rejected traditional messianic notions. Reform Jews contended — there is irony here, given Reform Judaism's country of birth — that, contrary to the traditional Jewish view, we are not in exile, not waiting for the messiah, not hoping to be returned to the Holy Land to rebuild the destroyed Temple. Indeed the labeling of Reform synagogues "temple" rather than "synagogue" was ideological: the former rather than latter label expresses the conviction that our house of worship here and now (*wherever* "here and now" happens to be, in Florence, Italy or Essen, Germany or Cleveland, Ohio) is every bit as valid as the Temple was then and there, when it still stood in Jerusalem.

At the other end of the century, modern active Jewish nationalism was rekindled by Theodore Herzl and others (in part inspired by events in Europe such as the Dreyfus trial), as a different answer to the Jewish Question. And in the generation after Herzl, the Orthodox Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook was able to generate support within the Orthodox community for the Zionist idea — from those who thought Zionism misguided, since it offered a program of ingathering the exiles that seemed to bypass Divine action — by pointing out that, as Jews, we do not *know* what God's messianic plans are. Rabbi Kook argued that perhaps God's plan is for *us* actively to formulate and pursue the project that will yield an ingathering of the exiles, and not wait for a supernatural being to accomplish that end for us.⁸ Thus Herzl was re-visioned as a kind of secular messiah. Thirty years after Herzl's death and barely a decade after Rabbi Kook's arguments in support of the Zionist idea, Hank Greenberg represented to an American Jewish community largely uninterested in the Zionist idea — confident in its place in America, and yet concerned both about what was developing in Germany and about the implications of those developments for Jews in America through the anti-Jewish ugliness of the Father Coughlins and Henry Fords and Charles Lindberghs of America — no less than the messianic answer to this *sub tabula* Jewish Question.⁹

The unholy trinity of Lindbergh, Ford and Coughlin (the last two of these, to repeat, centered in the city in which Hank Greenberg played major league baseball) offered an ugly re-articulation of the question of where Jews fit in — to America — and Greenberg was the answer. His famed Yom Kippur decision looms over the psychological landscape with resonances echoing all the way to Los Angeles and the decision by Sandy Koufax not to pitch the first game of the 1965 World Series against the Minnesota Twins.

The decision had other parallel avatars. Benny Leonard never boxed on the Jewish holidays, because he promised his mother that he would not abrogate them; and Barney Ross could both promise his rabbi to be an exemplary fighter and human being and walk his mother home after a Friday night victory, because she would come watch but not ride on the Sabbath — but the repercussions of these decisions are both less well-known and perhaps less significant than that of sitting out one baseball game, (especially a crucial one), since baseball was the ultimate American sport and the time of Greenberg's decision was the dawn of the era of ultimate Jewish peril.

One might also wonder how, in other senses, baseball — both like and opposed to other sports, in America or elsewhere — accords with the ideology and traditions of Judaism. On the one hand, of course, it merely offers another layer to the complicated piling on of aspects of the post-Emancipation Jewish Question. Not only do public school and business offer both opportunities and complications to one's self-definition as a Jew, both for the self-definer and for the non-Jewish community that, like Jews, is trying to figure out how Jews fit into a secular-Christian, as opposed to merely Christian, society. But baseball offers the ultimate opportunity to achieve renown by engaging America on its own terms while bringing with that opportunity its own complications.

As a practical matter, no American sport is more given to being played on Saturday afternoon than baseball. It is the ultimate father-and-son, spring-summer-autumn crisp and languid afternoon game, which, in the era of Hank Greenberg more so than our own — when Sunday would have generated wider discomfort for many Christian Americans as a time for such a pastime — and when week-day games meant competition with father's work (and in spring and fall, with school), found a natural place in the relaxed ambience of Saturday afternoon. No sport provided as much of a challenge to one's Judaism, if that Judaism is defined by the keeping of the Sabbath, of spending Saturday afternoons studying Torah, as baseball did and does. Barney Ross could easily enough choose not to fight on Jewish holidays or even on the Sabbath; basketball, played indoors, could be played at night; neither basketball nor football had yet captured the national consciousness as baseball did in that era. So the question for a player like Hank Greenberg, and everyone before or after him, was where to draw the line with regard to keeping the customs of Jewish religious tradition.

If he elected to play baseball, he could hardly choose to sit out every Saturday game. He might ignore Passover and Shavuot, and even Rosh HaShanah. But Yom Kippur is where he drew the line because he saw that day as the center of the Jewish calendar, the day of inward reflection backward and forward from year past to year future. No single day more profoundly causes the Jew to stand apart from his Christian neighbors, in bringing to its conclusion a 10-day-long New Year period not of raucous mind-numbing celebration but of sober introspection, by denying the most basic of natural, animal needs, food — and by extension by suspending the most fundamental of food-earning activities. And the propriety of Greenberg's gesture was divinely confirmed in the minds of many fans by the fact that, in the game following Yom Kippur, in which he did play, his bat won the day and helped carry Detroit forward toward the pennant and the World Series.

For Greenberg, Al Rosen, (the star third baseman for the Cleveland Indians, unanimous MVP of the 1953 season, who refused to play on the High Holidays, and not just Yom Kippur), Koufax or today's Shawn Green (who on a bright day in 2002, playing for the Los Angeles Dodgers against the Milwaukee Brewers had the most productive day at bat in the history of the game — four home runs, a double and a single), to choose that course of sitting-out action over action on the field of dreams reflects a commitment to their faith that is significant because of who they are in the eyes of the Jewish and non-Jewish American communities. And that significance is fascinatingly complicated. If Jewish accomplishments in sports contradict the stereotype of Jewish non-physicality, and baseball is the quintessential American sport, and if America is both a secular and yet in its gut a very religious country, then nothing could be more quintessentially American than success at baseball combined with staying off the field when the field competes with God — and nothing could more simply synthesize the dual ambitions of loyalty to both Jewish and American identities.¹⁰

Thus on the one hand, Greenberg's gesture was lauded by the popular poet, Edgar Guest, in a short poem that culminated with the lines

...Said Murphy to Mulrooney, "We shall lose the game today!
We shall miss him in the infield
and shall miss him at the bat.
But he's true to his religion –
and I honor him for that!"¹¹

On the other hand, when a journalist in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* wrote ugly words regarding Koufax's decision not to pitch on Yom Kippur, Koufax could respond with disgust to such disrespectful sentiment and receive piles of support from players, journalists and fans alike.

"Jewish values" are reflected historically, both before and since Emancipation, by a good deal more than the decision to keep or not keep the Sabbath or the Day of Atonement. Those values are embodied in the Decalogue and beyond it, in a total of 613 commandments spread throughout the Torah and reinforced through successive scriptural and post-scriptural generations of prophetic utterance and rabbinic ordinance. They are summarized in pithy statements. One statement asserts that the world rests on three principles, Torah (referring both to the text of God's word and to its careful study), *Avodah* and *Gemilut Hassidim*, "righteous acts", "acts of loving kindness." The Hebrew word, *Avodah*, puns: it means both "prayer" – and thus, in a sense relates back to Torah — and "work," serving others, in which sense it relates to the third principle, righteous acts. Another pithy summary enjoins us to do three things above all: to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly before God. The commandments are also captured by single words, such as *tzedakah*, or *mitzvah*, the one translatable as "justice" — but which, in common parlance, is used to refer to "charity" — the other "commandment", but which is commonly rendered as "a good deed." So, too, there is a rabbinic dictum traced to Hillel the Elder in the last pre-Christian century that suggests that "the hero is the one satisfied with his portion."

Do any of these principles find particularly noteworthy fulfillment in baseball — if being a baseball player means that the relative simplicity of keeping the Sabbath must be sacrificed? It may be hard to see it: the myriad rules of baseball, which to the non-fan can seem as arcane as some of the 613 commandments in the Torah, have their echoes in other sports. One can certainly observe acts of justice, charity, humility and service and the abrogation of these principles in any and every sport — but none other combines these with a designation as the National Pastime. Greenberg's alleged words of encouragement to Jackie Robinson when the latter broke baseball's color line, since as a Jew who was taunted by others he could empathize with a Black who was taunted, might be connected broadly to the same sense of justice that one must pursue and the same enlarged Jewish social conscience that would push Jews to the forefront of the Civil Rights movement two decades later. But these are almost as vague and generalized as the Jewish messianic concept.

On the other hand a sport most of whose heroes are not recognized by broken noses or excessive height or brawn lends itself to the post-Emancipation will toward normalcy, and from Herzl's *Der Judenstadt* and "Muscular Zionism" to the Maccabiah games, the goal of a large part of the Jewish community of the twentieth century has been to be regarded simply as normal — to excel yet not to stand out as *different*. Hank Greenberg and Shawn Green and everyone between them, from Harry Danning to Rosen to Koufax and Ken

Holtzman, could achieve the moments of perfection that they achieved without standing out as gargantuan and without physically destroying another human being: no boxer to be punched out; no opposing football or basketball player to be knocked over or shot over. Physically, baseball players could walk, unnoticed, down the street more than those in most other sports and still stand out on the field.

The player whacks a tiny sphere — like Abel striking back at Cain — or he attempts to whistle it by a would-be whacker, or to catch it or to throw it faster, farther and more accurately than his competitors (like Aaron tossing his staff into the fray, and watching it turn into the serpent that devours the staff-serpents of the majority Egyptian priest-magicians). Is there something mystically Jewish about baseball that captures the unconscious Jewish imagination? Could it be the configuration of the field? Four bases, like the four-lettered name of God which is the primary Jewish mystical access portal to God? (Not like the five on a basketball team, like the wounds of Christ; eleven on a football team, like the number of brothers who sold Joseph into slavery; tennis, squash, golf, track and field with their individual, rather than team play, minimizing the community, the congregation). Three outfielders, like the three principles upon which the world stands? Eight players, like the eight candles of the Hanukkah lamp, lit by the ninth, the *shamash*, the pitcher — and the reminders connected to the kindling of the lamp of how a heroic figure with a well-thought-out strategy can defeat an enemy much larger than he? These possibilities are games regarding games and the Game. Is it not simply that America calls most loudly from that particular field of dreams?

Could it be the sort of rabbinic mind-bending that re-visits and then shapes new categories of accomplishment? Thus the Jewish sportswriter, Jerome Holtzman, is known as the patron saint of the bullpen, since in 1959 he devised a system for calculating “saves” that, in creating an entirely new category of statistic provided previously under-regarded relief pitchers with a measuring stick for their excellence that is different from that directed at starting pitchers or other players. This particular mode of statistic was the first to be adopted by Major League Baseball’s Official Rules Committee, in 1966, since the RBI (Run(s) Batted In) was added as a category in 1920.

There is something inherently Jewish about the obsession with statistics which, while it defines the sports world is particularly endemic to the world of baseball. It is not only that the ability for a fan to quote reams of numbers that pertain to individual players and teams recalls the ability of an emerging star from the yeshiva world to be able to identify and/or quote passage after passage from the Torah and the rabbinic tradition. But the very obsession with statistics echoes the obsession of Jews with the question of who is a Jew in the various fields of enterprise that make up human endeavor: this actor and that painter and this scientist and that writer: “I didn’t know that so-and-so was Jewish!” is a common refrain of American Jews in particular.

No realm supports that obsession more fully than baseball. Only in the context of baseball could one imagine the need and thus the enterprise of producing a series of trading cards (no other sport in America offers as far-flung a focus on its own history by way of hand-held reminders of every player and his accomplishments than does baseball and its cards) devoted to Jewish baseball players. Thus in early 2004 the American Jewish Historical Society published a comprehensive set of these, featuring all 142 “American Jews in America’s Game” who played between 1871 and 2003. The cards offer every imaginable statistic detailing the accomplishments of immortals and anonymous players alike (including a few whose Jewish credentials are a bit suspect). For it is not only Greenberg and Koufax and the other headliners, but the myriad nameless Jewish players who combine to offer a Jewishly satisfying demographic: better than average overall statistics in pitch-

ing (as of 2003, 1,134 wins and 1,114 losses — twenty wins above the overall average (by definition) of a .500 winning percentage — and 11,632 strikeouts) and batting (22,246 hits, 2,032 home runs and 10,602 RBIs). From ERA (3.66) to Batting Average (.265) to stolen bases (955), all the categories that comprise the Orders and internal *masechtot* (Talmudic tractates) of baseball are included. “Who is a Jew” and “what is a Jew” can now be refracted through the all-American lens of “who is a Jewish baseball player” and “what have been the individual achievements of Jews in baseball?”

The painter, R.B. Kitaj (b. 1932), was born and raised in Ohio, but eventually immigrated to England, where most of his career as an artist has been lived (he returned to the United States in 1997). “His work, diversely built on metaphors and allegories, is a labyrinth of dreams, intertwined with reminiscences of Giotto, Brueghel, Velasquez, Uccello, Michelangelo, Titian, Tintoretto, Goya, Bazzano, Degas, Van Gogh, Cézanne, Bomberg, and reflections on his abandoned home, America,”¹² which he left in the mid-1960s. Early on — but then even more so later, in his long, almost exilic years away from America — he used baseball as an idealizing self-reflective metaphor, seeing the National Pastime as a reflection of his own boyhood. His was a childhood immersed in the American Midwest, and unconscious of the details of recent Jewish history — he grew up both unfamiliar with Jewish traditions and entirely unaware of the Holocaust — that the baseball diamond offered a double symbol of innocence.¹³ As with verbal artists since the era of Ring Lardner and Bernard Malamud, baseball represented eternal and unchanging youth to him. It represented America as a youthful actor on the world stage. But for Kitaj, it also represented his youthful ignorance about who he is.

By the late 1970s, the labyrinth of his ideas began to twist in new directions, via his extensive reading, toward an overt consciousness of his Jewish roots, and particularly, of the Holocaust: “I used to think,” he comments, “that you were a Jew only if you wished to be. It was the murder of European Jews that changed my thinking, once I became aware of it . . . I had no religious or cultural background, but the question of a Jewish art began to interest me.” This consciousness had been a decade in being reached. For he had first and somewhat suddenly become aware of the issue of “Jewishness” in part, because of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, on the eve of which it appeared that a few million Jews would be massacred while the world shrugged its shoulders. That shrug evoked the image of abandonment most centered, for Jews, in the Holocaust. In this shift toward 1967-induced self-awareness Kitaj shares common ground with many American Jews. His subsequent interest in both secular and traditional Jewish thinkers and Jewish history, long-term and recent, spurred the artist to begin to seek a Jewish symbol analogous to the cross for Christianity and Christian art — and to the baseball diamond for America.¹⁴

By the mid-1980s, the chimney had emerged as a reference to the ovens of Jewish experience in the diaspora, culminating with Auschwitz. His 1985 *Hamlet's Ghost (King of Denmark)* wears a yellow Star of David, recalling the Danish monarch and his people who ferried Danish Jews to rescue from the Nazis. Kitaj's sense of “Jewish” imagery connects to ashes and death, which he presents as the opposite of his sense of “American” imagery, connected to the green of the outfield grass and life that, season after season, even as the players change — from Greenberg to Rosen to Koufax to Green — continues without change. The one suggests the immortality of youthful bodies (the players, after all, are the “boys of summer”) and man-made numbers and statistics; the other the immortality of the soul where the bodies were reduced to smoke and names to the anonymity of numbers tattooed on arms stripped of their muscle and their very flesh.

In Kitaj's visual vocabulary, baseball and Judaism are opposites, but nothing could be more antithetical to both baseball and Jewish life-affirming values than the Holocaust.

Nothing could be more ironic than the fact that the most gigantic of Jewish baseball players should stand tallest as a Jew because he stood up by sitting out at the very moment when forces in and out of America were making possible the shaping of the Holocaust. It was as natural for Greenberg to sit out on Yom Kippur as it was for Malamud's Roy Hobbs to strike out as it was for Kitaj to seek himself in the double mirror of opposed images across his career. The paradoxes inherent in being a Jew in America or a Jewish American away from America, on and off the playing surface, are part of the post-Bar Kochba reality, that, altered by the course of Emancipation over two centuries ago has not changed, even after the Holocaust, with respect to complexity. That complexity remains as unshifting as the carefully cut grass in center field.

NOTES

¹ For more detail on these artists and these works, see Ori Z. Soltes, *Fixing the World: Jewish American Painters in the Twentieth Century* (Hanover, NH, 2002), Chapter One.

² See *Jews in the World of Sports*, (catalogue of the exhibition curated by Uriel Simri at Beth Hatfutsoth: The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, Tel Aviv, Summer, 1985). Interestingly, while the exhibition's coverage of the subject continues until the mid-twentieth century, the story of American Jews in sports is completely ignored.

³ See Robert Slater, *Great Jews in Sports* (Middle Village, NY, 1983) and Joseph Siegman, *Jewish Sports Legends* (Washington & London, 1997).

⁴ See Marilyn Cohen: *Where Did They Go When They Came to America?* (catalogue of the exhibition curated by Ori Z. Soltes at the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum, Washington, DC, April-June, 1994), 10. See also Soltes, *Fixing the World*, 115-16.

⁵ The *tzitzit* is the stylized four-tassled, fringed garment worn under the shirt by traditional Jewish males in interpretation of the commandment set forth in Numbers 15:38.

⁶ See note 9, below.

⁷ See Soltes, *Symphonies in Color: The Paintings of Malcah Zeldis* (catalogue of the exhibition at the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum, Washington, DC, Spring, 1992), 8.

⁸ See Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea* (Philadelphia, 1959), 417-31; and Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism: The Intellectual Origins of the Jewish State* (New York, 1981), 187-97.

⁹ I am referring to Lindbergh's overt antisemitism and support for fascism in general and the National Socialists of Germany in particular, and to Ford's project of personally funding the printing and distribution of tens of thousands of copies of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

¹⁰ I am not referring to the intense religiosity that has emerged in the last decade and is most emphatically symbolized by the Christian Right, but to a much longer history. The inauguration ceremonies of our presidents, however secular they are and we believe we are, are rarely devoid of the invocation and benediction that, offered by members of the clergy, articulate our unequivocal conviction that we are "One Nation under God."

¹¹ Quoted in Slater, 84.

¹² Soltes, *Fixing the World*, 82.

¹³ I am thinking of works such as the print portraying Lou Gehrig in his 1969-70 series "In Our Time" and later, his black and white drawing, "Self-Portrait as a Cleveland Indian" (1994) and oil paintings such as "Amerika (Baseball)" (1983-84) and "The Cleveland Indian"

(1995-98). Concerning “Amerika (Baseball)”, the artist wrote, in part: “For most of my life I’ve lived thousands of miles away from real baseball and I’ve got to recollect such things past from an English setting which has warped time through these thirty years of mostly exile from the Summer Game; in fact, since my poor lost tribe of Cleveland Indians last won a pennant and began their three decades of decline by blowing four straight to Leo Durocher’s Giants in the ’54 series... This painting’s title begins with Amerika... Unlike Kafka, I’ve been there, know it well and get quite homesick for it, but Kafka’s crazed, beautiful, unfinished book inspired me, some years ago, to look at my exilic self in changeful ways... I decided to paraphrase both Velasquez and Kafka, and so the great fieldscape of the Boar Hunt at London combined with a Cuckoo Nature Theatre of Ohio and upstate New York; the Velasquez setting reminded me of the low hills of home which often framed the playing fields where we toiled at pick up ball long after dusk blinded us....” See Marco Livingstone, *R.B. Kitaj* (Oxford, 1985).

¹⁴ See R.B. Kitaj, *First Diasporist Manifesto* (London, 1989); Avram Kampf, *Chagall to Kitaj: Jewish Experience in the Art of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1990), 105-12; and Soltes, *Fixing the World*, 82-3.

Baseball, the High Holidays and American Jewish Status and Survival

Jeffrey S. Gurock

For most fans of the national pastime, the 1986 baseball post-season is remembered for the improbable comeback of the New York Mets in the sixth game of the World Series. The "Amazin's" scored three runs after two were out in the bottom of the tenth inning, as the Boston Red Sox were about to claim their first major league championship in seven decades. This match-up has been immortalized for many as the "Bill Buckner World Series," in faux tribute to the unfortunate first base man upon whom calumnies of all sorts were heaped for permitting Mookie Wilson's grounder to slip under his glove at just the wrong moment. His failure personified and symbolized the hapless lot of Beantown's baseball "nation." Their fate would not change for another eighteen years.¹

For me, as an American Jewish historian, with no real rooting interest in who won that particular autumnal match-up – I am a devoted New York Yankee fan – the events of that October have taken on a different, enduring significance. What transpired in the weeks preceding Buckner's monumental fielding gaffe constituted a signal statement of that people's progress, comfort and sense of entitlement as members of a respected minority faith within a Christian society towards the end of the twentieth century.

The annual coincidence of the national pastime's most critical games with Judaism's Fall High Holidays – these traditional collisions of calendars - was the setting for this turning point. As in past, Jewish fans who cared about observance of their faith's holiest days but, who are also devoted to their teams, faced dilemmas. How could they keep track of goings-on in the secular sports realm at a time when the Jew's focus was supposedly on prayer and introspection? Arguably, this problem had bothered synagogue-goers for most of the eighty years that the World Series had been played [1903-1986] and the some seventeen years [1969-1986] that had witnessed baseball's playoff season extended to include a League Championship and eventually a Divisional series. Today the time from the end of the pennant races to the crowning of a world champion can occupy more than a month. So, no matter if Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur come "early" or "late" in any particular year - that means any time between the start of September and the beginning of October - in some competing city, the allegiances of Jewish fans are tested.

So conflicted, generations of Jews have chafed in their seats on Kol Nidre night, or during the long services that mark Rosh ha-Shanah or Yom Kippur day, wondering about the fate of their home team engaged in some crucial show down. Many co-religionists have sought relief from these anxieties both within and without the often unfriendly-to-sports confines of Jewish law and traditions. I remember that as a youngster growing up in an Orthodox synagogue in the Bronx – the home borough of my perennial champion Bombers - sneaking out of my Young Israel on Yom Kippur day to watch the World Series unfold through Macy's store window. The collateral attraction was the color televisions on display. We only had a small black and white set at home. There I found myself amidst more than a minyan of Jewish boys and men enjoying a break from the services and taking in the ball game. Strict constructionists of the halakhah would have said that we were in violation of the spirit, if not the letter of the ancient rules. More tolerant decisors might have understood that, at least for a few fleeting minutes or innings, we had found a comfort zone for ourselves as Jews trying to maintain their fidelity to two competing cultures.

A few years after my confreres and I slipped away from the action in synagogue, some congregants at The Traditional Congregation of Creve Coeur in St. Louis, Missouri devised a much more unorthodox solution to their desire not to miss the most important game of the year. Told by their rabbi that their semi-serious suggestion that Yom Kippur be postponed one day to permit worshippers to watch their mound hero Bob Gibson pitch against the Detroit Tigers in the 1968 World Series, these devoted ball fans did their spiritual leader one better. They showed up in shul with transistor radios in their pockets and hooked themselves into the broadcast with small earphones. Momentarily, the non-plussed rabbi thought that he was ministering to a mass of audio-challenged synagogue-goers. Certainly, they were hard of hearing of the ground rules of Jewish law. As it turned out, the Jewish Cardinal fans' prayers were only answered temporarily. "Gibby" did win the opener in magnificent fashion. He out-pitched Denny McClain in game one and recorded seventeen strikeouts. That feat broke Sandy Koufax's record of fifteen "Ks" in a series game. However, ultimately the series did not go the Red Bird's or the congregants' way. The Tigers prevailed in seven games. In the decisive encounter Mickey Lolich prevailed over Gibson 4-1.²

Before 1986, American Jews did nothing to address the precipitant of the problem; that the Lords of Baseball took absolutely no account, in scheduling their most important games, the interests of its Jewish fans. Nor, for that matter, did owners, league presidents or commissioners consider the personal needs of the few American Jewish major leaguers who were performers on their sport's largest stages. The most that minority group could hope for was that the temporal athletic powers-that-be would understand the reluctance of some Jewish major leaguers to play on the High Holidays.

Over the years, there had been some progress in that regard. Back in 1934, of course, Detroit first baseman Hank Greenberg was severely pressured to compete on Rosh ha-Shanah. Essentially he was told, in very certain terms, that he had "a civic duty" to help his home team defeat the Yankees for the American League flag. "If Detroit is to win the pennant, you must play." In some quarters it was pitched that the ball player was being, in effect, called upon to defend his city against "invaders" who wore pinstriped uniforms and the interlocking letters "NY" on their caps. Some sympathetic scribes did take note of the slugger's "conflicting duties to his religion and to his team." But, in the end, the consensus judgment was that he had to play for his American "community." That Greenberg succumbed to the general societal demand for him to put the needs of his town's team ahead of his faith's commitments was a sign of those times where all Jews in this country, during the 1930s, lived in a uncaring, if not intolerant America. And, Detroit Jews may have had it worse than most. The Motor City was home during the 1920s-1930s to such anti Semites as Henry Ford and Charles Coughlin. In the 1920s, that city also was quite hospitable to the Klu Klux Klan.³ Not incidentally, it is of some moment to me that the Detroit all-star first baseman has been widely-extolled for his courage in staying away from the ballpark on Yom Kippur. From a purely competitive perspective, it was a less than critical and thus, less than pressurized decision. For the record, by that time, his Tigers had reduced the "magic number" to clinch the flag to three with ten games to play and the demand to perform diminished.⁴ That Jews then, and later on, were proud of even that limited statement of ethnic pride is also indicative of how that minority group then saw itself and its possibilities within a less than fully-hospitable world. Some of Greenberg's Jewish contemporaries may have made much of his absence from the ballpark. However, the only historical note the *New York Times* took of Greenberg's not playing was that "it was the first break this season in the ranks of the Detroit infielders, the four regulars having participated in all the 143 games up to today."⁵

Thirty-one years later, in 1965, Los Angeles hurler Sandy Koufax made it abundantly clear that he would not pitch the opening game of the series against the Minnesota Twins. And his fellow Dodgers, and the vast majority of sports writers and fans, understood his position and did not challenge his decision. Of course, it should be noted that from a strategic, baseball point of view, a pitcher's absence from one game does not have the same potential deleterious effect on a club's fortune as a batter/fielder. Taking readily the second slot in the rotation, Koufax handed the ball to his roommate, Don Drysdale. In the end, this most famous Jewish athlete of his time pitched the Angeleans to the championship in the seventh game of the Classic, albeit with one less day of rest than usual. By the way, Drysdale's pinch performance produced a highly amusing sidelight to this often-discussed Judaism-sports encounter. The Protestant pitched poorly that afternoon and ultimately was knocked out of the box. But before heading to the showers, the big right-hander reportedly told his skipper, Walt Alston: "I bet right now you wish today that I was Jewish too."⁶

No matter. For the historian, the greater significance of what transpired on and off the mound in October, 1965 was its reflection of the greater tolerance Jews and Judaism was then being accorded in many different venues during a more egalitarian American era. This sign of acceptance in the sporting realm was analogous to other, general societal accommodations, like the one granted to this minority group and its religion just a few years earlier when the High Holidays conflicted with scheduling at another great American institution, Yale University.

In Greenberg's day, if a Jewish student could gain admission to this elite bastion of high education – notwithstanding restrictive quotas that limited their kind's very admission—they knew that the school's administration had no interest whatsoever in making allowances for missed classes or exams on High Holidays. (The problems that Sabbath-observant students faced were even more onerous. They had difficulties with clashing calendars every week. But such students were then very few indeed in New Haven). In any event, in 1954, when college registration and the Jewish holidays coincided, school leaders took serious notice of Jewish student concerns. While not prepared to officially change the schedule of classes, President A. Whitney Griswold articulated a new operational attitude. He spoke emphatically of "compassion" for those "with conflicts... involving severe hardships." Incidentally, by that time, one of Yale's competitors for the best students in the Ivy League, Harvard University, had already taken much larger steps towards entitling Jewish youngsters. In Cambridge, those for whom the Sabbath was important, could, with proper supervision, take tests scheduled for Saturday on Saturday night. Thus, by the 1960s, whether on the field or in academe – two very different fields of endeavor - Jews were starting to feel a strong sense of belonging to the club.⁷

By 1986, Jews felt so accepted and so were confident in this country that some were willing to explore the limits of tolerance, or to test their degree of entitlement, one additional large step further. Some fans of the New York Mets had the chutzpah to protest to Major League Baseball officials about the very *scheduling* of two Division Championship games during the holiest day in the Jewish calendar. At that point, there were no Jewish players on the Mets or their opponents, the Houston Astros. Why, Jewish voices argued, were the national pastime's chiefs so insensitive to the religious traditions of loyal fans that, not incidentally, habitually plunked down their dollars in support of sports franchises?

Venting their spleen, "several hundred people" called or wrote to the ball clubs, the commissioner's office and to the ABC television network protesting what one disaffected Jewish fan called an "appalling, offensive, discriminatory and totally irresponsible" act. Giving additional voice to the complainers, Judith A. Handelman of Scarsdale, N.Y.

projected the sin as having almost Biblical proportions. She wrote “the new, young God Television is about to triumph over the ancient God of the Jewish people.” Commenting in a similar vein, and waxing well nigh apocalyptic, New York *Times* sportswriter George Vecsey prophesized, only semi tongue-in-cheek, that supernatural involvement would undo the “absolutely unconscionable” sins of hard ball’s fathers. Could not “baseball and its chums from television,” wrote the angered commentator, “have consulted the Jewish holiday schedule when drawing up the contract; any rabbi could have helped them.” As retribution for this “disrespect,” Vecsey then predicted, “for 24 solid hours, children. A storm front is blowin’ in the wind, untrackable on any human-built radarscope. Television and baseball have defied the fates by scheduling not one but two baseball games with 24 hours in the city that has the most Jewish residents of any city in the world ... Public officials are advised to prepare arks.”⁸

In the end, the proprietors of the national pastime - which included at least one Jew, the Mets’ Fred Wilpon, a high school chum of Sandy Koufax - did not fold to Jewish complaints. And, it did not rain on October 12-13, 1986. Still, in making their unhappiness known, the Jews who protested had made the prideful point that their minority groups’ faith observance were as worthy of consideration as those of the Christian majority. Those who cared had made the statement that Yom Kippur should be as sacrosanct to the American sports world as Christmas eve. On neither day should the arenas be open. Keenly aware, at that moment, of what the complaints said about Jewish sense of entitlement, or belonging in the United States, Rabbi Marc Gellman reminded all that as late as Koufax’s time “no one even thought of asking that the game be canceled. The notion that Jews would ever tell the commissioner of baseball - in our imagination a man just under the President of the United States - that the schedule should be changed, it would have been an outrageous act of chutzpah.” “I suppose,” Rabbi Gellman concluded, “Jews are more confident today about their place in American society.” By the way, a decade or so later, the Archbishop of New York showed that he may have taken a lesson from this Jewish stance. In 1999, John Cardinal O’Connor spoke out, within his own community, against the Major Leagues playing on Good Friday. Such an act, said his Eminence, “cheapens our culture, no matter how big the box-office receipts.” A few weeks later, the Cardinal spoke out against parents who chose Little League over Sunday church services.⁹

To date, [2006], baseball has yet to countenance the Jewish holiday calendar. That reality is not likely to change. And there are Jews who, periodically, if fruitlessly, take the national pastimes’ leaders to task for their signs of insensitivity. For example, before the 2000 Mets-Yankee Subway Series, Steven Feldman of Scarsdale, New York complained to the *New York Times* that “because tickets to this year’s World Series can only be purchased by phone on Saturday morning... Sabbath observing Jew[s],” like himself were being “shut out” of “a once-in-a-generation occurrence.” It is not known if tickets were made available to quiet this articulate critic. But, what is certain is that in so many other ways, professional baseball has accommodated the needs of Jews who care about their religious traditions. This change of heart can be seen most readily in the special measures that are now routinely taken on behalf of American Jewry’s kosher-eating cohort - a minority within a minority¹⁰

Beginning in 1990, baseball stadiums all over the country began selling kosher frankfurters and knishes to fans. The message was clear. As one Phoenix-based Jewish writer put it: “Relax kosher-conscious fans. Now you can go to the ball game and eat your hot dogs too.” As another culinary sign of cultural pluralism at work, many of these same venues cater to other ethnic groups as well, offering them their favorite foods. It is widely seen as not only the right thing to do, but it also makes good business sense.

Moreover, there also is plenty of cultural-borrowing and interaction today at stadium food stands. Ball park sushi is clearly not only for Japanese-Americans. Latinos are far from the sole consumers of tacos. Almost everyone - except kosher eaters - loves Milwaukee bratwurst. And, reportedly, at one stadium, "the kosher food stand... attracted log lines of hungry consumers, some of whom wore yarmulkes under their baseball caps, while others, convinced that kosher hot dogs are innately superior to Sabretts, wore crucifixes under their T-shirts."¹¹

Some baseball proprietors have gone even further in catering to an even smaller cohort of American Jews - those who desire to pray the evening services [*maariv*] while the game is in progress. Since 1996, at Baltimore's Camden Yards, "Orthodox Jews congregate after the fifth inning in a small kitchen behind a kosher food stand." It has become "a stadium ritual." Beginning with the World Series of 2003, the same religious goings-on have taken place regularly at Florida Marlins' games. The Orthodox rabbi of Hollywood, Florida who championed that activity is quite proud that "the location of the Glatt Kosher Hot Dog stand is an item of note with us." He has bragged that "at Camden Yards the kosher stand is way out beyond the left field bleachers. At the Marlins' we're right behind home plate. Such *kavod* [honor]."¹²

Unscheduled services are frequently held at other venues. Once, a Jew who was obliged to say kaddish grabbed me for a minyan at the big ball yard in the Bronx. He recognized my rabbi with whom I sat and noticed my Yankee cap; three down, seven to go. That mourner worked the crowd for a number of innings to recruit the requisite ten. We stayed and prayed after the game as the House that Ruth Built emptied out under the respectful watch of stadium security guards.

Meanwhile, among minor league franchises, there is one ownership group that did not have to be softly cajoled to appreciate the values of accommodating observant Jewish patrons. The Getzler family, owners of the Staten Island Yankees, are themselves Orthodox Jews who regularly absent themselves from their club's Friday night and Saturday games. And, in thinking about Opening Night in 2004 at the Richmond Bank Ball Park, they took an additional step forward to meet their needs and those of their fellow religious Jews. "The Getzlers ... arranged for the league to schedule its home opener for any night other than the Sabbath."¹³

Reportedly, the Getzler's so-called "uber-boss" George Steinbrenner - their club is a Yankee affiliate - is on-board with that family's idiosyncratic behavior. For example, he "understands" why they would not drive to meet him at the ballpark early one Saturday evening. In their own way, the Getzlers are to baseball, what Senator Joseph Lieberman is to national politics. They are Jews who have earned the respect and even the admiration of Gentiles in this religiously tolerant country.¹⁴

But, even as the 1934-1986 World Series and Jewish holiday occurrences are useful barometers for measuring the changing pressures Jews have felt as a minority faith, the Judaism-Fall Classic encounter of 2004 underscored questions regarding the prospects for Jewish survival in present day America. With key pennant race games on the line, and with his Los Angeles Dodgers' lead over San Francisco shrinking day-by-day as Yom Kippur approached, outfielder Shawn Green pondered whether to play in two crucial games against the Giants scheduled for Kol Nidre night and Yom Kippur day. Three years earlier, Green, in the tradition of Koufax, had opted not to play. Then he stated unequivocally, "It's something I feel is an important thing to do partly as a representative of the Jewish community and as far as being a role model in sports for Jewish kids, to basically say that baseball, or anything, isn't bigger than your religion and your roots." In 2001, Green's personal sacrifice was that he stopped his streak of consecutive games played at 415. It was then the longest skein among major league players.

However, in 2004 with much more on the line, Green waffled. He told the Associated Press that “I’m totally committed to getting to the postseason and winning, and at the same time I’m committed to my religion and what I stood for in the past. I wish there was an easy solution, but there’s not ... I wish Yom Kippur could be in April, but it is not.”¹⁵

Significantly, playing and living as he did in a tolerant American religious environment, the questions revolving around his participation were essentially of Green’s own making. The Dodger brass did not pressure him to suit up. Dodger owner Frank McCourt announced that Green had the full backing of the team whatever his call. “It’s a personal decision and it’s his decision to make.” Most media outlets seconded McCourt’s opinion, although one evangelical radio personality, Steve Deance, did suggest that the Jewish ball player resolve his dilemma through “accepting the fulfillment of his Jewish heritage that his messiah is Jesus Christ.”¹⁶

In the end, aspiring to be both the consummate teammate and to “respect the holiday,” Green opted to play Yom Kippur night and sat out the afternoon game. For the record, torrential rains, as George Vescey might have predicted sarcastically, did not alter Green’s scenario. He played and, in fact, hit a game winning home run. no Divine punishment was visited upon the outfielder.

But if Shawn Green was spared even a wit of heavenly retribution, his playing Kol Nidre evening earned him “a strike” in many Jewish communal forums. Many rabbis and lay spokespeople took him to task for “missing the opportunity to make a powerful statement to Jews and non-Jews alike, who would have taken notice of and respected his sacrifice.” As one leader in the Dodgers’ home city, Rabbi David A. Wolpe put it: “Of course not!’ should have been his first, final and simple answer. ‘There are values above baseball, above money, above work. What self-respecting Jew would play on Yom Kippur.’ Oh, what he might have done with that simple declaration.”¹⁷

For these critics, concerned about assimilatory messages from high-profile role models, in an era where in almost all walks of life there are few brakes on Jews being teammates, or colleagues or neighbors, Green had shown a lack of self-discipline. He failed to fully separate himself from the accepting crowd, at least for 24 hours a year. Others might take negative signals from this athlete’s actions. Arguably, the Green decision symbolized the tenuous state of Jewish identity and prospects for the future at the opening of the twenty-first century. Can Judaism survive in an environment where above all, Jews want to be “chosen-in” at all times and in all venues?

But, Peter Dreier did not subscribe to these critiques and jeremiads. In an op-ed piece in the *Forward*, a national Jewish weekly, he asked his readers to effectively look at Shawn Green as a total Jewish man, representative of so many co-religionists – like Dreier himself – who are “trying to find a balance between assimilation and identity.” For the author, Green was worthy of praise, to begin with, for “lend[ing] his name to Jewish charities, such as a literacy program sponsored by The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles.” On this level, Green was emblematic of an alternative way of remaining Jewish that should not be gainsaid. In an age where “few American Jews are religiously observant,” the ball player has shown the way “by identifying with various aspects of Jewish heritage, such as its long-standing commitment to social activism, or by participating in the many Jewish cultural and philanthropic organizations.”

Indeed, for Dreier, it was highly laudable that Green who had married out of the faith –just like the *Forward* contributor - had chosen not to opt out totally from Jewish identification. As far as the athlete’s ambivalent decision about Yom Kippur and baseball were concerned, Dreier opined: “Green hit a symbolic home run ...and many other Jewish children and parents who take pride in his accomplishments, identify with his dilemma and

try their best to find the proper balance in their lives." All told, for that writer, possessed of a minimalist's perspective, the pictures and images of Green both at the stadium and at home were not only realistic snapshots of the contemporary American Jewish scene. They were also hopeful sign for Jewish continuity.¹⁸

Thus, in an era where Jewish scholars, religious leaders and pundits, all debated whether their community was in the midst of steep decline towards dissolution, during the High Holiday season of 5765, a Jewish ball player symbolized, for some, much of what was wrong with the American Jewish condition. At the same time, his actions offered, to others, a measure of encouragement about their group's prospects for survival in a tolerant twenty-first century American society.

NOTES

¹ For a discussion of Buckner's "costly error [that] became a defining moment and ultimately overshadowed the rest of his career, see <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/ws/yr1986.yr>.

² Interview with Rabbi Avraham Weiss, March 15, 2005. For information on the outcome of these World Series games, see www.baseball-reference.com/postseason/1968_WS.shtml

³ On the virulent forms of anti-Semitism that Detroit-adjacent Jews faced during the 1920s-1930s, see, for example, Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Klu Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Neil Baldwin, *Henry Ford and the Jews: The Mass Production of Hate* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001); Sheldon Marcus, *Father Coughlin: The Tumultuous Life of the Priest of the Little Flower* (Boston: Little Brown, 1973).

⁴ William M. Simons, "Hank Greenberg: The Jewish American Sports Hero," *Sports and the American Jew*, Steven A. Riess, ed. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1998), pp.192-200.

⁵ "Yankees, Behind Murphy, Defeat Tigers..." *New York Times* (September 19, 1934):30.

⁶ For a recent recounting of Koufax's absence on Yom Kippur and the positive reaction to it, see Jane Leavey, "The Chosen One," *Sports Illustrated* (September 6, 2002): 64-65. See also, Murray Chass, "On Yom Kippur, Green Opts to Miss at Least One Game," *New York Times* (September 23, 2004), D1.

⁷ Dan A. Oren, *Joining the Club: A History of Jews at Yale* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp.235-37.

⁸ Ari L. Goldman, "Yom Kippur Games Criticized," *New York Times* (September 20, 1986), p.49; George Vecsey, "Sports of the Times: Mets Forecast, A Deluge," *New York Times* (October 1, 1986): B13.

⁹ Goldman, p.49; For the Cardinal's pronouncements, see David W. Chen, "O'Connor Assails Sunday Little League," *New York Times* (May 15, 1998), B3

¹⁰ Steven Feldman, "To the Editor," *New York Times* (October 21, 2000), A14.

¹¹ On the availability of kosher foods and other ethnic-culinary options at ball parks, see Laura Nist, "The Evolution of Ballpark Cuisine," athomeplate.com/cuisine.shtml; Jenna Weissman Joselit, "Home Plate and Hot Dogs are Like Ball and Glove When Summer Hits," *Forward* (July 12, 2002), on line edition; Randi Barocas, "Kosher Dogs Have their Day at BOB," *Jewish News of Greater Phoenix* (August 7, 1998), on-line edition.

¹² Louis Berney, "Worshipping More than Baseball at Camden." *Baseball Weekly* (May 29, 1996), p.17; e mail communication between Rabbi Edward Davis and Jeffrey S. Gurcock, February 22, 2005.

¹³ Jonathan Mark, "Maariv in the Temple of Baseball," *The Jewish Week* (May 30, 2004), p.3

¹⁴ Mark, p.3

¹⁵ Chass, p.D1.

¹⁶ "First Baseman Will Sit Out Saturday's Game," <http://sports.espn.go.com/mlb/new/story?id=1887036>, September 23, 2004 ;Sean Minagil, "Sports Court: Green Blue because of Tormentors," <http://www.ryunlv.com/news/2004/09/27>, September 27, 2004.

¹⁷ Seth Swirsky, "Game during Kol Nidre earns Shawn Green a Strike," www.jewishsf.com/ October 1, 2004; David Wolpe, "A Rabbi's Advice to Shawn Green," www.beliefnet.com

¹⁸ Peter Dreier, "Thank You, Shawn Green," www.interfaithfamily.com originally appearing in *Forward* (October 8, 2004).

Baseball Across the Generations in Jewish American Writing

Rebecca Alpert

While American Judaism has taken many forms (religious and cultural, observant and secular), certain values that have deep roots in ancient Jewish tradition pervade the landscape of all versions of American Jewish life, taking on new and different nuances in the American context. The obligation that we pass our heritage from generation to generation is one such value. And one of the media through which it has been expressed is through the enthusiasm of American Jews for baseball. Of course Jews have been involved in other sports in America and have even had more prominent roles in boxing and basketball. But baseball is a sport that lends itself to literary and symbolic interpretation, as the voluminous literature on baseball as a system of making meaning will attest. Through baseball, Jews have been able to tell the story of what it means to be Jewish in America.

Most recent scholarship suggests that baseball once played an important role in American Jewish life, and that role was to make immigrant Jews and their children into Americans. The argument goes on to suggest that now that Jews are no longer predominantly immigrants, have less to fear from antisemitism, and do not need to prove their American credentials, their connection to the world of baseball has been normalized and is no longer freighted with significance. Yet in the past five years, a major best-selling book on Sandy Koufax, an award winning documentary film about Hank Greenberg, numerous articles about Shawn Green in *Sports Illustrated* and in the Jewish press, an anecdotal history of Jewish baseball, a website produced by the leading American Jewish historical society, many lists of Jews in baseball, arguments over who should be included in any Jewish major league "all-star team," a definitive set of Jewish baseball cards, and many other manifestations of interest in Jews and baseball have appeared in the media. This outpouring of interest in Jews in baseball suggests that baseball still has a particular hold on the American Jewish sensibility. Baseball is still an arena in which Jews can work out what it means to be not only an American, but an American Jew.

Because in the baseball world intergenerational connections are taken quite seriously, the Jewish value of making connection across generations resonates deeply. Much baseball lore and literature focuses on the ways in which fathers teach sons about playing baseball and becoming fans. Jewish families transmit not only the love of baseball from generation to generation, but use baseball as a medium for transmitting a sense of Jewish belonging and the personal history of the family's Jewish experience.

The idea of passing Jewish heritage down through generations is central to Jewish history and culture. The stories of the patriarchs in Genesis are all about the inheritance and transmission of biology and culture. Jews define themselves as "children of Abraham and Sarah" and individuals take on the name "son/daughter of Abraham and Sarah" when they convert to Judaism to link them through this generational connection. "And you shall teach them diligently to your children" is part of the central set of tenets in Jewish life found in Deuteronomy (chapter 6) and incorporated in the first paragraph of the *Shema*, a central prayer in the traditional liturgy that is recited at least twice a day. The ancient sages were primarily interested in raising disciples and passing on their understandings of the Jewish tradition, valuing their students (as inheritors of their traditions) as highly, or perhaps even more highly, than their biological sons. Every Jewish holiday features

some facet that focuses on passing on the tradition. It is a key feature of the celebration of Passover, and is reflected in the main focus of the *seder* ritual which centers on telling the story of the Exodus and explaining the symbols to the children in whatever way is necessary for them to understand. From the “four questions” asked by the youngest person at the Passover *Seder* to the game playing and gift giving at the heart of Chanukah, teaching children pervades the landscape of the Jewish calendar.

In American Judaism, the value of passing tradition on through the generations has taken on new meaning as a result of the fear that children will be enticed away from their Jewish heritage by the world of secular culture. Often when Jewish men and women have children (whether or not they are married to other Jewish men or women) or when those children reach school age, the parents encounter their own feelings about being Jewish defined by their desire to transmit the meaning and value of Jewishness to their children. American synagogues thrive on providing the contents of the education that young Jewish adults often cannot manufacture themselves. The Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremony has become the focal point of American Jewish life, and the intergenerational meaning of this ceremony is often made concrete through the symbolic passing of the Torah from grandparent to parent to child, an innovation introduced into the ceremony in the past half century.

Jewish life in America has proven to be quite resilient in the transmission of Jewish values. Not only have they been passed along in traditional settings such as the home and synagogue, but secular phenomena have also functioned as the mechanism for the expression of Jewish values. Baseball has been one such medium. Few stories about baseball written in a Jewish idiom fail to include a genealogy of the way baseball has come down through the generations in the writer’s family. Roger Kahn puts it in context:

The game begins with sons and father, father and sons. The theme is older than the English novel, older than ‘Hamlet,’ old at least as the Torah.¹

The allusion to Biblical themes of intergenerational connections is also present in Jewish novels about baseball. Typical is Phillip Goldberg’s novel, *This Is Next Year*, in which he describes three generations of a family held together by their love of the Brooklyn Dodgers. The narrator, Roger Stone (a middle son, named after Rogers Hornsby), sums up the connection:

As in other homes, the Dodger heritage was handed down from father to son...repeated like the story of Passover...that it shall not be forgotten. It was our folklore, our living mythology, an oral history with the pathos and redemptive promise of the Old Testament.²

Stephen Jay Gould’s autobiographical reminiscence of a passion that has lasted through four generations begins with his mother’s father, “Papa Joe,” a dedicated Yankee fan through his father (whose own childhood memories of Ruth and Gehrig gave the secular Gould his “closest insight into the potential nature of deity,”) and continues through his own experience as a life long fan whose passion was formed in New York in the 1940s and 50s. That passion was then handed down to his son Ethan who became a Red Sox fan and who interviewed his father for a college sociology course on “baseball as a mode of bonding between fathers and sons.”

This male bonding between father and son is indeed the prototypical story, but Gould adds “daughters will now be commonly included as well.”³ Jewish women’s involvement as participants in this process of passing baseball on across generations is not as new as Gould assumes however. Baseball has provided a medium for intergenerational commu-

nication for women and across genders in American Jewish life decades before women's equality became a reality⁴.

Jewish women's involvement in transmitting baseball across generations is reflected in two Jewish baseball novels, *The Last Jewish Shortstop in America*⁵ and *The Saturday Secret*,⁶ where parental support and enthusiasm for the Jewish girl who has the courage to play on the little league team is taken for granted. Jewish journalist Yosef Abramowitz wrote poignantly of his experience taking his own father and his five year old daughter to a Red Sox game, initiating her into the family tradition, wondering if, despite her gender, it would work. She didn't seem interested in watching the game, and wondered aloud why there were no Jews or girls who were playing that day. At the end, Abramowitz wasn't sure if he had effectively transmitted his family's commitment, his own and her grandfather's passion. But when they got home, he reported that Aliza began to play with the Red Sox bat her grandfather had purchased for her, and asked her father to pitch to her. Abramowitz concluded that "Judaism, like baseball or any other life passion, is best transmitted to the next generation when it is actively lived every day."⁷

Although it is often suggested that immigrant parents rejected baseball while it Americanized their sons, baseball was one way Jewish women related to their immigrant parents and grandparents. Ann Birstein connected to her father, a traditional rabbi in New York's theater district in the 1930s, by taking him to New York Giants' games. The games provided them opportunities for closeness and conversation.⁸ In the 1950s Jane Leavy, author of the best selling book on Sandy Koufax, writes that she learned her love of baseball from her grandmother who lived down the block from Yankee Stadium and was willing to buy her a glove and encourage her granddaughter's interest.⁹

Jewish men also emphasize connections to their mothers through baseball. For Rabbi Steve Arnold, baseball and in particular his mother's love for the Chicago Cubs was a way of bonding with his mother as she was recovering from a serious heart attack.¹⁰ For Jewish writer Henry Dunow playing catch and going to ball games with his mother, who was filling in for his father who was "alive and well" but not interested in baseball, was an important part of growing up Jewish.¹¹ Having grown up without a father, essayist Jack Newfield wrote about a "fleeting feeling of loss when I started taking my daughter, Rebecca, to Mets games in the 1980s, renewing the American ritual I never got to perform with my father."¹²

This connection across genders has also provided a way for adult Jewish women to relate to their sons. This phenomenon is reflected in two works of fiction from the early 1970s. Sylvia Tennenbaum's semi-autobiographical character Rachel in her comic novel, *Rachel, The Rabbi's Wife* communicated with her son via baseball. Going with him to New York Mets games was her greatest pleasure and also her means for finding out what was going on in his life.¹³ E.L. Konigsburg's *About the B'nai Bagels*, a children's story about a Jewish baseball team, focuses on a mother who takes an active role in teaching lessons about growing up and about being Jewish to her son by organizing and coaching his baseball team.¹⁴ Noted Jewish author and Orthodox feminist Blu Greenberg observed that a conversation she overheard between a mother and son preparing a Shabbat meal together while discussing pitchers and batting averages "was really about the connection."¹⁵ That was certainly the case for me with my son who, when he was younger, actually cared about collecting baseball cards and going to games at the stadia around the country we visited, but who has since outgrown baseball and attends to it only to connect to me.¹⁶

Like these cross gender stories, stories of Jewish men and boys — grandfathers, fathers and sons — and their connections through baseball have many different themes. They reflect difficult relationships and reconciliations. They tell stories of this passion

for baseball that unites grandfathers and their grandsons, and involve other surrogate parental relationships. Taken together they shed light on the experiences of Jews making themselves at home in America and passing on a heritage which includes a love of baseball across the generations.

For some Jewish sons, baseball keeps them connected to fathers who are no longer alive. Rabbi Ira Eisenstein fondly remembered his father as an otherwise timid man who in the early 1900s stole away from Hebrew school to the Polo Grounds to watch Christy Mathewson pitch.¹⁷ Jonathan Tobin, an editor at the *Philadelphia Jewish Exponent* and frequent writer about baseball and Jews, rooted for the New York Yankees because his father was loyal to Babe Ruth who visited the Jewish Orphans Asylum in New York when Tobin's father was a child there.¹⁸ Another columnist for the Jewish press, Gary Rosenblatt, remembers his father's loyalty to the Brooklyn Dodgers after they moved to Los Angeles. Rosenblatt describes moving away from Baltimore and going out to his car to get radio reception to listen to games late at night (in days before the internet) and in the process, remembering his father listening to Dodger games late at night after the team left Brooklyn for the west coast. Rosenblatt's father's loyalty to the Dodgers was an important lesson for him and created his own loyalty to his home team. For years after his father's death, Rosenblatt would still check the box score to see how his father's team was doing.¹⁹ Rosenblatt echoes the memories across generations that baseball evoked for him when he tells his readers that he thinks of his dad every time he sees fathers and sons playing catch, even though his father died fourteen years before. Like others, he explicitly connects Jews, baseball and learning across generations:

The Passover seder is about transmitting our heritage from one generation to the next, about parents teaching children the rituals of tradition. Baseball, too, is about fathers and sons (and more recently, mothers and daughters) doing the same, sharing a language and history of childhood memories remembered, discussed and given over.²⁰

Steve Freemire, a psychotherapist who works with adolescent boys, understood baseball as "my way of sitting *shivah*" (the seven days of mourning) for both his father and grandfather. For him, baseball has provided a structured way of coping with these losses. He concludes his article in the *Jewish Bulletin* with the following lesson:

Cheering for the Giants at Pacific Bell Park and sitting in temple over the High Holy Days are each ways of continuing to pay tribute to these men [his father and grandfather] who meant so much to me. Through sports and through prayer I am in touch with the joy, and I also continue to open to the sadness that, while never gone, has eased little by little over the years. Honoring my connection to Dad and Pop Pop reminds me of what is most important to me. While I still turn to the sports page each morning and my emotions rise and fall with my teams' fortunes, my sense of self is less attached to the thrill of victory. I know now more than ever before that close, loving relationships are what offer far more enduring and deeper meaning in my life.²¹

Rabbi Scott Gurdin related this story about his own experience with his father's death that provided him an opportunity to honor his father and work through his grief:

When my father died, nearly two years ago, his funeral took place on a Friday. He wasn't much of a temple goer, but my Mom insisted that we go to services that night to say Kaddish. I tried to talk folks into going to a Yankees' game that night. I suspect my Dad would have approved of that. Anyway, my Mom prevailed.

Skip ahead a year to my Dad's first *Yahrzeit* [the annual commemoration of a death]. My wife and I went to Harbor Park in Norfolk (near to where I live) for a Tides game. They were playing the Boston AAA farm team. It was a perfect day to be at the park.

You know how, especially at minor league games, they have promotional contests on the field between innings? Somehow, I got picked to be in one of them. I was supposed to throw a pitch through a placard with a strike zone cut through it. I would have three tries. My wife, knowing that I'm a genuinely mediocre thrower, was mortified. I have enormous stage fright. (I know, a peculiar problem for a congregational rabbi. That's another story.) We figured that I'd make a fool of myself in front of 9000 fans.

I really didn't mind.

I was escorted through the bowels of the park and I waited for half an inning in the visitor's bullpen. I was given the three baseballs I was to use. To take my mind off my nervousness, I started to juggle. (In high school, I was going to be a clown, but my parents prevailed upon me to choose another vocation.) The Pawtucket players got into the act with me. It was actually a lot of fun.

When I asked her, the woman who handles the promotional contestants told me that few fans ever get any balls through the strike zone. They try too hard. Clearly there's a negative correlation between nerves, velocity and accuracy. I thought, no problem here.

When I got to the field and the announcer introduced me I went into some sort of zone. I just missed with the first ball. I landed the other two perfectly.

Somehow, from that point on, I've felt more at peace with my father's passing. Go figure.²²

Gurdin, Freemire and Rosenblatt find that baseball has become a part of the ritual observances of remembrance of their fathers. Like more traditional Jewish rituals, baseball functions as a link between generations and an opportunity to mourn.

Irwin Shaw's novel, *Voices of a Summer Day* adds another dimension to this process. The story uses baseball as a link between the protagonist, his father and his son. In it, baseball replaces rather than augments Judaism as the way to make intergenerational connections. The story takes place in the context of a game of baseball in which Michael, son of the protagonist Benjamin Federov, is participating, and creates opportunities for Benjamin to reconstruct his relationship with his own father, Israel, who, we are told, while not an observant Jew, was "a good catcher." Benjamin recalls:

Federov had taken Michael to his first big-league game when Michael was six. The Giants were playing the Reds at the Polo Grounds. The Yankees were a more interesting team to watch, but it was at the Polo Grounds that Benjamin, aged six, had watched *his* first baseball game at his father's side. An uprooted people, Federov thought half-mockingly, we must make our family traditions with the material at hand.²³

These writers understand the power of the relationship between fathers and sons as an essential component of Jewish tradition. Baseball provides them with the opportunity to make these connections with their fathers even after death, to take stock of the lessons their fathers taught, to construct new ways of memorializing their dead fathers, and also new ways of coping with grief and loss that translate elements of Jewish tradition into the realm of baseball.

For two writers, Eric Rolfe Greenberg and Paul Auster, this powerful relationship skipped a generation, and connected them directly with their grandfathers. It was Greenberg's grandfather who was his inspiration for Jackie Kapp, the main character in *The Celebrant* which is considered by many to be the best novel about baseball of the twentieth century. Greenberg said in an interview that the reason he wrote the book from the point of view of a fan was to pay homage to his grandfather. While his own grandfather was a businessman and not an artist like the protagonist Kapp, baseball was a central emotional commitment in his life. His grandfather was a pitcher, and he bought Greenberg catching equipment so that they could play together. Like the novel's protagonist, Greenberg's grandfather went to games as part of business and often took Greenberg along to Yankee Stadium when he was a child.²⁴

Paul Auster's memoir, *The Invention of Solitude*, recollects an absent father, but a deep connection with his grandfather who took him to his first game and subsequently to many others. As his grandfather lay dying, Paul would talk to him about baseball, "the one subject they could still come to as equals." He'd read him newspaper accounts of the games, "a series of coded messages he could understand with his eyes closed."²⁵

This relationship between grandfather and grandson is lovingly depicted in the television series, *Brooklyn Bridge* in an episode entitled, "When Irish Eyes are Smiling" (9/20/91). The show tells the story of a Jewish family in Brooklyn in the 1950s. Nine-year-old Nate Silver is a "baseball nut" and a passionate fan of the Brooklyn Dodgers. His immigrant grandfather knows nothing of the game, but in an effort to connect to his grandson tells him that he played baseball with Nate's favorite player, Gil Hodges, in Russia. When the grandfather takes Nate to get Hodges' autograph, the player wisely plays along, reinforcing the tender connection between Nate and his grandpa.

Intergenerational relationships, especially those between fathers and sons, are not always positive emotional reveries about connection and memory. They are sometimes spaces of pain, absence and wrongdoing where baseball can be the source of the disturbance, the conduit through which the difficulty is repaired, or sometimes both. But these stories predominantly focus on the theme of intergenerational reconciliation.

Perhaps the most famous example of this complicated relationship between fathers and sons is found in Chaim Potok's novel, *The Chosen*, which begins with the scene of Reuben and Danny playing baseball. The baseball game begins a friendship between the two boys, but also creates the opportunity for the sons to develop connections to each other's fathers.²⁶

In a similar vein, the children's novel, *Does Anyone Know the Way to Thirteen?* tells the story of Myron whose father wishes his son were more interested in baseball and less interested in Judaism. As the last picked on his Little League team, and too timid to go up to Stan Musial to ask for his autograph, he is a disappointment to his father. Myron's friend Solomon's father, Rabbi Singer, is also not happy with his own son who loves baseball more than Judaism. Myron helps Solomon find a league where he doesn't have to play on the Sabbath and they find ways to reconcile these conflicts between Jewishness and baseball, father and son.²⁷

Some father and son stories illustrate the dilemma of Jewish boys who need to persuade their fathers that baseball is compatible with being a Jew in America. For some fathers, their sons' interest in baseball sparks their own. Elie Wiesel tells a story of attending to baseball only to please his then 14 year old son, who was more impressed with Wiesel being asked by the Red Sox to throw out the first ball of the 1986 World Series than he was with his father's Nobel Prize.²⁸

Mark Harris, author of four baseball novels, including *Bang the Drum Slowly*, also wrote a play about a son's strained relationship with his father, *Friedman and Son*, accompanied by an essay which points to the quasi-autobiographical nature of the work. In a scene from the play where Friedman is considering the possibility of reconciliation with his son, he reminisces about his son (who has changed his name to Ferguson)'s love of baseball: "I understood nothing of baseball, but he loved it, so I took him." He goes on to defend baseball as a Jewish game and his son's intelligence as reflected through his baseball knowledge. This memory and others like it compel Friedman to open up his relationship with his son once again.²⁹

In Eric Goodman's novel, *In Days of Awe*, the connection between a Jewish father and son reverses generational roles. Joe Singer, a great Jewish ball player, has been suspended from baseball indefinitely for throwing a game. As it turns out, he did this so as not to implicate his father, the gambler, who was in fact responsible for the fix. During the summer in which the novel takes place, Joe and his father come to understand one another as Jack ultimately confesses, gives himself up to the commissioner and begins to take on his paternal responsibilities and become a good Jewish father to Joe.³⁰

Two children's books deal with the conflict that Jewish boys experience between their desire to play baseball and their step-fathers' insistence that Jewish observance take precedence. *The Saturday Secret* is a story of a young Jewish boy whose father died when he was seven and whose mother remarried. Jason is twelve, and likes his step-father David, except for the fact that David has decided that he (and consequently the whole family) should begin to observe Jewish religious customs. While Jason doesn't love wearing a *kippah*, (head covering) keeping *Shabbat* (the Sabbath) and abstaining from non-kosher foods, he is learning to accommodate and compromise. But when David forbids him from playing baseball on *Shabbat* afternoons, Jason devises a plan to deceive his parents and play anyway. When Jason is injured, and David takes him to the hospital on *Shabbat*, agrees with Jason that he should have discussed the new rules with him first, and seems willing to consider the possibility that since baseball involves neither work nor spending money nor riding on the Sabbath that Jason might, in fact, be allowed to play the following year. Through this compromise, Jason begins to refer to David as father, and they are reconciled.

A full family reconciliation (mother, father, step-father and son) and a full reconciliation between observing Judaism and playing baseball takes place in *The Koufax Dilemma*. Danny Guttman is deeply upset that his mother is making him go to the *seder* instead of pitching in his Little League game on opening day. He could care less that Sandy Koufax refused to pitch on Yom Kippur thirty years before; in fact he's angry at Koufax for not playing. But when his step-father gives him a 1956 autographed Dodger baseball for the *afikomen* present (a gift that is given by the leader of the *seder* to the child who finds the piece of matzah the leader has hidden) and his coach also comes to the *seder* instead of coaching the game, he can make the connection between his love of baseball and his Jewish identity, and even forgive his father for being at a *seder* in Italy instead of being home with him. His mother and step-father and then later his father take him to Yankee games, and he is happy when he wins his first game and is compared to Koufax.³¹

Alan Lelchuk provides an example of a story in which baseball is the cause for a split between father and son, and the reconciliation takes place on the father's terms, where baseball is part of the problem, but not part of the solution. Lelchuk writes autobiographically about his father surrogate in *On Home Ground*. Although Aaron's father is alive, Aaron needs a surrogate father and finds one in Burt, a neighbor and twenty-two year old veteran who was wounded in World War II and was home in Brooklyn for

a while before he went off to Palestine to fight in the war that broke out when the State of Israel was created. Burt took Aaron to baseball games, even though his father forbade him to cut school early and miss Hebrew school to go. Aaron disobeyed and was caught because of his exuberance at getting Jackie Robinson's autograph compelled him to tell his friends about it when his father happened to be walking by. His father objected to baseball because he was a communist whose passion remained in Russia. He wanted his son to play chess, learn Yiddish and secular Jewish history, and not get swept up in the world of baseball and America. Aaron is alienated from his father until the following summer in the Catskills when his father takes him for a ride on horseback. On the horse together, Aaron and his father bond through his father's joy that he had never observed on any other occasion.³²

The classic story of father-son reconciliation is told by Peter Levine in *The Rabbi of Swat*, the story of Morrie Ginsberg, "a nice Jewish boy from Brownsville." The novel is meant to be a fictionalized history of all the important Jewish baseball connections in twentieth century America, so it is not surprising that one of the main parts of the plot involves the theme of baseball as the medium for father-son reconciliation. Ginsberg's character is based on a composite of real Jewish players Mose Solomon, Andy Cohen, and Harry Danning, who were hired by the New York Giants in the 1920s and 30s to attract Jewish fans. The Giant's manager, John McGraw, was obsessed with finding a Jewish player who could rival the Yankees' attraction, Babe Ruth, and who would bring Jewish fans to Giants games. Levine creates a fictional character who, unlike the real players, actually becomes a great player for the Giants. In the process Morrie wins over his father, Jake, who initially dislikes "his son playing a child's game for a living." But Jake begins to save Morrie's clippings, which he kept on a shelf near his *tallis* (prayer shawl) bag as a symbolic effort to connect his son's triumphs with the Jewish tradition.

At the novel's climax, a group of Jewish gamblers decide to pressure Morrie into throwing a World Series game by kidnapping his father, and it's the memory of his father's wisdom about trusting his own judgment that keeps him from faltering on the mound during this crisis. Ultimately Morrie's father is saved from the kidnappers and Morrie doesn't have to throw the game. Babe Ruth, who also had issues with his own father, is given the role of the outside commentator on the story together with the author in an effort to provide humor and set limits on the sentimentality of the narrative. Even Babe plays a role in the father-son connection. After Morrie and Jake reconcile, Babe comments:

For a minute, I thought I'd be Morrie's father — metaphorically speaking — the role model for his future, the light in his Jewish darkness...the recognition that it's ok to live fully, to enjoy, to have fun...and not feel guilty...No! Don't tell me! You mean the kid is going to have it both ways? ³³

Levine explained that he wrote the book to work out issues with his own father, with whom there were "botched opportunities for expressing mutual respect and love" but from whom he learned to enjoy life and respect values like racial equality.³⁴ So Levine's fictional account, like many of the others chronicled here, derives in part from the impetus to connect to fathers and grandfathers and reconcile difficult or failed relationships through the medium of baseball.

Levine's novel rewrites the story of McGraw's search for a "Jewish star" for his team. The irony of that story is that McGraw in fact neglected to sign a young man from the Bronx, Hank Greenberg, who would become the first great Jewish baseball player. Bill Simons, a baseball historian, and Aviva Kempner, a film maker, have devoted much energy to documenting the life of Hank Greenberg. They make it clear in their work that they did

this for their fathers for whom Greenberg symbolized so much. Kempner's documentary, *The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg*, is as much a story about her father's life as an immigrant Jew in Detroit as it is a story about Greenberg. For Simons, "The search for Hank Greenberg, the Jewish standard bearer of our shared mythology, has always shaped the dialogue between my father and myself."³⁵ Hank Greenberg is a symbol for both Simons and Kempner of the compatibility between Judaism and baseball in America, and they make a self-conscious link to their fathers' passion for baseball as interpreted through the story of Hank Greenberg.

In several other stories, the intergenerational connection that baseball makes possible creates links between young men and older men who serve as surrogate fathers. A children's story, *Thank You, Jackie Robinson* and a novel, *Snow in August* are about boys who have fathers who have died and bond, over baseball, with surrogate fathers. In *Thank You, Jackie Robinson*, the boy, Sammy Greene, is Jewish and his father figure, Davy, black. In *Snow in August* the boy, Michael, is Christian and his father figure, Rabbi Hirsch, a Holocaust survivor.

Sammy Greene's father died and his mother needs to run the inn the family owned, leaving little time for her ten year old son. Sam is fascinated by baseball, and a big fan of the Brooklyn Dodgers. When his mother hires Davy, a sixty year old black man, as a cook, their conversations about the Dodgers draw them together. Sammy gains a best friend, surrogate father, and someone through whom he learns lessons about life through his travels with Davy to ball games. When Davy has a heart attack, Sam takes care of him by traveling on his own to get Jackie Robinson's autograph for him.³⁶

In *Snow in August*, Pete Hamill tells a story about a young Irish Catholic boy in Brooklyn who also had lost his father and who also loved the Dodgers. Michael, just like Hamill himself, became a "shabbas goy" (a non Jew who does certain tasks not permitted to the Jews on the Sabbath) for Holocaust survivor and new immigrant, Rabbi Hirsch, who moves into his neighborhood in Brooklyn immediately following World War II. Their friendship helped Michael overcome his loss of his father, and brought the rabbi into the world of America through the medium of baseball. In exchange, Rabbi Hirsch taught Michael Yiddish and Jewish history and customs. In this story, it was Michael who wound up in the hospital, a victim of neighborhood bullies. The rabbi is able to help him through the experience. Both Sammy and Davy and Michael and Rabbi Hirsch have their ultimate experience of bonding at a Brooklyn Dodgers game.³⁷

While many of these stories take place in the past, baseball is still creating opportunities for fathers to connect to their sons in this generation. An opportunity to do a project with his son was the driving force behind creating the baseball card set of Jewish Major Leaguers for Martin Abramowitz. Abramowitz, a card collector, was lamenting to his eleven year old son Jacob that some of the Jewish players never had baseball cards. When Jacob off-handedly told him to make his own, and drew a logo for the card set, Abramowitz took up the challenge. The effort developed into an elaborate set of 142 beautifully designed baseball cards of all the Jews who played major league baseball that has subsequently created opportunities for other fathers and sons to reflect on and meet with some of the Jewish players at a series of well attended events and conferences sponsored by the American Jewish Historical Society and by the organization that Abramowitz founded, Jewish Major Leaguers, Inc.³⁸

These Jewish stories of cross-generational connection through baseball take many forms. They link genders, families of blood and families of love. They illustrate how baseball was passed down through generations in Jewish families. They make clear that baseball had a unique role to play in Jewish families, in fostering communication across

generations, in giving parents and grandchildren a way to communicate. While some might argue that baseball became a substitute for Jewishness, I would suggest that baseball became the language in which the Jewish value of teaching children about their past and their heritage was communicated across generations. The act of telling and participating in stories that link parents with children and children with parents is a primary mode of Jewish communication, and baseball has promoted this Jewish value valiantly.

NOTES

¹ Roger Kahn, *A Season in the Sun* (New York, 1977), 5.

² Phillip Goldberg, *This Is Next Year* (New York, 1991), 41.

³ Stephen Jay Gould, *Triumph & Tragedy in Mudville: A Lifelong Passion for Baseball* (New York, 2003), 31, 211.

⁴ See especially Doris Kearns Goodwin's memoir about her childhood experiences as a Brooklyn Dodger fan as they connected her to her father, and her Catholic roots, and her adult experience as a Boston Red Sox fan to connect with her son. *Wait Till Next Year: A Memoir*. (New York, 1997).

⁵ Lowell B. Komie, *The Last Jewish Shortstop in America* (Chicago, 1997).

⁶ Miriam Rinn, *The Saturday Secret* (Los Angeles, 1999).

⁷ Yosef Abramowitz, "Like Judaism, Baseball Is Best When Shared by Generations." *Jewish News of Greater Phoenix*, 5 June 2003. accessed at <http://www.jewishaz.com/jewishnews/980911.yosi.shtml>

⁸ Ann Birstein, *The Rabbi on 47th Street* (New York, 1982).

⁹ Jane Leavy, *Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's Legacy* (New York, 2002).

¹⁰ Stephen Arnold, "Rosh Hashanah Sermon: You CAN Go Home Again." Vassar Temple, Poughkeepsie, 9 September 1991.

¹¹ Henry Dunow, *The Way Home: Scenes from a Season, Lessons from a Lifetime* (New York, 2002), 175.

¹² Jack Newfield, *Somebody's Gotta Tell It: The Upbeat Memoir of a Working-Class Journalist* (New York, 2002), 34.

¹³ Sylvia Tennenbaum, *Rachel, The Rabbi's Wife* (New York, 1970).

¹⁴ Eli Konigsburg, *About the B'nai Bagels* (New York, 1969).

¹⁵ Blu Greenberg, "Sacred Time, Sacred Space: The Family Dinner." *Jewish News of Greater Phoenix*, 27 December 2002, S30.

¹⁶ William Freedman, *More Than a Pastime: An Oral History of Baseball Fans* (North Carolina, 1998), 133.

¹⁷ Ira Eisenstein, *Reconstructing Judaism: An Autobiography* (New York, 1986).

¹⁸ Jonathan S. Tobin, "A Matter of Opinion: Baseball and the Jews; Making America's Game Our Own." *Jewish Exponent*, 15 April 1999, 39.

¹⁹ Gary Rosenblatt, "Between the Lines: A Brand New Season." *The Jewish Week*, 9 April 1999, 7.

²⁰ Gary Rosenblatt, "Ripken As a Role Model." *Baltimore Jewish Times*, 8 September 1995, 14.

- ²¹ Steven Pechter Freemire, "Game of Baseball, Symbolic of Life and Death, Brings Men Together." *Jewish Bulletin*, 29 September 2000, 23.
- ²² Scott Gurdin, "Setbacks Inspire the Journey." *Daily Press*, 23 March 2002.
- ²³ Irwin Shaw, *Voices of A Summer Day* (New York, 1965), 153.
- ²⁴ Daniel A. Nathan, "Touching the Bases: A Conversation with Eric Rolfe Greenberg." *Aethlon*, 7/1 (Fall 1989): 10-19.
- ²⁵ Paul Auster, *The Invention of Solitude* (New York, 1988), 119.
- ²⁶ Chaim Potok, *The Chosen* (New York, 1967).
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Jews on First: The “Avot” of Baseball

Eric Schulmiller

These are the mighty men of old ... men of great renown (Genesis 6:4)

From the epic figures that shaped the destiny of Judaism’s most ancient sacred texts, to the modern marvels that grace the sports pages of America’s daily newspapers, Jews have always been captivated by their heroes’ tantalizing mix of human frailty and brushes with the divine. Perhaps it is more than coincidence then, that two Jewish teenagers from Cleveland created Superman at the same moment that American Jews were celebrating the arrival of Hammerin’ Hank Greenberg in Detroit, just across the river from where Seigel and Shuster launched America’s greatest mythic figure onto the world stage. More astonishing is when history repeated itself a quarter century later with the arrival of Stan Lee’s (née Leiber’s) “Friendly Neighborhood Spiderman” in Queens in the same year as the Brooklyn-born Koufax wove his web of greatness with the Dodgers!

This chapter will explore the varied ways in which Jewish tradition esteems its heroes, its “founding fathers,” its “men of great renown,” and the Jewish contributors to America’s pastime who best represented these values during the first 140 years of professional baseball.

Adam

I begin by examining Jewish participation during the earliest days of organized baseball, before Ruth and Gehrig, Mantle and Mays, Steinbrenner and steroids. Born in 1845 in New York City to Jews of Dutch descent, in 1866 Lipman “Lip” Emanuel Pike (along with two other players) accepted \$20 per week to play for the Philadelphia Athletics. Although against the rules of the National Association of Base Ball Players, many players were indeed taking money under the table, and The Association’s hearing concerning Lip’s pay-for-play (at which no one even bothered to show up) publicly set the precedent for the widespread practice of receiving payment for playing ball, which garnered Lip recognition as the “Father of Professional Baseball.”

In 1871, Lip became one of the star players of the National Association (the first all-professional league) and actually led the league in home runs with a whopping *four* in 1871, and then set a new league record in 1872 with six.¹ Possessing great speed (he once beat a racehorse in a 100 yard dash), and a lifetime batting average of .321, when he joined the Cincinnati Reds of the fledgling National League in 1877, Lip was arguably one of the best players in the game. He was also the first Jewish Met, although not of the version that entered the National League in 1962, but rather as a player for two different incarnations of the New York Metropolitan — an independent team in 1880, and the American Association’s club in 1887. Lip was also the first (professional) Jewish manager, as player-manager for the Troy Haymakers in 1871. As a side note, we should also include Lipman’s brother, Jacob Pike as a kind of Adam — in 1875 he became the first Jewish Major League umpire, calling games for the National Association.

Yuval

Yuval is described in Genesis 4 as a seventh-generation descendant of Adam, and “the ‘father’ of all who handle the lyre and pipe” (Gen. 4:21). Yuval is therefore considered the first “proto-musician,” and his baseball counterpart is Albert Von Tilzer (née Albert Gumminsky), an Indianapolis-born Jewish member of the Songwriters Hall of Fame,

who set a poem by Jack Norworth to music entitled “Take Me Out to the Ball Game” in 1908. Thus, our National Pastime’s two unofficial anthems (Irving Berlin wrote “God Bless America” ten years later) were both written by Jewish composers! An interesting side-note (at least for fellow cantors) is that a cursory musical analysis of Tilzer’s melody shows hints of Ashkenazic cantillation.²

Tubal-cain

Yuval’s brother Tubal-cain was known as “the forger of every cutting instrument of bronze and iron” (Gen. 4:22) thereby serving as a paradigm for inventors and craftsmen of every era. While popular legend and scholarly assertions may duke it out between Abner Doubleday and Alexander Cartwright, Jews can claim Benjamin Shibe as the true inventor of baseball...or, at least, *the* baseball. On February 5th, 1909, Shibe patented his design for the first baseball to feature a cork center (improving upon his own patent for a rubber-centered ball from 1882). This revolutionary baseball design (as well as the machinery Shibe invented to manufacture it) was later licensed by Spalding to produce baseballs for both Major and Minor Leagues, paving the way for the end of the dead ball era and the beginnings of modern baseball as we know it.

We should probably mention Steve Yeager as a modern-day “Tubal Cain” as well, for not only did this 1981 World Series co-MVP possess stellar defensive skills that rivaled the best catchers of all time (Johnny Bench included), Yeager also invented the protective neck-flap used on Major League catchers’ masks today, following a bizarre injury when splinters from a shattered bat lodged in his neck while he was waiting in the on-deck circle.

And while a later section will detail Hank Greenberg’s accomplishments as both player and humanitarian, it should also be noted that his controversial use of an oversized first-baseman’s glove (mitt, really), led to the eventual adoption of similarly-designed mitts by modern first-basemen today.

Noah

Although there had been league championship games played throughout the later part of the nineteenth century, the introduction of a true “World Series” in 1903 (along with a roster of sixteen Major League teams that would remain constant for the next fifty years) demarcates baseball’s real entry into the modern era. The originator of this series, where teams would march “two by two” towards immortality each fall, was Barney Dreyfus. Dreyfus, owner of the National League-champion Pittsburgh Pirates, invited the Boston champions from the upstart rival American League to an end-of-the-year series to decide baseball’s ultimate victor. Pittsburgh lost the series, five games to three. Many would argue that Dreyfus’ contributions to baseball as owner and innovator merit his inclusion as the first Jewish executive to be inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. However, despite popular accounts to the contrary,³ this has yet to occur.

Abraham

In *Midrash Genesis Rabbah* we read the following statement by Rav Abba bar Kahana: “In the world’s practice, when a man joins a pair of beams so that they come together at an angle, where does he place them? Does he not place them in the middle of the chamber, so that they give support to the beams in front of them and behind them? So, too, why did the Holy One create Abraham in the middle of the generations? In order that

he might sustain the generations before and after him.”⁴ There is no player that better fits this description than Henry Benjamin Greenberg. Hank Greenberg’s fame, athletic prowess, and the moral choices he would make both on and off the field have shaped our perceptions — and expectations — of what a Jewish ballplayer could and should be. His greatness extended beyond his Hall of Fame numbers (five time All-Star, two time American League MVP, four time AL home run champion, four time AL Runs Batted In champion, seventh best career slugging percentage of all time, highest career RBI-game ratio [.92] in Major League history) to his contributions towards social justice, and his impact as a representative of the Jewish people to the world community.

Like Abraham, Greenberg faced many trials during his life. As an awkward, gangly youth, fielding did not come naturally to Hank, and he worked tirelessly to become a Major League-caliber first baseman. Like Abraham, Hank was compelled to journey from the land of his father (New York City) and the land of his household (The Bronx), to a land in need of redemption: Detroit — a city that hadn’t won a pennant in twenty-five years, and home to rabid anti-Semites like Henry Ford and Father Charles Coughlin.⁵

Like Abraham, who was promised a “great name” (Gen. 12:2), Hank made a legendary name for himself among the all-time baseball greats. Over thirteen full seasons, Greenberg led his team to four pennants and two World Series championships and never hit below .310 with at least twenty-five home runs and 130 RBI (excluding the first and last years of his career).⁶

Like Abraham, who joined in the battle of four kings against five (Gen. 14), Hank also became a warrior when the times required it. In fact, due to a low draft number, Hank was one of the first Major League players to be drafted, and even after being declared unfit for military service due to his flat feet, he insisted on retaking the physical and being classified as 1A. He served for several months before being released (he was, at 28, not required to be shipped off at that time). However, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor several days later, Hank became the first Major Leaguer to *enlist* in the armed forces; becoming a First Lieutenant in the Air Force, and eventually serving in a B-29 unit that flew missions in the China-Burma-India theater. After the war, Hank returned to baseball with the rank of Captain and four battle stars. In his first Major League game in four years, Hank hit a home run, and in the final game of the 1945 season he hit a dramatic ninth inning grand slam to send the Tigers back to the World Series.

Like Abraham, Hank often found himself immersed in a very different kind of battle — one for equality and justice, as this 1947 *New York Times* article, written during Hanks last season (his only one with the Pittsburgh Pirates), illustrates:

“Jackie Robinson, first Negro player in the Major Leagues, has picked a diamond hero — rival First Baseman Hank Greenberg of the Pittsburgh Pirates. Here’s why: Robinson and Greenberg collided in a play at first base during the current Dodger-Pirate series. The next time Jackie came down to the sack Hank said: ‘I forgot to ask you if you were hurt in that play.’ Assured that Robinson was unharmed, Greenberg said: ‘Stick in there. You’re doing fine. Keep your chin up.’ This encouragement from an established star heartened Robinson who has been the subject of reported anti-racial treatment elsewhere and admits he has undergone ‘jockeying — some of it pretty severe.’ ‘Class tells. It sticks out all over Mr. Greenberg,’ Robinson declared.”⁷

As Greenberg later put it: “I identified with Jackie Robinson. I had feelings for him because they had treated me the same way. Not as bad, but they made remarks about my being a sheenie and a Jew all the time.”⁸ In fact, a few years after this incident, when Hank was the General Manager of the Cleveland Indians, he was barred from staying at

the Arizona hotel hosting the American League winter meetings because he was Jewish. In 1955, memories of this injustice caused Hank to insist that any hotel that housed the Indians during their road trips had to house *all* of the players — black and white — or none at all. Most hotels complied, rather than lose such a large amount of business.⁹

Earlier in his career, during the 1934 season, Hank would face his greatest test — a dilemma that would expose the tension between the world of baseball and the World of his Fathers. The first week of September found Detroit with a razor-thin lead in a pennant race with the New York Yankees. Unfortunately, Rosh Hashanah fell on September 10 — the date of a crucial game against the Red Sox. However, thanks to at least one of three Talmudic opinions issued by local rabbis in anticipation of this crisis (what my colleague Rabbi Lee Friedlander calls “the rabbinic finagle factor”), Hank felt he had official dispensation to take the field on the Jewish New Year. Hank’s phenomenal performance (his two home runs single-handedly won the game over Boston 2-1) resulted in perhaps the oddest pair of headlines in the history of American sports. In the paper issued before the game was played, the *Detroit Free Press* headline read: “Talmud clears Greenberg for Holiday Play!” The headlines following the Tigers’ dramatic win read: “L’shanah Tova! Happy New Year, Hank!” — in Hebrew, no less! I’m sure Father Coughlin choked on his coffee while reading his paper *that* September morning.

However, Hank’s success was not universally celebrated — in choosing his team over his tradition, Hank felt the wrath of many of his Jewish fans — including his father. As he said in his autobiography, “When I got back to my hotel, my phone rang half the night, I caught hell from my fellow parishioners, I caught hell from some rabbis, and I don’t know what to do, it’s ten days until the next holiday — Yom Kippur.”¹⁰ And so it was that on September 19, 1934, Hank Greenberg paved the way for Koufax and Rosen, Holtzman and Green, by heading off to *shul* instead of the ballpark. What was so monumental about Hank’s decision was that as much as the people of Detroit embraced him when he played and won on Rosh Hashanah, they seemed to admire him even more when he sat and his team lost. Nationally-syndicated sports columnist Edgar Guest summed it up best with these famous words written following Detroit’s 5-2 loss to the Yankees on Yom Kippur: “We shall miss him on the infield and shall miss him at the bat,/But he’s true to his religion — and I honor him for that!”

The irony of this legendary episode is that while Hank Greenberg may have achieved heroic status with the Jewish people for the stand he took, he was not a very devout Jew when it came to matters of religious practice and identity. Like Abraham, Hank’s second spouse was not Jewish, and like Abraham, not all of his children were raised with a Jewish identity, either. Hank’s son Stephen recounts the time in 1959 when his father took him to a planetarium on Yom Kippur, because it was “someplace that was obviously special [to him].”¹¹ In a poignant way, this harkens back to the original promise made by God to Abraham, that as a reward for obeying God’s command to sacrifice his son, his offspring would in fact be as numerous as the “stars of the heavens” (Gen. 22:17). In the end, Hank Greenberg’s legacy comes not from displays of personal piety or observance, but rather from the desire to make a “good name” for himself. By living his life as best he could, Hank acquired a name that others would bless as well.

Isaac

If we were to choose an “Isaac” of baseball from a purely etymological point of view, all signs would point to Max Platkin, the “Clown Prince of Baseball.” After all, the name Yitzchak comes from the Hebrew root denoting play and laughter. During three separate

stints with teams owned by baseball impresario Bill Veeck (the Indians in the 40's, Browns in the 50's and White Sox in the 70's), Max was a Major League first-base coach unlike any other. After a few innings (and eventually between them), Max would entertain crowds with his goofy appearance and zany, on-the-field antics. He also traveled with his act all over the United States, played himself in the movie *Bull Durham*, and has been hailed as the "spiritual father of all the hundreds of mascots who entertain at Major and Minor League baseball, and at every other sport, at every level, in this country."¹² Although Max's legacy (and that of Al Schacht, a Jewish Major League ballplayer who first held the "Clown Prince" title) may seem dubious to some purists, one need not look merely to the San Diego Chicken or Phillie Phanatic (sic) for affirmation of the mascot's importance. In the Babylonian Talmud, no less a figure than Elijah himself singles out two clowns as the only people in their village who are worthy of the World to Come.¹³ Why? Perhaps the following Midrash holds the key: "When Yitzchak/LAUGHTER was born, all those who were sick were healed; all those who were deaf could hear; all those who were blind could see. This is what [Sarah] meant when she said: 'Laughter has God made for me.'"¹⁴

In terms of a direct line of heritage from father to son, Al "Flip" Rosen can be considered Isaac to Hank Greenberg's Abraham. From childhood through adulthood and into his later years, Rosen followed closely in Greenberg's footsteps. As Rosen says in Hank's autobiography, "...[F]rom the time I was a boy, I had two favorite players, Greenberg and Gehrig."¹⁵ In the prime of manhood, Rosen "reopened the wellsprings" of offensive power that were the legacy of his fellow patriarch across the diamond (Gen. 26:15-18). Al was the 1950 American League rookie of the year, and through 1957 was a four-time All-Star, twice each capturing the American League's home run and RBI titles.

And in 1953, Rosen had what baseball scholar and historian Bill James called the best single season by a third baseman — ever.¹⁶ During that year Al was one of the league's best *defensive* third baseman, leading the league in assists and double plays and finishing second in fielding percentage, while simultaneously leading the league in most *offensive* categories — homers, RBIs, runs scored, and slugging percentage. Rosen finished 1953 with a .336 batting average, losing the batting title to Mickey Vernon (.337), missing by .001 becoming only the tenth player of the twentieth century to achieve baseball's coveted Triple Crown, and the first since Ted Williams in the 1940's.

These prodigious numbers led Rosen to become the first Jewish MVP since Hank Greenberg (Sandy Koufax would become the third MVP-winning patriarch ten years later), and the first player *ever* to be unanimously voted league MVP. Yet like many fathers and sons (including Abraham and Isaac), Al often struggled against the legend of his predecessor — often to his face, since all seven of Rosen's spectacular full seasons in the Majors came during Hammerin' Hank's tenure as part-owner and general manager of Rosen's Cleveland Indians. Typical of this often-stormy relationship between a star player and his boyhood idol, after Al's magnificent MVP season, Greenberg managed to sign him for about half of the salary for which Rosen had asked by comparing his own fourth-year numbers to Rosen's! In his fourth year, Greenberg had knocked in a near record-setting 183 RBIs, and had hit .337. Once again, that .001 of a point had cost Rosen dearly.

At his best as good as Hall of Fame third basemen Schmidt and Brett,¹⁷ nagging injuries forced an early end to Al Rosen's monumental career track. After his retirement, Rosen followed in Greenberg's footsteps again, this time as a successful General Manager — first for the Yankees, then with the Astros and finally with the Giants, where he was named Major League Executive of the Year in 1987. Yet it was Al's pride in his Jewish heritage and his role as an example for young Jews everywhere that established his place among the Patriarchs. In response to a newspaper article written in the 1950's

by a pre-Elvis/pre-Beatles Ed Sullivan, who spuriously claimed that Al was actually a practicing Catholic, Al is said to have responded that he wished his name was Rosenthal or Rosenstein, so he would be seen as even *more* Jewish. Can we detect in this sentiment echoes of Rosen's Biblical namesake, Isaac — the only Patriarch *not* to receive a second name describing his Jewish destiny?

Yes, like Isaac, Rosen's achievements were largely overshadowed in the course of history by his patriarchal predecessor and successor (Hall-of-Famers Greenberg and Koufax). Even his stated intention not to play on Yom Kippur in the midst of the 1954 World Series is largely overlooked, since the Series ended when the Giants swept Rosen's Indians before he had a chance to follow through on his promise (although, like Greenberg and Koufax, Rosen never did play on Yom Kippur). Still, Rosen will go down as one of the greats, fulfilling his aspirations as a successful and admired ballplayer, executive, and Jew: "I wanted it to be, 'Here comes one Jewish kid that every Jew in the world can be proud of.'"¹⁸

Jacob

For those of the opinion shared by sages in the Passover *Haggadah* that the phrase "My father was a wandering Aramean" (Deut. 26:5) refers to the patriarch Jacob, then his baseball counterpart would have to be Samuel Nahem, a New York-born Jewish pitcher of Syrian (aka *Aramean*) descent who spent the better part of ten years (when he wasn't serving in the military) wandering from town to town, and club to club. Nahem was so well-traveled (playing with a handful of Major League clubs and Minor League teams from Louisiana to Iowa to Nashville to Montreal) that he earned a moniker that would have made any wandering Aramean proud: "Subway Sam."

But the truest parallel to Jacob in the patriarchal narratives is, of course, Sandy Koufax. Like young Jacob the trickster, Sandy Koufax swindled many a batter out of his birthright (or at least a few base hits, as they were left "stewing" at the plate) with his tremendous curve and blazing fastball. Like Jacob heaving the huge stone off of the well to water the flocks of Rachel (Gen. 29:10), the young Koufax was wild and gifted with great strength (leading the National League in wild pitches in 1958, yet tying the Major league record for strikeouts in a single game in 1959). And just as a mound played witness to Jacob's departure from his father-in-law as he journeyed towards a new life in the promised land (Gen. 31), Koufax, like so many pitchers in this pitching-dominant era, benefited greatly from a raised mound — a pitcher's mound that was nearly half a foot higher during his career than it was from 1969 onward.

Yet like Jacob, it wasn't until Koufax reached the "promised land," i.e. Dodger stadium, where his career home Earned Run Average was over a full point lower than on the road, that Sandy first began to reach towards immortality (of course, a few sage words during the 1961 spring training by fellow tribesman and backup catcher Norm Sherry didn't hurt, either). During the next half-dozen years, Koufax averaged twenty-two wins per season with a 2.24 ERA, appeared in six consecutive All-Star games, won five consecutive ERA titles, pitched four no-hitters (including a perfect game), won three Cy Young Awards, was twice the World Series MVP and won the National League MVP award in 1963.

And then we come to what is arguably the seminal moment in 350 years of American Jewish history. It's true that before Sandy Koufax left his indelible mark on the baseball diamond and the psyche of the Jewish people, both Greenberg and Rosen chose not to play on Yom Kippur (along with other, lesser known Jewish players and coaches). But it's equally true that October 6, 1965 possessed elements that catapulted this Yom Kippur decision, and the man who made it, into the annals of Jewish and baseball history in a way

that has never been, nor will likely be surpassed. It took place during an era of increased media coverage (Koufax made the cover of *Life Magazine* on August 6, 1963), with the added allure of a legendary player on a legendary franchise with the drama of a World Series opener in the balance. As with Jacob's encounter with the divine at the Jabbok River (Gen. 32), which left him a changed man with a changed name (Israel — a name that signified his role as progenitor not just of a family, but of a people), in her excellent biography of Koufax, Jane Leavy writes: "The decision not to pitch was a transforming event, providing the catalyst for an unknown number of lawyers and Little Leaguers to acknowledge and honor their religion in like kind. Koufax made them brave. By refusing to pitch, he both reinforced Jewish pride and enhanced the sense of belonging — a feat as prodigious as any he accomplished on the field."¹⁹

Before we move from Jacob to our baseball "Joseph," this would be as good a spot as any to pay homage to the predominance of pitchers in patriarchal player positions. Over half a century before Koufax, Leo Fishel became the very first Jewish Major League pitcher as he pitched the only big league game of his career: a complete-game loss for the Giants to the Phillies on May 3, 1899. Speaking of the Phillies, Erskine Mayer, although overshadowed by his Phillies teammate, Grover Cleveland Alexander, was one heck of a pitcher — and in 1914 he became the first Jew to win twenty games — winning twenty-one in both 1914 and 1915 (of course, future Hall of Famer Alexander won twenty-seven and thirty-one during those same years). Then in 1917, while with the other Pennsylvania franchise, Erskine pitched an amazing sixteen innings of scoreless baseball during the Pirates' twenty-one-inning win over the Boston Braves. Erskine hung up his cleats for good after the 1919 season — as one of the blameless members of that notorious White Sox team, the Black Sox scandal had broken his heart, and with it, his desire to play ball.

Although we've reserved a later section to propose baseball's Moses and Aaron, Larry and Norm Sherry formed the only pitcher-catcher battery of Jewish brothers in baseball history. And while it may have been Norm that gave Koufax the advice that changed his career — and with it the course of baseball history — it was Larry, in 1959, who became the first Jewish Dodgers pitcher to win the World Series MVP. Larry was awarded the MVP in 1959 as the only player in history to be the pitcher of record for *all four* World Series victories. Pitching 12 2/3 innings (more than any other Dodgers pitcher), he recorded two wins and two saves, with a 0.71 World Series Earned Run Average.

It may seem surprising that an All-Star pitcher with roughly a .500 lifetime record and a World Series Ring would be called "Hard Luck Horlen," but that's the nickname Joe Horlen carried throughout his career. It's easier to understand this sorrowful sobriquet when you realize that the awful-hitting White Sox of the sixties saddled Horlen with one of the most brutal run support-to-ERA ratios in the history of the game. In 1967, despite a dominant nineteen-win season (during which he became one of only four Jewish pitchers to ever hurl a no-hitter) and a league-leading ERA of 2.06, Horlen (who finished an impressive fourth in the League MVP vote) lost the Cy Young award to Jim Lonborg, a pitcher with several more wins (but *far greater* run support) whose ERA was over a point *higher* than Joe's. Nevertheless, Horlen (who converted to Judaism following his baseball career) can be considered one of the top Jewish pitchers to play the game, even if his record doesn't seem to indicate it.

Ken Holtzman (Horlen's teammate on the 1972 World Champion Oakland A's), on the other hand, was both lucky *and* phenomenally talented. In 1966, towards the end of his first full season, many felt that the Jewish Pitching baton had been passed, when Holtzman took a no-hitter into the eighth inning, handing Sandy Koufax the last regular season loss of his Major League career (by the final score of 2-1). As it happens, Koufax

would never have faced Holtzman if he hadn't declined to pitch the previous day, which had been Yom Kippur! The following year, pitching only on weekends while in the National Guard, Holtzman compiled an impressive 9-0 record. Ken spent several more successful seasons with the Cubs, during which he became the only Jewish pitcher besides Koufax to throw at least two no-hitters during his career. Then, from 1972-75, Holtzman flourished as an integral part of the pitching rotation for the three-time World Champion Oakland A's, going 6-1 in seven post-season series with a 2.30 ERA.

The wingest Jewish pitcher in Major League history (beating out Koufax with 174 career wins to Sandy's 165), Holtzman is also second only to Koufax in total strikeouts, and won seventeen or more games six times in his fifteen year career. Holtzman was also a fairly observant Jew (remarkably so for a Major League ballplayer), kept kosher at home and on the road as much as possible (despite playing alongside a pitcher named "Catfish"), and would follow in fellow southpaw Koufax's footsteps, never pitching on Yom Kippur. During the 1973 American League Championship Series, for example, Holtzman missed his turn to start when it fell on Yom Kippur, but pitched a three-hit, eleven inning gem the following day to beat the Orioles 2-1 (a lucky score for Ken, it would seem). When his career was all said and done, Holtzman could be proud of the way he represented the Jewish people — on the mound and off.

Steve Stone is not on this detour into the world of Jewish pitching because he had a stellar career like Holtzman or Koufax, but because of how this average Major Leaguer was inspired to pitch one year of brilliant, perfect baseball. Throughout most of the 1970's Steve Stone put in mediocre stints in San Francisco and both sides of Chicago. Although he had several promising seasons with the White Sox (including a strong 15-12 season in 1977), Stone finished out the decade with a record of 78-79. But it was following the lackluster first half of 1979 that Steve decided that his various arm troubles and middling career numbers were not going to stop him from reaching for greatness. So he did what any respectable Jewish pitcher would do: he channeled Sandy Koufax. He read his idol's biography five times, changed his number to Sandy's 32, and didn't lose a single game for the rest of the season!²⁰

Of course, a baseball-loving kabbalist might tell you that the numerical value (*gematria*) of 32 is equivalent to the Hebrew word *lev*, which means "heart." Steve certainly pitched his heart out in 1980, garnering an astonishing *twenty-five* wins (including fourteen straight) and becoming the only Jewish pitcher besides Koufax to win a Cy Young award. His crowning moment had to be the 1980 All Star game, where Steve pitched three perfect innings, not allowing a walk or a hit from the likes of Johnny Bench, Dave Kingman and Steve Garvey. One could even argue that, following the game, Stone's sore arm was the second "Miracle on Ice" of 1980!

Joseph

In terms of statistics, it's difficult to judge a player who is still in the midst of a great career, but it's telling that up to this point (near the end of the 2005 season), a player Shawn Green very closely resembles statistically is Hall of Famer Reggie Jackson.²¹ At 1,650 games (and at roughly the same age), Shawn and Reggie have almost identical numbers for career runs scored and slugging percentage, with Shawn having 150 more career hits and Reggie outpacing Shawn by fewer than 40 career home runs and 75 total RBIs. Shawn has already accrued a Gold Glove and two All-Star appearances, and if he can stay healthy and play into his late thirties, he has a shot at 450 home runs, 2,500 hits

and 1,500 RBIs — numbers that, some day (even in this offense-inflated age), might land Shawn in the Hall alongside Sandy and Hank.

As a transitional patriarch, it's also fitting that Shawn Green, who before joining the Arizona Diamondbacks in 2005 was the greatest Jewish Dodger since Koufax, grew up idolizing Steve Stone. And just as the Biblical Joseph took on a new name to reflect his stature in more than one civilization (Egyptian and Jewish), Shawn's original family name was changed to Green by his grandfather — from *Greenberg!*

In September of 2001, Shawn joined Greenberg and Koufax in an equally important manner, as he faced his first Yom Kippur challenge. He won the accolades and admiration of countless fans — Jewish and Gentile — when he sat out the final game of the season against the age-old rival and pennant race contender Giants when it fell on this holy day (also ending his streak of 415 consecutive games played — the longest in the Majors at the time). He seemed to say and do all the right things — donating that day's salary (\$70,000) to *tzedakah*, and saying, "It's just something I feel is the right thing to do and the right example to set for the kids ... I think Sandy set a precedent on that and made my decision so much easier."²²

Of course, as the original Joseph found out, it's not easy to wear the brightly-colored mantle of fame and success that has been handed down from the legends that preceded you. The fall of 2004 found Green struggling quite a bit more with the burden of being a Jewish Dodger (and a monumentally successful one at that) under media scrutiny that was exponentially greater than any other Jewish superstar had ever faced before. One also has to remember that Green's first Yom Kippur decision came in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy of 9/11, when countless Americans (many for the first time) looked to their faiths for guidance and comfort following the horrors of that day. It would be understandable if Green himself was feeling notably more "spiritual" during this time, which may have made his decision easier than the one that followed three years later.

In September of 2004, we can follow Green's agonizing process over whether to sit out not one, but *two* crucial games on Yom Kippur (the games fell on both Yom Kippur eve *and* day), once again during a tight pennant race with the Giants. During the week leading up to these games, Green said, "I need another day ... I've been struggling hard with this. Obviously, it's very important to me, my religion is very important to me, too. It's a really tough deal ... I'm totally committed to getting to the postseason and winning, and at the same time I'm committed to my religion and what I stood for in the past ... I wish there was an easy solution, but there's not."²³ When Green finally decided to play the night game, but sit during the day game, he had this to say about his decision, "I struggled with it ... I definitely learned a lot through the experience, how important it is to do what you feel in your heart ... Everyone can have their opinions, but religion is your relationship with God and how you want to handle it ... When it came down to it, I realized that I just had to do what I feel is right and what's most consistent with my beliefs ... Everyone has different ways of expressing their beliefs. For me as a Jewish person and a teammate, I feel that this is the right decision for me."²⁴

Green has had quite a bit of a burden to bare, in terms of living up to his predecessors — not only in terms of their baseball successes, but in terms of the way he is compelled to represent the Jewish people based on decisions others have made under very different circumstances, with different personal religious convictions. There are fellow Jews ('brothers,' one might even say) who seem willing to strip Shawn of his "favorite son" pedigree and cast him into a pit of scorn if he varies even slightly from the standards they perceive to be required for a Jew on the world stage. In light of this, we may recall that once ensconced in Egypt, the Biblical Joseph named his sons "Ephraim," in honor of the fruitfulness in

his new home, and “Manasseh,” lamenting the loss of his old one (Gen. 41). Interestingly, the Hebrew root for “Manasseh” is shared by the word, “nasheh,” which is the thigh-vein which must be removed as part of the process to render that section of meat kosher. The commandment to remove the *nasheh* is explained in Genesis as a reminder of Joseph’s father Jacob’s epic midnight struggle, when he divided all he owned into “two camps,” wrestled with a Divine being, and had a wrenching experience that left him limping on one leg (Gen. 32). When, years later, Jacob comes to bless Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, he crosses his hands — seemingly a mistake by a blind old man (Gen. 48). Yet perhaps what Jacob was trying to tell Joseph is that the name Israel can be understood to mean, “one who wrestles with God,” and that the “children” of Israel will have to engage in every generation in the wrenching struggle between the “two camps” of our past and our future, our successes and our faith, our “homeland” and our homes.

Green, like Joseph, lived in a very different time and place than did his forebears. Joseph had no direct communication from God, and had to rely upon his heart, his dreams, and his faith that he could live a life that was consistent with his personal Jewish identity and values, even in the midst of great pressure, and great success. Green, too, made his decision based upon his own heart; and by paying recognition to both his ancient heritage and his current teammates, Green showed the world both the tensions and rewards of a Jew facing the prospect of existence in and commitment to two civilizations.

Moses and Aaron

Isadore Muchnick was a Boston city councilman whose “deep religious convictions”²⁵ led him to pursue the cause of racial equality. He introduced resolutions in the early 1940’s to create an educational program in the public schools to battle racial intolerance, but they were blocked by bigoted members of the council. Tired of seeing discrimination modeled to children by the national pastime itself, Muchnick decided to play hardball, and passed a motion that threatened to revoke *both* Boston teams’ rights to play on Sundays if they did not grant tryouts to African American players. This led to Jackie Robinson being given a tryout in 1945 with the Boston Red Sox. Despite a stellar performance, Robinson was passed on by Boston’s management (some argue that racist and short-sighted management was the real cause of Boston’s eighty-eight year “curse of the Bambino”). Later that year, when Branch Rickey was looking for the perfect player to break the color barrier on his Brooklyn Dodgers, he consulted with Wendell Smith, sports editor of a major African American newspaper, who was at the 1945 Boston tryouts. Smith recommended Robinson, and the rest is history. One of the first letters of congratulations that Jackie Robinson received in 1947 was from his now good friend, Isadore Muchnick.

Who will be the next Jew to join Greenberg and Koufax in the Hall of Fame? When baseball executives are next included on the newly-formulated veterans’ committee ballots in 2007, the cries for Marvin Miller, baseball’s true “Moses,” will be louder than ever. Like Hank Greenberg, Miller hailed from The Bronx (although he was raised in Brooklyn as a true-blue Dodgers fan). He served on the War Labor Board during World War II, followed by stints with the United Auto Workers and finally as chief economist for United Steel Workers of America. In 1966, Marvin was elected Executive Director of the Baseball Players Association. With his experience as a trade unionist, keen knowledge as a labor economist, and savvy, innovative negotiating skills, Marvin fought the owners at every turn, and vastly improved the status of Major League ballplayers, both financially and conceptually.

To begin with, Miller achieved the first significant increase (over seventy-five percent!) in minimum player salaries since the 1940's. Secondly, he secured for players a pension plan that provided unprecedented security following their retirement. And in 1976, Miller finally achieved through grievance arbitration what even the heroic sacrifice of Curt Flood²⁶ had failed to do: Put an end to the decades-old reserve clause, shepherding in the era of free agency. To put this accomplishment in perspective, the following quotes may seem hyperbolic, but they're merely representative of the feelings of multitudes of fans and players as to the importance of Miller's role:

"From baseball's standpoint, Marvin Miller is almost an Abraham Lincoln figure — he freed the players from the constraints that bound them to one team for life. When Marvin came along, the players finally got a fair share of the economic pie. He's one of the four or five people who've had the biggest impact on the game, and his story has largely been left out of the mainstream."²⁷

"Arthur Ashe felt that Miller 'did more for the welfare of black athletes than anyone else.' Bob Costas said that, with the possible exception of Branch Rickey, 'there is no nonplayer more deserving for the Hall of Fame than Marvin Miller.'²⁸

"[Hank] Aaron ... once said, 'Marvin Miller is as important to the history of baseball as Jackie Robinson.'²⁹

So there you have it — praise of Moses by Aaron himself!

King David

Like David in his youth, Scott Radinsky is a gifted hurler. In the early nineties with the White Sox, and then again during the late nineties with (who else?) the Dodgers, he showed flashes of brilliance as a reliever whose Earned Run Average was often well under 3.00. In between these two successful Major League stints, Scott battled through a diagnosis of Hodgkin's Disease. In one of the "Psalms of David," there is a very powerful prayer of one suffering from illness: "Be gracious unto me, Oh Eternal One; heal me, Oh Eternal One for my very bones are terrified!" (Ps. 6:3) This psalm's beginning ("For the musician on a stringed instrument") is especially relevant because Scott, like David, is an accomplished musician as well — he currently fronts the popular punk band, Pulley.

King Solomon

Only someone with the wisdom of King Solomon (or the savvy of a used car salesman) could drag Major League baseball kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century. During his current tenure (1992-1998 on a "temporary" basis, 1998-present in official capacity) as baseball's first Jewish commissioner, Bud Selig has helped baseball achieve greater excitement through inter-league play, wildcard spots and an additional round of playoffs, and greater parity through team revenue sharing and the first intimations of a salary cap (or at least over-spending penalties). Of course, the baby was almost split in half in 1994 with a season-ending strike; and the steroid controversy continues on despite significant improvements in the league's testing policy over the past several years. But like King Solomon, Selig has presided over the construction of not just one, but nearly *two dozen* new "temples" to baseball, from Camden Yards and Jacobs Field to PNC and Pac Bell (Now AT&T) Park.

Deborah

Thelma “Tiby” Eisen was one of the greatest players of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL) that captivated the nation during the lean war years. She helped lead the Milwaukee Chicks to a championship in her rookie year with nearly 100 stolen bases, and then stole 128 in 1946, the year she was selected to the AAGPBL All-Star team.

Esther

On April 6, 1973 (just a few weeks after Purim), Ron Blumberg became Major League baseball’s first Designated Hitter. I mean no disrespect by associating Blumberg with a female heroine, but aside from the fact that as a baseball purist I consider the role of DH to be as farcical as the story told in the *Megillah* (the scroll of Esther read on Purim) each year, it just so happens that Esther herself was a DH — or as Ron often refers to himself, a *Designated Hebrew*. And just as Ahashuerus selected Esther over and above all other potential candidates, Blumberg was the first pick of the 1967 MLB draft.

Psalmlists

Born Franklin Leopold Adams, Franklin Pierce Adams changed his name at age 13, following his synagogue confirmation. A popular columnist, radio personality and one of the members of the Algonquin Round Table, FPA penned “Baseball’s Saddest Lexicon,” (aka “Tinkers to Evers to Chance”) in 1910 after witnessing this eponymous Cubs double-play combination foil his New York Giants on numerous occasions. Many believe that it was the artistry of this poem as much as (if not more than) this trio’s on-field prowess that led to their induction into the Hall of Fame in 1946.

As the first broadcaster (along with Red Barber) to receive the Ford C. Frick Award for major contributions to Major League Baseball, Mel Allen is the only Jew so honored as part of the exhibit of Ford C. Frick Award winners on permanent display at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. Born Melvin Avrom Israel, Mel was the voice of the Yankees from 1939-1964 (and to a new generation in the 70’s and 80’s), and his participation in dozens of World Series, All-Star Games and Bowl Games made him one of the preeminent sportscasters of the twentieth century. Long before fellow tribesman Gary Cohen’s “It’s outta here!!” or Rich Eisen’s “He *got* it!”, Mel coined the most famous home-run call of all time: “Going, going, gone!!”

Conclusion

So much has been written about how Jewish ballplayers have faced the issue of whether to play or pray on Yom Kippur. Yet in Biblical times, although Yom Kippur served as it does today for the expiation of the peoples’ sins, its greater function was to purify the Temple in Jerusalem for the most important holiday of the year: Sukkot. It was on Sukkot, following the fall harvest, that Jews would gather from throughout the land (as they did on the other two pilgrimage festivals of Pesach and Shavuot) for the grandest Thanksgiving celebration of the year. And while following the destruction of the Second Temple Yom Kippur took on a more predominant role in the Jewish holiday cycle, we may want to reexamine the importance of Sukkot as it relates to baseball.

After all, Sukkot comes during the climax of the baseball season, when our teams may dwell in the shaky huts of a wildcard playoff birth — the holes in our lineups readily

apparent under the glare of postseason pressure. Or we may be stuck in our tents out in the wilderness of last place, gazing longingly upon a still-distant promised land. Perhaps this is why the custom arose to invite symbolic guests (called *Ushpizin*) into the Sukkah — one significant Biblical personage for each night. As Rabbi Michael Strassfeld points out in his essay on Sukkot,³⁰ each of these traditional *Ushpizin* guests — Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron and David represent the themes of wandering and homelessness symbolized by the frailty and transient nature of the Sukkah itself. By mapping Jewish ballplayers onto each of these pioneering patriarchal figures, we're reminded that the ultimate aspiration of anyone who's ever played the game of baseball has been the same as the fundamental desire shared by the Patriarchs and all Jews that followed in their footsteps — as George Carlin puts it: "In baseball the object is to go home! And to be safe! 'I hope I'll be safe at home!'"³¹

ENDNOTES

¹ It seems that players' miniscule home run totals during this accurately-named "dead ball" era were inversely proportional to the extended life spans of their antediluvian Biblical counterparts.

² The melody for the phrase "to the ballgame" and "for the home team" are evocative of the melody used for the beginning of the Biblically and liturgically-chanted *v'ahavta*, while "crackerjacks" and "never get back" both use High Holy Day motifs.

³ See, for example, Peter S. Horvitz and Joachim Horvitz, *The Big Book of Jewish Baseball* (New York, 2001), 215. Dreyfus was selected in 1946 by a Commissioner-appointed "Permanent Committee" to the short-lived and long-forgotten *Honor Rolls of Baseball*: a widely-derided "purgatory" consisting of 39 writers, managers, executives and umpires who were deemed "almost Hall of Fame worthy." Many of these honorees have gone on to become Hall of Fame inductees. Dreyfus, however, has not.

⁴ Midrash Genesis Rabbah, 14:6, as it appears in Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hana Ravnitzky, eds., trans. William G. Braude, *The Book of Legends* (New York, 1992), 31.

⁵ Uncannily, Detroit is almost the identical distance from the Bronx as Canaan was to Abraham's original home of Aram-Naharaim!

⁶ All statistics in this essay were checked at <http://www.baseball-reference.com>.

⁷ Associated Press, "Hank Greenberg a Hero To Dodgers' Negro Star," *New York Times*, May 18, 1947.

⁸ Hank Greenberg and Ira Berkow, *Hank Greenberg: The Story of My Life* (Chicago, 2001), 190-91.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 207-8, 216-17.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 59-60.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 238-39.

¹² Horvitz and Horvitz, *The Big Book of Jewish Baseball*, 128-29.

¹³ B. Talmud Ta'anit 22a.

¹⁴ Midrash Tanchuma on Parshat Va'era, Genesis 21:6.

¹⁵ Greenberg and Berkow, *Hank Greenberg*, 218.

¹⁶ Bill James, *The New Bill James Historical Baseball Abstract* (New York, 2001), 554.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Roger Kahn, *How The Weather Was* (New York, 1973), 165.

¹⁹ Jane Leavy, *Sandy Koufax: A Lefty's legacy* (New York, 2002), 193.

²⁰ Horvitz and Horvitz, *The Big Book of Jewish Baseball*, 182.

²¹ Another touching point of connection between Green and Jackson was that Reggie, who was quite a Philo-Semite according to his autobiography, was the only non-Jewish player on the 1972 A's to wear a black armband, alongside Jewish A's Holtzman and Mike Epstein, following the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympic Games. See Scott Schleifstein, "A Small, Yet Momentous Gesture," *The Baseball Research Journal*, no. 34, 79-81.

²² Jim Caple, ESPN.com: Baseball, September 26, 2001.

²³ Steve Bisheff. *Knight Ridder Tribune News Service*. Sep 22, 2004, 1.

²⁴ Steve Springer and Jason Reid, "Dodger Star Will Observe, and Play on, Yom Kippur," *Los Angeles Times*, Sep 24, 2004, A.1.

²⁵ Stephen H. Norwood, "Going to Bat for Jackie Robinson: the Jewish Role in Breaking Baseball's Color Line," *Journal of Sports History*, Volume 26, no. 1 (Spring 1999), 124.

²⁶ Who was represented in his losing effort before the Supreme Court by another Jew: former Supreme Court justice Arthur J. Goldberg.

²⁷ Ken Burns, quoted in Allen Barra, "Ken Burns' 'Baseball': Ode to America's Game," *Chicago Sun - Times*, Aug 28, 1994, 1.

²⁸ Allen Barra, "Marvin Miller's Fame is Subject to Interpretation," *The New York Times*, Feb 20, 2000, 8 and 11.

²⁹ Ira Berkow, "Marvin Miller, Hall of Famer," *The New York Times*, Feb 15, 1999, D.7.

³⁰ Michael Strassfeld, *The Jewish Holidays: A Guide and Commentary* (New York, 1985), 129.

³¹ George Carlin, *Brain Droppings* (New York, 1997), 53.

The Rashi of Baseball: The Announcer

Jordan Parr

For me, baseball is a game best played, not watched. If I am not playing the game, or sitting at the ballpark however, it is best experienced on radio. The television screen is too small to hold the hundreds of subtle movements so essential to a major league baseball game: the constant re-positioning of the players, the signals between pitcher and catcher or between third-base coach and batter, the pitcher's look to first, the second baseman preparing to take the throw from the catcher – or even the on-deck batter swinging his bat. Television cannot possibly cover all the intricacies of the game; it is the radio announcer who provides the *Rashi*, the notes that allow me to reinvent the game in my head.

As a child, I went to a few games at the old Detroit Tiger Stadium each year; they are among my fondest memories. I remember watching my hometown heroes (especially Al Kaline and Norm Cash) hitting home runs and making great plays in the field. But without broadcaster extraordinaire Ernie Harwell telling me what happened, everything seemed random. There was no order to the game; it was just a series of hits and misses.

Ernie Harwell was my *Rashi*.¹ He was able to take the seemingly random swings and pitches and interpret them in such a way that we, listening as always on the radio, could play the game in our mind. It was not just any pitch that Denny McLain threw in the ninth inning on an August night in 1968; rather, it was a high leg-kick that allowed the runner to try to steal second – but his “high, hard one” was hit straight to Mickey Stanley in center field. And the Tigers won again. Thus spake Harwell – and so it was recorded in the annals of baseball history.

We would play out Harwell's *Rashi* the next day on the baseball diamond, trying to pitch like Ernie Harwell said Denny McLain pitched, trying to hit like Ernie Harwell said Norm Cash hit and trying to throw out a runner going from first to third from right field – just like Ernie Harwell said Al Kaline did. The game may have been exciting enough; but when we added the *Rashi* to our re-enactment (often with our very own Harwell clone in the dugout), the game came alive.

This must have been the feeling in Worms when Rashi first taught Talmud. Imagine lifting a hand-written folio of Talmud and trying to make sense of it without the *Rashi*. It was like going to a baseball game and forgetting your radio! Rashi made the text come alive. Suddenly, it all made sense.

The Talmud is like a baseball game. It flows, back and forth, in gentle discussion. The debates are like a current: sometimes gentle, sometimes fast – but always moving forward. Final decisions depend upon the words of the “All Star” rabbis, ones that I like to say are in the “Rabbis’ Hall of Fame.” And once in a while, as in the case of Rabbi Eliezer and the Oven of Aknin² (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Baba Metzia 59b), somebody gets ejected.

The story is a familiar one. Rabbi Eliezer, a great Talmudic sage, found himself in a minority of one regarding the Oven of Aknin. While he felt that this particular type of oven was ritually pure. However, his colleagues declared it unfit for use. But Rabbi Eliezer would not give up. He declared, “If the halacha (Jewish law) is according to my ruling, let the carob tree prove it. The carob tree moved 100 cubits. The rabbis declared that there could be no proof from a carob tree. Rabbi Eliezer then brought a stream of water and even the very walls of the Academy into play, only to be rebuked. Finally, he called upon heaven itself to support his claim. A *bat kol* (heavenly voice) was heard, saying that

in all matters of halacha, Rabbi Eliezer was correct. To which, Rabbi Yehoshua replied, "It (Torah) is not in heaven!"³

Later, Rabbi Natan met the prophet Elijah.⁴ After asking the prophet of God's reaction to this episode, Elijah simply replied, "And God laughed, saying 'My children have defeated me! My children have defeated me!'"

While this is usually where the story ends, there is more to it. Following this amazing Divine declaration, the Talmud states that the rabbis brought every object (food cooked in the oven of Aknin) that Rabbi Eliezer had declared pure and publicly burned them. Not only did they reassert their halachic authority, but they also excommunicated Rabbi Eliezer! Realizing the gravity of this decision, they sent Rabbi Akiva – the greatest sage of the time – to tell Rabbi Eliezer the bad news in a merciful way. The passage concludes by saying that Rabbi Akiva humbled himself before Rabbi Eliezer and made the aggrieved rabbi realize his punishment without shaming him. And so, at the end of the story, the lesson is revealed: halachah is decided in the rabbinic era by majority vote. But even more important, one may not disparage another in public – especially when that person is in the minority. To quote the text, given to the wife of Rabbi Eliezer, Imma Shalom (Mother of Peace): "all the gates (of heaven) are locked except for the gate of *ona'ah* (hurt feelings). While the sages who excommunicated Rabbi Eliezer may have been justified in their actions; heaven punished them because they hurt Rabbi Eliezer's feelings and caused him anguish."⁵

The question arises: why would Rabbi Emden claim that the rabbis were punished for their actions when their actions were legitimate and proper? The text is straightforward: Imma Shalom, the wife of Rabbi Eliezer (and a great female figure in her own right) quoted this passage, which she had ostensibly heard from her grandfather: "All the gates (of heaven) are locked except for the gates of *ona'ah*. In other words, Rabbi Eliezer could pray to heaven because his feelings were hurt and so God was certain to hear his prayers.

Emden looked at the Rashi! His conclusion was based on his reading of the brief passages of Rashi that accompanied this text. Let me quote:

From my grandfather's house. From the house of my father's family. She (Imma Shalom) was the daughter of princes. They (Imma Shalom and her brother, Rabban Gamliel) were descended from the House of David.

Except for the gates of *ona'ah*. Because this is the gate of the heart and it is easy to shed tears.

The linkage of Imma Shalom to the House of David gave her tremendous credibility – even to the point of linking her to the Messiah! Therefore, one had to listen to her words carefully and respectfully. But if the gate of *ona'ah* is the seat of emotion, Rashi is saying that the rabbis literally broke Rabbi Eliezer's heart. He then cried out to God and God heard him – because God always hears the prayers of the victims of unnecessary distress.

We might have been able to deduce this idea without Rashi – but it would have been very difficult. Rabbi Emden depended upon Rashi for this interpretation; just as we depend upon Rashi to explain and expound other passages in the Talmud.

We can apply the Rashi model to baseball. Here is the box score for Game 7 of the World Series, played on October 10, 1968 in St. Louis, Missouri, between the Detroit Tigers and the St. Louis Cardinals:⁶

Baseball Almanac Box Scores

Detroit Tigers 4, St. Louis Cardinals 1

Game played on Thursday, October 10, 1968 at Busch Stadium II

Detroit Tigers					St. Louis Cardinals				
	ab	r	h	rbi		ab	r	h	rbi
McAuliffe 2b	4	0	0	0	Brock lf	3	0	1	0
Stanley, ss, cf	4	0	1	0	Javier 2b	4	0	0	0
Kaline rf	4	0	0	0	Flood cf	4	0	2	0
Cash 1b	4	1	1	0	Cepeda 1b	3	0	0	0
Horton lf	4	1	2	0	Shannon 3b	4	1	1	1
Tracewski pr	0	1	0	0	McCarver c	3	0	1	0
Oyler ss	0	0	0	0	Maris rf	3	0	0	0
Northrup cf, lf	4	1	2	2	Maxvill ss	2	0	0	0
Freehan c	4	0	1	1	Gagliano ph	1	0	0	0
Wert 3b	3	0	1	1	Schofield ss	0	0	0	0
Lolich p	4	0	0	2	Gibson p	3	0	0	0
Totals	35	4	8	40	Totals	30	1	5	1

	r h e				
Detroit	0	0	0	3	0 1-4 8 1
St. Louis	0	0	0	0	0 1-1 5 0

Detroit Tigers

	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Lolich W (3-0)	9.0	5	1	1	3	4

St. Louis Cardinals

	IP	H	R	ER	BB	SO
Gibson L (2-1)	9.0	8	4	4	1	8

E-Northrup (3). DP-Detroit 1. 2B-Detroit Freehan (1, off Gibson). 3B-Detroit Northrup (1, off Gibson). HR-St. Louis Shannon (1, 9th inning off Lolich 0 on. 2 out). Ibb-Wert (1, by Gibson). SB-Flood (3, 2nd base off Lolich/Freehan). IBB-Gibson (1, Wert). U-Tom Gorman (NL), Jim Honochick (AL), Stan Landes (NL), Bill Kinnamon (AL), Doug Harvey (NL). T-2:07. A-54,692.

To the experienced fan, this box score is gold. It provides a summary of the game for all posterity. For many Tiger fans especially, it might even hang on a wall in the den!

But for all of its summary information, it does not enable us to remember exactly what happened that afternoon in St. Louis. For that, we need the announcer and his record of the game.

I do not have a transcript of Ernie Harwell's call of the game.⁷ But we can create a semblance of what happened when the first batter, Dick McAuliffe, came to bat against Bob Gibson. Perhaps Ernie Harwell would have called it like this:

It's a beautiful day here in St. Louis. The sun is in the sky and the air is crisp. If I didn't know any better, I'd say that the Rams and the Lions were getting ready to play football, rather than the Cardinals and Tigers playing the last baseball game of the year.

Dick McAuliffe, the Tiger's shortstop is walking to the plate. He is sure taking his time. After all, I don't think any Tiger is in a hurry to face Bob Gibson – who set a World Series record in Game 1 by striking out 17 Detroit batters. He has been on fire during this series and McAuliffe has paid the price.

McAuliffe steps into the batter's box for the first pitch of the game. He is looking at Gibson. The infield is playing shallow and the outfield is straight away. If he could just punch one past the second base, Julio Javier, he might have a chance for a double.

Gibson is looking at the sign from his catcher, Tim McCarver. He nods and – just a minute, McAuliffe has stepped out of the batter's box. The crafty second baseman is trying to get Gibson off of his rhythm.

He's back in the box. Maxvill, the Cardinal's shortstop is inching over towards the bag. McAuliffe hasn't hit one to the left side of the infield yet this Series; now would be a good time to catch Maxvill leaning.

Gibson goes back into his wind-up. Here's the leg kick and it's a foul ball. O and one for McAuliffe. That lady from Hannibal, Missouri caught that ball. She's going to show it to all her friends at Becky Thatcher's old house.

And so the banter would continue. From the mouth of such a smooth announcer, the game took on a life of its own, its own vibrancy, its own spirit. We waited for the corny jokes, for Ernie to tell us more about the supposed hometown of the lady who caught that foul ball. We waited for Ernie to tell us that the infield was in "double-play depth" so that the Cardinals could catch the runner at second base. We heard from him if the batter had squared away to bunt or if the pitcher threw over to first base. We could not learn this from the television or from the box score in the newspaper. The television can only flash one aspect of the game at a time, perhaps two if they focus on the runner and the batter.

So the radio announcer is vital to the enjoyment of the game of baseball. Without the announcer, the game is reduced to a meaningless box score – good for recalling the overall statistics but a dismal failure at describing the flow of the game. A good announcer will tell us about the movement of the runners and the fielders, the tendencies of the pitchers and the idiosyncrasies of the managers and coaches.

All year, for example, the Tigers played Ray Oyler, a light-hitting but slick-fielding shortstop. In an act that can only be described in retrospect as total genius, Mayo Smith, the Tiger's manager, took Oyler out of the line-up and inserted Mickey Stanley, a defensive star and a better hitter, at shortstop. Stanley had never played the infield; he usually rotated with Jim Northrup in center field or as a late-inning defensive replacement. Northrup often moved to left field late in the game to replace Willie Horton – a stellar hitter but a defensive liability. While his bat never caused anyone to cheer, during the World Series Stanley certainly held his own in the infield – and often did move to center field in Smith's late inning maneuvers. Such was the move of a coach: to pinch-hit, to remove a pitcher, to make a defensive change or simply to adjust the outfield for a dangerous hitter. And Ernie Harwell would know these tendencies and convey them to the listener on the radio. He could anticipate changes and explain why they would happen, whether he agreed with the change or not.

Without our radio announcer, our Rashi, we would not have baseball as we know it. Reduced to a series of statistics, the game would be incomprehensible – and nobody would want to play it. Even today, almost 40 years after the last pitch of that magical World Series, I can still remember great moments: Lolich’s home run and eventual victory over Gibson in Game 7, Stanley at short stop, Al Kaline’s great play in the only World Series of his vaunted career, Gibson’s total mastery over the Tigers (yet losing Game 7) and even Mike Shannon’s home run in the bottom of the ninth in Game 7, striking a dagger into Detroit’s hopes, fearing that the Series would slip away. Other baseball fans might remember other great moments from their favorite teams: the Red Sox victory in Game 5 in 1976 over the Cincinnati Reds, or Buckner’s error – or especially their thrilling Series win in 2004. You might remember the Big Red Machine or Willie Stargell’s “famalee” in Pittsburgh. Yankee and Dodger fans have many memories, be they of Mantle, Koufax or Robinson.

But each of these memories, I daresay, is due to a Rashi, a baseball announcer. What were the Cardinals without the late Jack Buck or the Cubs without the great Harry Carey? Vin Scully is the heart and soul of the Dodgers; Skip Carey of the Braves. Without these men, the game would be incomprehensible. So just as we depend on Rashi for Talmud, so do we depend upon these modern-day Rashis for our baseball information. They do not disappoint.

NOTES

¹ Rashi, Rabbi Shimon ben Isaac, lived in Worms in the 12th Century. He wrote the foundational commentaries on the Torah and the Talmud. Every serious student of these texts is dependent upon Rashi’s elucidations.

² It seems that laying rings of increasingly smaller sizes on top of each other gave this type of oven its “snake like” appearance. Aknai can be translated as snake. Rabbi Eliezer maintained that if you cut this oven horizontally and then glued it back together it was still ritually pure. He was, of course, overruled.

³ Deuteronomy 30.12.

⁴ In Jewish tradition, Elijah did not die but went up to heaven in a “Chariot of Fire” (II Kings 2:11). He returns to earth to do good deeds and will one day herald the coming of the Messiah.

⁵ Cf. Tractate Bava Metzia, vol III, Part III (Steinsaltz edition, Random House, 1990, p. 240, note). This is the interpretation of Rabbi Ya’akov Emden.

⁶ Source: *The Baseball Almanac* found at: <http://www.baseball-almanac.com/box-scores/boxscore.php?boxid=196810100SLN>.

⁷ The late, great Jack Buck and Harry Carey called the game for St. Louis.

Baseball: Physical, Spiritual and Intellectual

Joshua L. Segal

I don't know that a formal study has ever been done to determine what is the most popular team sport among Jews, but baseball has to be considered to be a contender. I suggest that the reason is that the sport appeals to the physical, the spiritual and the intellectual that exists in greater or lesser amounts in all of us.

On a physical level, baseball is a game that most anyone can play. It doesn't cost a fortune for equipment, like hockey. You don't have to be physically gigantic, like football. You don't have to be exceptionally tall, like basketball. It's a game that can be played at the highest levels of competition by average people.

On a spiritual level, baseball has been around a long time. Of the major professional sports in this country, it is older than all. As a result, it has years of history, records, statistics and embarrassments. Jews love history. We study our own. We assess what we are and who we are, based on the records of those people who came before us.

There are lists maintained of Jewish baseball players. Recently, one Jewish baseball fan issued a set of cards of Jews who played the game. There have been a number of Jews who played major league baseball who subsequently found their way to the Hall of Fame: Hank Greenberg — a great home run hitter. In his best year he hit 58 at a time when baseball was a haven for white Protestants. Antisemitic remarks abounded over the fear that Babe Ruth's 60-home run record might be broken by - a Jew. The other great one was a pitcher, Sandy Koufax, who was a strikeout king and an MVP/Cy Young winner for a number of seasons. The common thing that both shared Jewishly speaking is that each declined to play baseball in world series games that were scheduled for Yom Kippur. These heroes provide us with a positive role model for the spiritual choices we have to make in life.

But on an intellectual level, baseball, more than any other sport, parallels day-to-day life and from a specifically Jewish perspective, baseball parallels talmudic thinking.

Let's take a look at some of the features of baseball. There are precise rules. And like the Talmud, the true student of the game likes to hypothesize all kinds of odd problems, such as, "how can a triple play occur with no defensive player touching the ball?" Inevitably, like the page of Talmud, one question spawns another and sometimes the new question is very related to the first and sometimes, it is only tangentially related. Rule changes in baseball are as sparse as constitutional amendments. While an umpire's judgment certainly has impact on the game, the focus of the game is on the ball and the only time that players are in close proximity is when the ball is nearby. Therefore, there is not the opportunity to "get away with things" while the umpire is "looking the other way."

Not only are the rules precise, but even the play is precise. If I were listening to a football game and heard, "the halfback went over left tackle," I don't know specifically what the other 20 players on the field were doing. On the other hand, in a baseball game, with no runners on base, if I said, "there is a ground ball to the short-stop," I know:

1. The ball is somewhere between 2nd and 3rd base.
2. The first baseman is hustling toward first base.
3. The catcher is running up behind first base to back up the throw and
4. The man who hit the ball is running towards first base.

Baseball is a team sport and each player has a position to play. But while many of the positions require special skills, each basically combines running, catching and throwing. The expectation of a fielder is for perfection. Sure, errors occur, but there are very few players who do not make 95% of the fielding plays that they are expected to make.

That's the way it is in our day-to-day work life. Each of us may be hired for a particular specialty, but we use many of the same skills. Whether a high level scientist or a low level clerk, we all need to read, write, do some arithmetic and these days, probably some keyboarding. Within the jobs we do, we are allowed some errors, but unless you are the weatherman, just like the baseball fielder, you better be correct more than 90%, at least if you want to keep the job. Within the Jewish experience, each year, we wipe the slate clean at the High Holydays and start again. The imagery we are taught is that God opens the "Book of Life" in which is written every detail of what we did publicly and privately in the past year.

Similarly, in baseball, our cumulative lifetime record is well known, but the week-to-week statistics that draw so much interest among baseball fans is limited to the current season. The fielding skills of baseball most clearly parallel the inter-human aspects of life. The ball comes your way. You must catch it, know to whom to throw it to, and then — throw it in a timely manner. While team play is important, each player also has an opportunity to "go-it-alone" when it is his turn to bat. While it is true that the hitter must coordinate what he does with the coaches and the other runners on base, ultimately, the experience is a one-on-one confrontation with the pitcher.

This is more analogous to corporate marketing teams. Each company has a set of skills and products with which they compete. In this arena the level success is measured, not by batting 1000 or 100%, but by succeeding 20 to 30% of the time. But when the chips are down, the stress level goes up. It's more important how you hit when there are runners on second and third base, and there are times where hitting a home run is no more significant than a single. And that's another reality of life. There are times we lose no matter how well we do and there are times when seemingly insignificant things we do are rewarded with much money and/or great praise. Sometimes, the hitter nails one, only to be robbed by a spectacular fielding play. Other times, we are the beneficiaries of a judgment error on the part of the fielders. And that's the reality. Sometimes we do everything right and lose. Sometimes, we win, in spite of ourselves. A good baseball team wins 55% of its games. A great team wins 60%.

In summary, baseball is a reflection of the realities of life. It also represents a mix of the physical, the spiritual and the intellectual. In some aspects, 100% is expected. In some 60% is good enough and in still others, 30% is a satisfactory target. While our lifetime record is cumulative, the current year and this moment in time is where the focus lies. We are part of a team, but we are also individuals and as individuals, each of us gets to stand alone occasionally, with the spot light on us.

NOTE

¹ One way: Runners on first and second base, no outs. The batter pops the ball up in the infield between second and third base. The "infield fly rule" is called making the batter out. The runner on first starts toward second and passes the runner on second, making him out and immediately afterwards, the ball hits the runner leaving second base.

Jake, Hank, Sandy, and Me

Stephen Fuchs

For me, my consciousness of my special identity as a Jew as it relates to athletics began back in the 1950s, when, on a Rosh Hashanah afternoon, I heard the mellifluous voice of the great Red Barber say, “The old familiar number 31 of Brooklyn first base coach Jake Pitler will be missing today as he is observing the Jewish New Year and is not in the ball park.”

My consciousness of Jews in American sports developed further during *oneg shabbat* (receptions following services) at Sabbath Eve services at my congregation, Temple Sharey Tefilo in East Orange, New Jersey. My parents were regular Sabbath eve attendees, and as I look back on my childhood, I realize that one of the most precious gifts they gave me was to bring me with them. I wanted to be with them even though I often counted ahead to see how many pages were left in the service. At the *oneg shabbat*, while they socialized with friends, I drifted into the Temple’s combination museum and library and browsed through the exhibits and the books.

Invariably, as a young boy who loved athletics, my hands picked out *The Jew in American Sports*, by Harold U. Ribalow. The book was published in 1952 and contained sketches of Jewish athletes most of whom I had never heard. Their stories fascinated me. I became familiar with such names as Morrie Arnovich, Al Singer, Moe Berg, and, of course, Hank Greenberg. Sandy Koufax came of age as a baseball and Jewish icon as I moved through high school and college.

Greenberg and Koufax were not just Jews who happened to play sports. They were Jews who, through circumstances of time, location, and the game of baseball, became symbols of Jewish pride as our people searched for the elusive balance in their identities as Jews and Americans. They – perhaps unwittingly – helped us in our struggle to gain full acceptance in a gentile world while maintaining (to differing degrees) our identity as Jews.

Hank Greenberg

American antisemitism reached its peak in the 1930s. The Great Depression proved the well-known axiom that the comfort level of Jews is in a direct relationship with the health of the economy. With Henry Ford’s *Dearborn Independent* still popular and his book, *The International Jew, the World’s Foremost Problem*, and the rantings of Father Charles Coughlin leading the way, the 30s were not a comfortable decade for American Jews especially in the Detroit area, where Greenberg played.

Hank Greenberg’s story is well-known to us. According to *The Baseball Page.com*, “Amid the rising antisemitism of the 1930s, Hank Greenberg’s baseball heroics took on symbolic meaning for many Jewish Americans. He was the first baseball star to enter the military in World War II, doing so voluntarily.”¹

As a player, Greenberg ranks among the all-time greats. He is the first and one of only three players in *all of history* to win Most Valuable Player awards at two different positions (he played first base and left field). He played in four World Series in his war-shortened career, and he led the Detroit Tigers to two world championships in 1935 and 1945.

In 1934, Hank batted .339 with 63 doubles, and he hit .328 with 170 RBIs in 1935. Injuries hampered him in 1936, but in 1937, he drove in 183 runs (one short of Lou Gehrig’s all-time record) with 103 extra-base hits and a batting average of .337. In 1939, he hit 41 home runs and had 150 RBIs, with a batting average of .340.

His greatest year, though, was 1938, when he hit 58 home runs with 146 RBIs. His 119 walks might well have prevented him from eclipsing Babe Ruth's home run record, and it was frequently heard that he received so many passes because of a reluctance of many in baseball to have a Jew equal or tie Babe Ruth's record.

The reluctance of Tiger Manager Bucky Harris to play Greenberg regularly as a young player, and the Tiger's curious sale of a still productive and very popular Greenberg after the 1946 season, suggests to many that antisemitism was still a factor in Major League Baseball decisions during the years of Greenberg's career.

My interest in Greenberg, though, is as the role model he became for American Jews. He was by no means a religious man – although his parents were Orthodox – but he did sit out on Yom Kippur and actually consulted a Reform rabbi who gave him (incredulously, to me) his okay to play on Rosh Hashanah during a tight 1934 pennant race. In that Rosh Hashanah contest, Greenberg hit two home runs in a 2-1 victory. When he sat out on Yom Kippur, though, he inspired the following poem by Edgar A. Guest, which appeared in *The Detroit Free Press*.²

The Irish didn't like it when they heard of Greenberg's fame
For they thought a good first baseman should possess an Irish name;
And the Murphy's and Mulrooney's said they never dreamed they'd see
A Jewish boy from Bronxville out where Casey used to be.
In the early days of April not a Dugan tipped his hat
Or prayed to see a "double" when Hank Greenberg came to bat.
In July the Irish wondered where he'd ever learned to play.
"He makes me think of Casey!" Old Man Murphy dared to say;
And with fifty-seven doubles and a score of homers made
The respect they had for Greenberg was being openly displayed.
But on the Jewish New Year when Hank Greenberg came to bat
And made two home runs off pitcher Rhodes they cheered like mad for that.
Came Yom Kippur holy fast day world wide over to the Jew
And Hank Greenberg to his teaching and the old tradition true
Spent the day among his people and he didn't come to play.
Said Murphy to Mulrooney, "We shall lose the game today!
We shall miss him on the infield and shall miss him at the bat,
But he's true to his religion and I honor him for that!"

Did the antisemitic feelings of the times that were often magnified by slurs and comments from opposing players and fans bother Greenberg? Of course they did. He once noted candidly: "How the hell could you get up to home plate every day and have some son-of-a-bitch call you a Jew bastard and a kike and a sheenie and get on your ass without feeling the pressure? If the ballplayers weren't doing it, the fans were. I used to get frustrated as hell. Sometimes I wanted to go into the stands and beat the shit out of them."³

What Henry Benjamin Greenberg did, though, was much more effective and much more satisfying. He provided Jews across the land a symbol of strength, power, and success. He was a fine athlete, a war hero, and a mensch, with a marvelous work ethic that made him one of the greatest ballplayers ever. When he entered the synagogue on Yom Kippur in 1934, he received a standing ovation from the congregation. He made us proud to be Jews.

Sandy Koufax

In the five or so years before arm trouble ended his career at 31, Sandy Koufax may well have been the greatest pitcher who ever lived. Although he last pitched nearly 40 years ago, my memories of him are vivid. My most prominent one is the first inning of his perfect game — when he struck out the side in the first inning on nine pitches. I have never seen anyone do that before or since. I remember saying as he walked off the mound after those nine pitches, “I can’t imagine anyone getting a bat on his pitches today.”

In 1961, when Koufax was in his first outstanding season, the famed *Los Angeles Times* columnist Jim Murray wrote: “Sandy’s fastball was so fast some batters would start to swing as he was on his way to the mound. His curveball disappeared like a long putt going in a hole.”⁴

The *National Baseball Hall of Fame* web page sums up Koufax’s career succinctly: “After Sandy Koufax finally tamed his blazing fastball, he enjoyed a five-year stretch as perhaps the most dominating pitcher in the game’s history. He won 25 games three times, won five straight ERA titles, and set a new standard with 382 strikeouts in 1965. His fastball and devastating curve enabled him to pitch no-hitters in four consecutive seasons, culminating with a perfect game in 1965. He posted a 0.95 ERA in four career World Series, helping the Dodgers to three championships.”⁵

In addition Koufax was an All-Star six times, the National League MVP in 1963 and the Cy Young Award winner three times as well. He was also World Series MVP in ’63 and ’65. One of his most memorable games was his three-hit shutout of the Minnesota Twins in Game Seven of the 1965 World Series. He also shut out the Twins in Game Five of that series, on four hits.

Of course, for all his feats on the field, his most memorable act as a Jew was refusing to pitch in the first game of the ’65 Series, on October 6, because that day was Yom Kippur. Like Greenberg, Sandy Koufax was not a religious man, but he demonstrated his pride in his heritage publicly. From that day to this, he has been an inspiration to me.

In 1966, before my body became old and neuropathically challenged, I won the Eastern College Athletic Conference College Division Draw II tennis tournament at Rider College in Trenton, New Jersey. I played five of the best matches of my life at that tournament. I still cherish that victory and seeing my name in the national tennis magazines and the *New York Times*. I was excited at the prospect of returning the next year — my senior year — to compete as Hamilton College’s number one player in the Draw I Division.

When I learned, however, that the dates of that tournament coincided with Yom Kippur, I made without hesitation — but with much trepidation — the longer-than-it-usually-seemed walk to the gym to tell my coach that I would not compete and why. From that day to this, I still love to play tennis.

On the local level, when I lived in Maryland and Tennessee, I won a number of tournaments of which I am proud. But my proudest moment as an athlete is the tournament in which I did *not* play. It allowed me to realize that compared with others over the centuries, I was paying a piddling price to express my pride in being a Jew. It also allowed me to feel

that, in my own small way, I was following in the footsteps of men like Jake Pitler, Hank Greenberg, and Sandy Koufax. I am honored to be in their company and grateful for the example they set for me and for so many others as Jews in American sports.

NOTES:

¹ *The BaseballPage.com*, Hank Greenberg, web page.

² Edgar A. Guest, *Detroit Free Press*, 1934 (date uncertain).

³ Barry Burston, *The Diamond Trade: Baseball and Judaism*, web page.

⁴ Jim Murray, "Sandy Rare Specimen", column, August 31, 1961, quoted in, *The Great Ones*, Los Angeles Times Books, 1999, 27.

⁵ *National Baseball Hall of Fame*, web page, Sandy Koufax.

Baseball Kabbalah¹

Reuven Goldfarb

For Gerry,
athlete and scholar,
my first teacher in baseball

“Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field.” —
Deuteronomy 28:

“Baseball is good for ya, little reuben.” — Cinquefoil, in Chapter 18 of
Michael Chabon’s *Summerl*

My friend Shelley, a couples and family counselor, once told me about an experience he had had as a youngster in Hebrew School. The school he went to in the 1950s was orthodox and strict, with attendance in class and at *Shabbat* services closely monitored. One Saturday he was playing ball with some friends at a distance from *shul*, thinking that he was safe. But someone had seen him. When he returned to Hebrew School the following week, he was severely reprimanded for his malfecance. In all innocence, he responded, “But I feel much closer to God when I’m playing ball than when I’m in Junior Congregation.” Uh oh. The scolding he had received before was mild compared to the outburst that followed this heretical utterance.

For the summer after my father’s Bar Mitzvah (this would be 1920), my grandfather — Pop — had arranged for him to study Talmud with a respected teacher in the neighborhood, whom he paid in advance for this privilege. My father spent the summer playing ball with his friends. When Pop met the teacher around the High Holy Days, he asked about his son’s progress. The teacher replied, “Your son? I haven’t seen him since the end of school!” I am sure that Judgment Day was heavier for my father that year than ever before.

I take it as a given that this experience is fairly common. In fact, it reminds me of some stories that are told about the Ba’al Shem Tov² and Reb Nachman³, both of whom at times preferred being in nature to learning in the *beit midrash* (House of Study) and often prayed outdoors. I suggest that there are some similar principles at work in both baseball and Jewish teachings. There is certainly a deep affinity between baseball and Jewish Americans that equals or exceeds the attraction that the national pastime has for members of other ethnic groups. While seriously underrepresented at the competitive level (even with such exceptions as Hank Greenberg, Al Rosen, Sandy Koufax, Ken Holtzman, and the more recent sensation, Shawn Green, duly noted), we have been disproportionately represented among the sport’s scribes, chroniclers, statisticians, agents, and owners. At an evening program I attended some years ago at Cody’s Books, entitled “On Writing Baseball,” noted critic and San Francisco State Professor Eric Solomon announced his plans for a book focusing on Jewish involvement with the sport, and his venture is far from the only one. Numerous such books have appeared in the last half century. However, distancing myself from this particular ethnocentric focus, my purpose in this article is not to dwell on the relative talent and frequency of Jewish ballplayers (a deservedly and thoroughly researched obsession), but to examine the resemblances between certain Jewish mystical and moral teachings and the folkways, rules, and logic of baseball, beginning with the remarkable congruity between the kabbalistic Tree of Life and the positions of a team in the field when an opposing player is at bat.

I will ask you to imagine the layout of a team — three outfielders, four infielders, and the “battery” (pitcher and catcher). That’s a total of nine players. Add the batter, and you’ve got ten players on the field at the time the ball is put into play, the same number of *sefirot* (Divine Emanations) that constitute the Tree of Life, a schematic drawing of the universe used by mystics to contemplate and comprehend the workings of God, the energy patterns set in motion by the Divine Will.

According to this analogy, or metaphor, God might have said, “Play ball!” instead of “Let there be light!” And you’ve heard of the seventh inning stretch? Does that sound like *Shabbat* to you? Well, in any case, along with a diagram of team positions, you will also need an image of the Tree of Life. Miriam Stampfer, with the help of MacPaint, has obliged me by creating a suitable baseball graphic, and Rabbi Ayla Grafstein gave me a basic chart of the *sefirot* and their connecting paths, a schematic model of the Tree according to the system of the earlier kabbalists, which I have placed above it. The dotted circle, known as *Da’at*, or Knowledge, appears in its present location in versions of the chart that omit *Keter*. In my analogue, it represents shallow center field and reminds us of the range and mobility the center field position requires. In his translation of *Sefer Yetsirah*, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan says that *Da’at* “is not a *Sefirah*, but merely the point of confluence between Wisdom and Understanding.” He goes on to explain that “in many ways, however, it behaves as a *Sefirah*, and it is thus often included among them.”⁴ In some versions of softball, as if following this very template, one fielder is assigned to short center and another to deep center. Baseball, however, retains its allegiance to the earlier model and expects one fielder to patrol both zones.

You can also think of *Da’at* as the zone where an infielder, usually the shortstop, runs to relay a throw from the outfield, as well as the place where three fielders — typically the second baseman, shortstop, and center fielder — converge to strive to snare a Texas Leaguer (a short pop fly). Kabbalistically, this is a place of transition, where the energies of the Upper Worlds are transformed or stepped down, in electrical terms — to enter the world of duality, a situation, of course, that is fraught with all kinds of peril, a juncture at which collisions and breakages are liable to occur. Excellent coordination is required to avoid disaster, and agility and alertness are needed to capture the spheroid and convey it to its intended target. Here caution is married to daring.

Thus, the Tree, with its ten *sefirot*, may be superimposed upon the players in the field, poised to begin their game. And this is the correspondence, at least the way I read it:

<i>Keter</i> /Crown (Fontanel)	Center Field
<i>Chokhmah</i> /Wisdom (Right Brain)	Right Field
<i>Binah</i> /Understanding (Left Brain)	Left Field
<i>Chesed</i> /Lovingkindness/Overflow (Right Arm)	Second Base
<i>Gevurah</i> /Strength/Discipline/Limit Setting (Left Arm)	Shortstop
<i>Tiferet</i> /Beauty/Harmony (Heart)	Pitcher
<i>Netzach</i> /Victory/Endurance (Right Thigh).....	First Base
<i>Hod</i> /Splendor/Grace (Left Thigh)	Third Base
<i>Yesod</i> /Foundation/Communication (Sign of the Covenant)	Batter
<i>Malkhut</i> /Sovereignty/Groundedness (Feet)	Catcher

Of course, what makes the game or the Tree interesting and relevant is the motion that develops when the system is activated. It is a dynamic system, responding to circumstances but guided by several underlying principles or rules. In the case of the game, the elaborate rules of baseball govern. In the Tree (or game) of Life, it is the complex laws

revealed in the Torah. In both systems, actions take place along particular paths. In the sefirotic system, the paths between the *sefirot* are as important as the *sefirot* themselves. In baseball, the runners must proceed along certain predetermined base paths, until they either make an out or advance on a hit, force, error, sacrifice, fielder's choice, stolen base, passed ball, wild pitch, or balk. In Kabbalah, there are 32 Paths of Wisdom, the ten *sefirot* and the 22 lines that connect them. In baseball, too, there are ten players on the field and complex interconnecting lines that manifest when the ball is put into play and the spheroid is hit, caught, or thrown from player to player. However, the paths between the bases are the most crucial ones.

Whatever the runners and fielders do, a scorekeeper records the results, an action analogous to *Cheshbon HaNefesh* (accounting of the soul) by which an ethical Jew periodically assesses his behavior. If someone scores a run, he comes home (*Olam HaBah* — the world to come) and receives a reward — a positive mark in the score book — and a warm welcome from his teammates and fans. If he is a great player, he may be admitted to the Hall of Fame, like a pious Jew or anyone replete with good deeds entering *Gan Eden* (Paradise). There, in the gallery of exalted heroes, his deeds are acclaimed by successive generations and compared with those of other standouts. There is similar hagiographic praise for the accomplishments of great prophets, sages, scholars, and rabbis in our sacred literature⁴.

In both disciplines the concept of teamwork is paramount. A player who sacrifices himself for his team (*Mesirat HaNefesh* — selfless service, even martyrdom) or who leads his team (*Admor* — the leader of his generation) is equally praised. In Jewish terms this quality is alluded to in *Pirke Avot* — *Ethics of the Fathers*, in the words of Hillel, who said: "Do not distance yourself from the community" (II:5).

Now let's take a look at some of these positions and see how they match up with the *sefirot*. In center field (*Keter* or Crown) you have some of the greatest players ever to play the game: Willie Mays, Tris Speaker, Wahoo Sam Crawford, Mickey Mantle, and Duke Snider. Great outfielders are not only great hitters; they are also known for their great arms (and golden gloves), which they need for strong throws to the infield to catch runners or prevent them from advancing. Babe Ruth, Carl Furillo, Rocky Colavito, and Roberto Clemente, among right fielders, and Barry Bonds (in his prime) among left fielders, are but a few of the many outfielders known for this ability.

It is also interesting to note that right field and left field are so called because they are seen from the position of someone who is facing the field — whether as home plate umpire, catcher, or batter. The Tree is analogous to the back of an androgyne, so that its right and the left sides correspond to right and left field, an example of bilateral symmetry, although ballpark dimensions vary widely and are often far from symmetrical — unlike the infield dimensions, which are scrupulously identical, although the quality of the various surfaces (true also of the outfield) differs widely. Thus, although these structures complement one another, they are not mirror images, and the outfielders are "out there" in a free-ranging world of their own, essential and alert but patient, waiting for the time when they will be needed, yet all the while exerting an influence by their very presence and availability — like the *Partzufim*, or Divine Personalities, described in esoteric kabbalistic texts and hymns.

But as we noted above, most of the action takes place in the infield, the world of the seven lower *sefirot*. There is constant interaction between the second baseman, or *Chesed* (Lovingkindness), and the shortstop, or *Gevurah* (Strength and Discipline — which includes setting limits), popularly known as the keystone combination. To see a pair of accomplished middle fielders turn a double play is a thing of rare beauty, like seeing a

pair of skilled dancers execute a *pas de deux* with apparent ease and grace. The shortstop is often captain of the team (Pee Wee Reese comes to mind) or is the infield leader, calling out who should catch pop flies, and might also be the holler guy, the assertive one, maybe even the rally killer.

The pitcher, *Tiferet* (Beauty or Symmetry) is the heart of the team. It is he (or she) who initiates the motion by hurling the spheroid to the catcher, *Malkhut* (Groundedness/Responsibility) with whom he has an intimate relationship — indeed, they are called “battery-mates” — past the batter, *Yesod* (Foundation/Connection), who is standing there with a phallic club in his hands, whether he is a right-handed, left-handed, or switch-hitting player. Without making the analogy too pat, *Yesod* is related, among other functions, to the sexual or generative. Thus, the batter is trying to generate runs (offspring) to the orgasmic delight of his teammates (family) and fans (friends, clan, tribe).

An iron man — Lou Gehrig, Ted Kluszewski, or Gil Hodges — often fields first base (*Netzakh* or Endurance). Gehrig played in 2,130 consecutive games at the position, a record that has only recently been broken — after 60 years — by Cal Ripken. Gehrig epitomized the quality of *Netzakh* (Endurance), with which Moshe *Rabbeinu* (Moses, our Teacher) is identified in the Jewish heroes’ hall of fame. Moshe also is known for his profound humility, a quality that came easily (and out of necessity) to Gehrig, who played on the same team as the flamboyant Ruth.

Spectacular fielding third basemen, responsible for *Hod* (Splendor or Grace), such as Brooks Robinson, are famous for the tremendous agility they demonstrate in their extremely difficult role, which in kabbalistic terms corresponds to the priestly role of Aharon. The position is aptly named “the hot corner,” for the blazing line drives and hard grounders that are frequently hit there. Pie Traynor, Graig Nettles, and Mike Schmidt are still appreciated for the seemingly impossible plays they made. To see any one of them extend his body, while airborne, across the bag, to spear a liner, or to stretch and snare a ball deep in the hole and make the long throw to first from his knees, challenges the limits of what we had thought possible. It verges on the miraculous. For the fire pan and the fielder’s glove have both often prevented catastrophic losses. One of the most moving passages in the Torah is the description of Aharon *HaKohen*, the High Priest and the brother of Moses, rushing into the midst of his perishing people, his fire pan extended, on which the smoking incense burned. The Torah says, “He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was checked” (Numbers 17:13).

Of course, to compare physical agility and moral strength is also quite a stretch, but in both examples I think you will find a willingness to take personal risks and assume personal responsibility for the outcome of a crisis on behalf of the *kehillah* — the collective, the nation, or the team, the group to which one is loyally committed. Such an example is inspiring, no matter what is ultimately at stake.

I hope I have by now sufficiently established the underlying similarities between these two models for life, one considered a game, “the national pastime,” and the other an all-embracing lifestyle, if followed to its full extent. I’m sure you can think of numerous additional applications. Some that have come up in discussions so far have been in response to questions: What about the umpires? Easy. They’re *Dayanim* (rabbinical judges). That’s why they wear dark colors. Managers? *Rebbes* (spiritual guides). Coaches? *Gabbais* (assistants). Batboys and equipment managers? *Shammeses* (maintenance men). Substitutes? *Batlanim* (benchwarmers). The opposing team? The *Sitra Achra* (the Other Side).

But it is well-known that with no *Yetzer HaRa* (“Evil Urge” — libido or *E’lan Vital*), life would be static. In *Genesis Rabbah* (IX:9), a midrashic commentary on the Torah, Rav Nahman says in the name of Rav Samuel that “were it not for the will to evil, men

would not build homes, or take wives, or propagate, or engage in business.” He goes on to quote from Ecclesiastes (*Kohelet*), whose authorship is traditionally assigned to King Solomon: “I considered all labour and all excelling in work, that it is a man’s rivalry with his neighbour.” (*Kohelet* IV:4)⁵ Thus, even within a team, according to Clem Labine, the great Dodger reliever, “harmony was not always a good thing; a little tension, a little edge was useful, if only to show that things matter. Labine liked the idea of a team that sustained a manageable degree of anger — ‘It shows you’re not lethargic about what you’re doing’ — so long as it did not flare [up].”⁶ Without this intensity, this drive, the mainspring of activity would be paralyzed.

And this game, while at times slow moving, is fraught with anticipation and filled with continual mental references to precedent. Thus the master strategists — managers, pitchers, catchers, and hitters — are always weighing the consequences of a particular deed, like the *mitzvah mavens* (those who perform righteous acts) of old, the sages of the Talmud. Yet temptation and risk-taking are intrinsic to the game. The overweening urge to prevail over one’s opponent, to win, might sometimes obscure one’s better judgment. Yet often, playing the percentages, maintaining a steady, conservative approach, does not result in the desired breakthrough to victory, either. Likewise, in true Gnostic fashion, the home team becomes the “other side” for the visitors, or to their opponents when they go on the road. This is quite in accord with the nature of *Ivri*, the original name for Hebrew, which means “from beyond” or “the other side,” referring to Abraham and his clan, those Hebrew and Aramaic-speaking associates who came from the other side of the Euphrates River with him. In due course, we have allies and enemies, who have transmogrified into philosemites and antisemites. The word “fan,” of course, comes from “fanatic,” which is derived from *fanum* or temple. Thus, the first frenzied fans were religious fanatics. Richard Grossinger aptly named his 1985 anthology *The Temple of Baseball*.⁷ He borrowed the title from a column by my friend Lowell Cohn, in which he recounts an interview with former Los Angeles Dodger second baseman Jim Lefebvre who, to his own surprise, uses the term to describe Yankee Stadium.

Evil changes shape and turns into its opposite. The game itself is a paradox, charged with ambiguity, uncertainty, and perennial, unanswerable questions, such as, “Would old-timers be able to compete with today’s players?” This kind of question parallels the suspicion voiced by numerous commentators that Noah, a *Tzaddik tamim* (a pure and saintly person) “in his generations” (Genesis 6:9), would not have been so special in Abraham’s time. There are also the “What ifs?": the dangling sense that if a certain course of action had not been followed, then everything would have turned out differently. There are often excruciating post-game analyses as detailed (though not as weighty) as the debates about blind curves in Jewish history. Baseball is a game that offers life-like analogies while Judaism is a religious civilization that strives to close the gap between metaphor and reality, so that *Malkhut Shamayim* (the Kingdom of Heaven) may exist here, in our earthly life.

I would like to conclude with a conversation I had with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi at the 1989 P’nai Or Kallah, a week-long gathering of representatives from dozens of Jewish renewal communities that took place at Bryn Mawr College in early July. Reb Zalman, who was then turning sixty-five, had his two young sons, Barya and Yotam, with him. Lately he had begun playing ball with them and, apropos of this, remarked to me, “You know, I used to think baseball was a silly game — ” “Oh no,” I broke in, “it’s the American Kabbalah!” “But now,” he went on, “I’m beginning to like it.”

First *addendum*: At a 1999 Oakland A’s game, a 6-2 victory over the Boston Red Sox, my youngest son, Elishama, noticed a painted jersey on the outfield wall in right, with Joe DiMaggio’s name and number (5), clearly visible. He asked whether major league base-

ball had retired the Yankee Clipper's number, and I replied that I had heard no such thing. Jackie Robinson's #42 jersey appeared at its left, and Elishama suggested that this was probably a commemorative gesture in honor of the 50th year since Robinson joined the Dodgers and integrated the game; Robinson, however, broke in with the Dodgers in 1947, although his best year, when he batted .342 and won the National League's Most Valuable Player Award, had indeed occurred 50 years before, in 1949. Other jerseys, on the left field wall, honored Rollie Fingers and Catfish Hunter, two A's players from the 1970s championship teams who had won election to the Hall of Fame. We observed that no Philadelphia A's were so honored here, although many of them were also in Cooperstown. Then it hit me. Joe had died this year; therefore, for the rest of the year, perhaps until his *Yahrtzeit* (the anniversary of someone's death), his painted jersey would remain in place. In synagogue, that very morning, I had noticed the plaque affixed to the chapel wall, to the right of the ark, on which were visible the names of congregants who had died within the year, a reminder of past distinction, and a focal point for those saying *Kaddish*, the Mourner's Prayer, in their honor. Another cultural parallel, another spiritual motif.

Second *addendum*: In the course of attending a couple of post-season games this past year, I noticed more parallels.

1. The Rules of Major League Baseball — the authoritative guide for determining how an umpire should rule on every conceivable play — is matched by the *Shulchan Aruch* ("Set Table"), the authoritative Code of Jewish Law, which serves as a guide to the conduct of observant Jews. Depending on circumstances, both codes permit considerable latitude in many areas where the law — or rules — are applied. The rabbi must exercise his own discretion in interpreting the law. The umpire, too, is often called upon to make a "judgment call." Simply calling a runner safe or out and calling a pitch a ball or strike is in many cases exceedingly difficult. Likewise, deciding whether a chicken is kosher (fit for consumption) or not is but one of many areas where the decision of the rabbi can be influenced by numerous factors inherent in the situation. In both cases the ruling is binding, and appeals are rarely successful.

2. Superstition. A baseball player will often wear the same socks or the same shirt, use the same bat, wear the same hat or medal, hitch his pants the same way, chew the same brand of gum, or practice any of a hundred variables so long as doing so seems to bring good fortune to his game. Likewise, there are many well-known folk customs, perhaps derived from centuries of countering bad luck in foreign lands, such as spitting three times (or simulating spitting by saying "poo-poo-poo"), saying *kayn ayin ha-rah* ("against the evil eye") or "God forbid!" and numerous other practices that have even become enshrined in *Halakhah* (law), though perhaps beginning as *minhagim* (customs), such as *Tashlikh* (the symbolic casting of sins into a body of water on Rosh HaShanah), covering mirrors after a death, and so on. Timely spitting seems to be one custom to which both traditions adhere. And both practices might have similar folk origins.

3. An intense interest in numbers. The compilation, analysis, and general obsession with statistics is a well-known and often remarked upon aspect of baseball culture. This interest, originally developed to evaluate skills as measured by an objective standard, has evolved into using the information thereby obtained for strategic purposes, known as "playing the percentages," the most prominent example of which is assuming that the percentages favor a right-handed batter when the opposing pitcher is left-handed

and favor the pitcher who is right-handed in a match-up with a right-handed batter. The statistics supporting this conclusion encourage managers to carry out a pattern of substitution, most notably in the use of pinch-hitters and relief pitchers.

In Judaic lore, each Hebrew letter is assigned a number, and words therefore have a numerical value. Words and names and phrases with identical numerical values are assumed to have cognate meanings. This form of seeking out similarities or equivalents in apparently dissimilar or unrelated places is known as the science of *Gematria*.

It is important to note one significant difference, however. The assigning of relative degrees of excellence to players based on their statistics, such as batting average, fielding percentage, earned run average and won-lost record does not have an exact counterpart in Jewish life. Although a somewhat mechanistic scale of values has evolved, whereby the performance of *mitzvot* (commandments) is contrasted with the commission of *avayrot* (misdeeds), the true calculation of excellence is understood to lie beyond human understanding. The True Judge, alone, is deemed qualified to determine a person's worth, which is based not only on actual deeds but also upon the opportunities to serve with which one has been blessed, one's inner intention, one's love for God and God's creation, and one's dedication to the purposes for which he or she has been given life. In baseball, too, it must be said, outstanding numbers are frequently outweighed by the possession of certain "intangibles," which often determine the value of a player to his team and the reputation he thereby garners in the annals of the game.

For biblical corroboration, see Psalm 147:10-11 — "Not in the strength of the horse does He desire, and not in the thighs of man does He favor. HaShem favors those who fear [stand in awe of] Him, those who yearn for His kindness." This passage reminds us that victory is not always achieved through the obvious and outwardly impressive attributes of strength and power. Many a team seems superior on paper but stumbles as Goliath did when he was faced by the redoubtable and resourceful David. (For the full story, see I Samuel, chapter 17.)

The attempt to assign value to a player based on salaries, bonuses, and incentives also has a counterpart in Jewish lore. Reb Nachman's allegorical fairy tale, "The Master of Prayer," mocks — yet has compassion for — the community whose members assign rank and status to individuals based on the amount of money each possesses. Their distorted sense of values is attributed to a great storm (in kabbalistic terms, *Shiv'irat haKaylim*, "the shattering of the vessels") that scattered the once unified human family across the world, an uprooting which in turn led to confusion and a diminution of standards. As the story progresses, however, the Master of Prayer gradually joins forces with the similarly exiled Warrior and other dispersed members of the King's court and restores proper perception of the truth to all of erring mankind.

I have come to regard this essay as my attempt to reconcile these contrasting paradigmatic figures, demonstrate their essential unity, and point to their common source. If, along the way, you have enjoyed a few smiles and flashes of recognition, I will consider our exchange another step toward *Tikkun Olam* — repair of the world.

Third *addendum*:

And finally, inescapably, I must make mention of the uncanny correspondences between the Hebrew calendar and its Holy Days cycle with the baseball season. Spring training begins in March, and the final exhibition games are played in early April, followed by Opening Day. *Nisan*, the first month of the Jewish year, also begins sometime in March, and Passover, the first major festival, usually occurs in April, although occasionally it begins at the end of March. It is typically preceded by a thorough house cleaning, the

main point of which is to get rid of bloat — *chumatz* — identified as any of the five species of grain that rise, like bread, upon contact with water: wheat, rye, barley, oats, and spelt — and the primary leavening agent itself, yeast (and baking powder). Likewise, major league rosters, swelling at 45 players, must be trimmed down to 25 by Opening Day. The superfluous grains and their byproducts are sent elsewhere, such *chumatz* being either burned or sold to a non-Jew (that is, someone who is not obligated to observe these ritual stringencies). Players who do not make the final cut are either sent to a team's farm club, traded, sold, or released outright. Like *chumatz*, they can also be bought back.

The fifty day interval between Passover and *Shavuot* (the next major Holy Day) is a time of self-scrutiny, as the psalmist says, "teach us to number our days, that we may get us a heart of wisdom" (90:12). We count the *omer* — in ancient times, by waving an *omer* (a sheaf's worth) of barley meal in the six basic directions: south, north, east, up, down, and west — and today by counting with a blessing. This is a way of keeping track of the shifting permutations of days and weeks and the specific qualities, based on the *sefirot*, that are associated with them. The driving purpose of this daily counting ritual is to refine our *midot* — personal attributes that can be elevated into virtues or diminished into vices — in order to merit receiving the Torah, the gift with which *Shavuot* (the Festival of Weeks) is today chiefly associated.

The first two months of the baseball season are also a time for close examination, during which the manager and his coaching staff and the owners and their front office personnel wonder whether the team has the right combination of players and the right chemistry to go all the way. If not, adjustments can still be made, that is, until the trading deadline (July 31st).

By mid-summer the season has begun to take its toll. There might be injuries to key players and other unexpected setbacks, even the firing of managers or the release of players who can no longer contribute or who do not perform as well as expected. Such deleterious trends and patterns of weakness in the lineup are noted by fans and scribes, who protest some decisions, recommend or applaud others, and watch with increasing concern as the clubs jockey for position.

In Jewish lore, the midsummer crisis centers around the three weeks that encompass the fast days of the 17th of *Tammuz* and the 9th of *Av*, which generally occur starting anywhere from late June to mid-July and conclude by mid-July to mid-August. It is a time when previous national disasters are recalled and collective responsibility assumed for the internal dissension that allowed these calamities to occur. There is a special focus on avoiding backbiting, rumor-mongering, and gossip, all of which tend to embarrass individuals and fracture group *esprit*.

In the home stretch, September and October, the pennant races heat up. Every play counts, and every player becomes even more aware of the possible consequences of a misplay, error, or temper tantrum leading to an expulsion, suspension, or benching. Fracas between teams and teammates are more likely to break out, and umpires' decisions on close plays are more hotly disputed. Yet some teams jell, and the early claims of good chemistry are proven true — or, in some cases, disproven, if, for example, some prima donna cares more about his own records than the team's success.

Jews are entering the last month before the great accounting that takes place on *Rosh HaShanah* (Head of the Year) — also known as *Yom HaDin* (the Day of Judgment), *Yom Teruah* (the Day of Sounding the Shofar), and *Yom HaKesah* (the Day of Concealment) — referring to the barely visible New Moon and to the Judgment itself). In Elul, the month that precedes our New Year, we seek to mend our frayed relationships, straighten out past misunderstandings, and heal interpersonal wounds. To do so requires a considerable measure of humility, expressed as a willingness to acknowledge one's own failures, faults,

and flaws. Likewise, our relationship with the Sovereign of the Universe is often in need of renewal. Fortunately, this time of year is considered ideal for a sincere approach. Many beautiful interactions occur as people meet one another with open hearts and approach God in a spirit of repentance or *t'shuva*, meaning "return" to the path of righteousness. There is even a well-known saying, "The King is in the field," to describe God's closeness and easy access to the true penitent.

On *Rosh HaShanah*, we are taught, God inscribes our names in the Book of Life, if we merit it, or in the other book, if we do not, for the coming year. During the Ten Days of *Teshuvah* or *Yamim Noraim*, the Days of Awe, which fall between *Rosh HaShanah* and *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement, there is still time for the inscription to be emended. On *Yom Kippur*, however, the written Judgment is sealed — made permanent — although some say the sealing is not final until *Hoshana Raba*, the seventh day of *Sukkot* (which I'll get to in a minute).

And what is happening on the diamond? Final determinations are also being made in the standings. Some teams are out of contention, others are still in the throes of the race or barely hanging on, and a lucky few may have already clinched their division title or a wild card position. The playoffs generally happen around this time, and by *Sukkot*, the fall harvest festival that follows *Yom Kippur* by four days, the World Series combatants have emerged from the scuffle. Here's a stretch: the distinguishing features of *Sukkot* are 1) the construction of a *Sukkah*, a temporary shelter with a permeable roof, and 2) "*bentching lulav*," the holding together of the "four species" (*arba minim*) and, after saying a blessing, shaking them in the six directions referred to earlier. These species consist of a palm branch (*lulav*), a citron or *etrog*, three branches of myrtle (*hadass*), and two of willow (*aravah*). To my conceptual vision, the *lulav* resembles a bat, the *etrog* a ball, and the five combined branches of the other two species the figure of a glove. Okay, it's a stretch. But do you really think it's only a coincidence that the World Series is often played at precisely this time of year? And sometimes in a stadium with a retractable roof?

What is a coincidence? C.G. Jung used the term "synchronicity" to refer to otherwise apparently unrelated events that occur simultaneously, and energy healers and holistic thinkers alike often remark, "There are no accidents." Their point? There is a link, there is a connection. And while I agree that these circumstances may only demonstrate parallel evolution, with no demonstrable causative influence, that is exactly my point — there is an underlying pattern of which these instances are examples.

Baseball today is likewise usually played in an enclosure that is exposed to the elements. Like the *sukkah*, it has certain minimum required dimensions but no fixed shape. Thus, unless cookie cutter models are used, no two are alike and each has its charms and its peculiarities. And like the 360° *lulav* shaking, which, ideally, takes place in the *sukkah*, the ball can travel in all directions — in the air, on the ground, in fair or foul territory, that is, in front, behind, up, down, and to either side. And, of course, a ball hit into foul territory can still count for something. It can be caught for an out and even result in a double play if a runner is caught off base. It can count for a strike, and even if there are already two strikes on the batter (who cannot strike out on a foul ball — unless it's a third strike bunt), the foul ball at least adds to the pitch count and could therefore lead to a pitcher being replaced sooner. Every action counts.

Before and after each time the *lulav* bundle is extended, it is held close to the heart. The team that plays with heart and determination is more likely to win and better able to bear loss. "Ya Gotta Have Heart," the signature song of the Washington Senators in *Damn Yankees*, the Broadway musical and movie based on Douglass Wallop's novel, *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*, bears this out.

Want more? *Chanukah*, the Festival of Lights, occurs in December, a couple of months after the baseball season has ended. But memories of the season just past are still fresh. They fire the embers of discussion in the Hot Stove League. It's also the time of the Winter Meetings, where baseball executives talk business and prepare for the next season. During *Chanukah*, according to some, the sealed judgment can still be opened and revised. In January or February, as the sap rises, *Tu b'Shvat*, the New Year of the Trees, is celebrated, and players and their teams buy new equipment, among these items being the bats that are made of carefully chosen and aged billets of ash.

Here's a memory. One of the most exciting World Series games ever played occurred on *Simchat Torah*, 5746 (October 25, 1986), between the Boston Red Sox and the New York Mets. *Simchat Torah*, in the diaspora, is the ninth day, as it were, of *Sukkot*, but actually it is an extension of *Shemini Atzeret* (the Eighth Day of Solemn Assembly). In Israel, the two days and their ritual observances are combined. It is an extra day devoted to rejoicing in the Torah with a series of seven *hakafot*, circle dances that culminate in the reading of passages from the concluding section of the Torah. In traditional congregations, the complete conclusion and the beginning are only read the next morning. However, in some communities, the end and the beginning are both read at night.

On that memorable evening, my community, the Berkeley, California-based Aquarian Minyan, was holding a *Simchat Torah* retreat at Camp Lodestar in the Sierra foothills. The Red Sox and the Mets were playing their sixth game, with the Red Sox leading three games to two. Someone at the retreat had a radio, and between *hakafot*, he checked the score. Our group danced ecstatically for perhaps 15 or 20 minutes and then paused. During this brief interval, our friend reported on the progress of the game. I think we were all rooting for the Mets, as most of us had closer ties to New York than to Boston.⁸

As the tense, close game proceeded, we began to speculate that when the Mets fans in their countless synagogues concluded their services — which they were likely to do well before we would, as it was three hours later on the east coast, their focus on the game might shift the balance and push the Mets to victory. The Mets did win, in a completely unexpected way, on Mookie Wilson's ground ball, the culmination of a ten pitch at-bat, which rolled under first baseman Bill Buckner's glove and through his legs, in the bottom of the tenth inning. But whether this outcome was due to a sudden surge of fan attention, or for some other reason, I cannot say. The next day's game was rained out, and the Mets won the seventh game, 8-5, taking the Series, four games to three. The date was 24 *Tishrei*/October 27.

This year, 19 years later, through a computer from my home in Israel, I watched the Chicago White Sox beat the Houston Astros in four straight games. I watched the final innings in the early morning hours of 24 *Tishrei*, which once again fell on October 27th, as the civil and religious calendars coincide every 19 years.⁹

When I started to write about these correspondences, I was elaborating on a flash, a sudden insight. I hadn't yet realized how far-reaching and intricate the parallels between these analogical realms were. Therefore, I approached the subject light-heartedly, as much interested in creating a humorous effect as in the substance of my comparisons. The *frisson* of humor that accompanied my investigations leavened the search and increased its appeal to those who heard it. I even wrote a disclaimer to the essay, advising its readers not to take it all too seriously. In "A Caveat to 'Baseball Kabbalah,'" I explained:

"I wrote this extended comparison and analysis a bit tongue-in-cheek. I don't mean to imply that every analogue is filled with deep significance, nor do I mean to claim to have proven that these correspondences necessarily possess some overarching cosmic

meaning. Nevertheless, I feel that the preponderance of apparent linkages — in schematic layout, in numbers, and in assumed and expressed values — is no mere accident. Rather, these seem to emerge from some vast and perennial underlying pattern. I hope, therefore, that through example and humor, I have established some connection, some relation, between these worlds.”

This belated display of caution is evidence of my concern that taking this comparison too literally could eclipse the charm of the original idea and possibly lead someone to regard it as flippant or even heretical. So let me clarify my point, one more time: it's all a metaphor; it's poetry; it's a game, but one with high stakes. You can learn from one to live the other. Baseball models something that Judaism manifests, and Judaism models something that baseball manifests. Both reflect seasonal patterns in strikingly similar ways and exemplify fond hopes, great dreams, and *joi de vivre*, even though the *kavanah* — the intentionality — that each brings to its practice and discipline reflects its particular contrasting reasons for existing: victory on the field for one, redemption of the world for the other. Yet those who immerse themselves in either of these paths — players, fanatics, and worshippers alike — are blessed with moments of transcendence and vindication, a reward for their commitment and justification for all their toil and pain.

ENDNOTES

¹ Thanks to Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group for permission to reprint this essay, which previously appeared in *Worlds of Jewish Prayer: A Festschrift in Honor of Rabbi Zalman M. Schachter-Shalomi*, edited by Shohama Wiener and Robert Esformes (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1993). A nearly identical version appeared earlier in the author's community newsletter, *The Aquarian Minyan Tz'Khok /Laughter* (Berkeley, California, 1990, pp. 2-3). These versions have been further developed and greatly expanded.

² The Ba'al Shem Tov (literally, Master of the Good Name), Israel ben Eliezer (1698-1760), known to history as the founder of the Hasidic movement or, in Professor Arthur Green's memorable phrase, “the figure around whom the Hasidic movement crystallized.”

³ Reb Nachman — Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810), the great-grandson of the Ba'al Shem Tov and a profoundly influential Hasidic Master in his own right. He taught that sparks of the primeval creation lay slumbering in every blade of grass and could be raised by sincere prayer. How many prayers have been uttered (or muttered) in the field! — From the neophyte's, “Please don't let it be hit to me,” to the batter's, “Please let me get a hit,” to the pitcher's competing, “Just let me get this guy out!” The pastoral environment itself supports the yearning of its (albeit temporary) residents and is uplifted along with them. We are told that “Isaac went out to meditate [or supplicate] in the field” (Genesis 24:63), just prior to the arrival of his bride, Rebecca. Reb Nachman uses the central verb, “*lasuach*,” which also means, “to speak,” as a proof-text for his recommended form of prayer and meditation: talking directly to God.

⁴ Aryeh Kaplan, translator, *Sefer Yetzirah: The Book of Creation*, rev. ed. (York Beach, ME., 1997), p. 25.

⁵ We are told, for example, that during the lifetime of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, the Talmudic Sage who is traditionally credited with authorship of the *Zohar*, no rainbow appeared because his merit was sufficient to sustain the world without God or humanity needing any further reminders.

⁶ Cited by Nahum N. Glatzer, *Hammer on the Rock: A Midrash Reader* (New York, 1948, 1962, 1977), p. 15.

⁷ Michael Shapiro, *The Last Good Season: Brooklyn, the Dodgers, and Their Final Pennant Race Together* (New York, 2003), p. 53.

⁸ Richard Grossinger, ed., *The Temple of Baseball* (Berkeley, 1985).

⁹ Despite the hilarity of this occasion, there is also great pleasure to be gained by staying within the sanctity of the day and waiting until after the conclusion of the festival to receive news of sporting results and other secular events. That is how I have presently organized my life.

¹⁰ For more information on this topic, see my essay, "Your Portion in the Torah," in *Pumbedissa*, Volume 7, Number 3, 5760/2000, or visit my web site, www.reuengoldfarb.com. To discuss any of the ideas implicitly or explicitly stated in this essay, or any of the illustrative examples, feel free to send a note to reuvan@avirtov.com.

Kabaseballah

David Wechsler-Azen

The field and the world

The universe, according to many contemporary theories of astro-physics, began with a single point. In a split second, it expanded to a space about the size of home plate, and then burst forth. The expansion continues to this day and according to one theory will continue to expand infinitely. In the latest understanding of the world, superstring or M theory, we live in ten spatial dimensions, the three visible ones and seven others tightly wrapped up inside our cosmos.

These discoveries come as no surprise to those versed in Kabbalah. In this stream of received Jewish wisdom regarding the hidden nature of existence, creation also began with a single point. From that singular opening space began to emerge and at its edges it touches the infinity within which it expands. Within this space, ten aspects of divine energy are in play.

A baseball field also begins with a single point. From the tip at the back of home plate lines emanate which theoretically stretch to infinity. Within the field, players (including the batter) take ten positions to begin the game. Clearly, there is more to baseball than meets the eye.

According to Kabbalah, prior to creation all was Without End (*Ein Sof*), without differentiation. Rabbi Isaac Luria suggested that the Divine had to carve out a space absent of itself in which to create something else that could be independent and different. Thus the first act of creation was a withdrawal in order to generate space within Infinity into which something new could be projected.

The stadium surrounds and makes room for the field, thus representing the Infinite within which the world expands. Since fans sit in the area surrounding the field that parallels the world beyond the known, it is no surprise that fans' behavior borders on the unimaginable at times.

Moreover, fans therefore have a "God's eye-view" of the game, and act like it. As Rocky Bridges, a minor league manager once said: "There are three things the average man thinks he can do better than anyone else. Build a fire, run a hotel and manage a baseball team." Fans know it all, from what plays and moves the manager should have made to how a player should have handled a situation. Fans know everything but how to hit a major league fastball.

The kabbalistic corollary to fans is angels. Angels also know it all, from what a person has done to what they should do next. Some are supportive, some are adversarial, just like fans. They know everything but how to get physical.

Lest we forget, however, letting fans be fans allows for emotional catharsis, whether it be razzing or cheering. "The first human being who hurled an insult instead of a stone was the founder of civilization," Freud once observed. And we might add that the first person to pick up a stick and hit the stone back from whence it came was the founder of baseball.

When the withdrawal within *Ein Sof* occurred, the concept of two, *Ein Sof* and something other than *Ein Sof*, became real. Two marks the beginning of creation, the start for a home plate for the world. The Torah (Five Books of Moses) begins with the second letter of the Hebrew alphabet (*beit*) which equals the number two and also represents a home (*bayit*).

Home plate on the baseball field marks the beginning of the baseball field. And the boundary lines differentiate between the two realms of fair and foul. Without two, without distinctions, there can be no game.

We might approach the baseball field itself as a map of space-time. The tip of home plate represents the origin of the universe in a singular point. With each passing moment, the field of space itself expands. So, as time marches on, from the point of origin at home plate toward the outfield and eternity, the lines move out to the left and right marking the growth of space itself toward infinity.

"The beginning of existence is the secret concealed point. This is the beginning of all hidden things, which spread out from there and emanate, according to their species. From a single point you can extend the dimensions of all things," Moses de Leon wrote in the thirteenth century.¹ A home run thrills us because with the journey of the ball we travel from the beginning of everything out past the limits of the field of the known. We get a hint of the magical things, the extraordinary origins and the unknown mysteries beyond the bounds of our lives. A home run is a taste of the infinite brought to life.

When we enter a stadium, the building may be impressive. What really takes our breath away, however, is the sight and smell of the field of green shimmering like an emerald. Fresh grass, mowed often in distinct and interesting patterns beckons forth fresh play. The contrast of rich brown soil and green field, the diamond in the rough, does something to us that Astroturf, as practical in some climates as it is, cannot offer. The natural field returns us to Eden, to paradise.

It can be easy to forget that such arrangements do not happen by themselves. The head groundskeeper and crew work long and hard to manufacture the magic of the field. Sure, we can play sandlot baseball as kids, but major league baseball requires an upping of the ante. Behind the image of what we see lies hours of labor and the commitment of huge resources, natural and human.

Ben Zoma once saw a crowd on the steps of the Temple Mount. He said: "Blessed be the One who has created all these people to serve me.' For he used to say: 'What labors did Adam have to carry out before he obtained bread to eat? He plowed, he sowed, he reaped, he bound the sheaves, threshed the grain, winnowed the chaff, selected the ears, ground them, sifted the flour, kneaded the dough, and baked. And only then did he eat. Whereas I get up and find all these things done for me. And how many labors did Adam have to carry out before he obtained a garment to wear? He had to shear the sheep, wash the wool, comb it, spin it, weave it, and only then did he have a garment to wear. Whereas I get up and find all these things done for me. All kinds of craftsmen come to the door of my house, and when I rise in the morning, I find all these things ready for me.'"² Nothing can be taken for granted when we feel the presence of something special. To all the groundskeepers, all the makers of baseballs and uniforms, hot dogs and pretzels, beer and hats, we give our thanks.

Ontology recapitulates Phylogeny

From fertilized egg through in-utero growth to birth, a human being goes through all the stages of evolutionary design that have culminated in earthlings who can throw a ball, swing a bat, and send our spirits soaring with a home run. The special evolutionary achievement of baseball provides a recapitulation of the journey of the soul.

Baseball players arrive at the stadium and go into the clubhouse. There, they find every delight they could possibly desire, from any food they like to exercise equipment to massages and video games. They can review past games and consider their strategy for the upcoming contest.

In Kabbalah, we learn that we may need a number of lifetimes in which to learn how to play the game of life at higher and higher levels. In between lifetimes, above and beyond the visible world, lies a Garden of Eden. Pleasure and delight await us there, as well as an opportunity to review past lives, learn what we missed in the last go-round and prepare ourselves for the next lifetime.

Right before the game begins the players then move from the clubhouse to the dugout. The dugout, whose name itself reminds us that players wait below the field to enter the game, serves as the holding station before entering the game. So too in Jewish mysticism do we understand that souls tapped to enter the game of life again move into a place also below the level of the visible world.

The batter steps up and out of the dugout and enters the on-deck circle. As the pitcher warms up or pitches to the previous batter, the on-deck batter practices timing swings to the pitches. Again, the parallel with Kabbalah, that once a soul is tapped for incarnation, it arrives in the on-deck circle of the womb. The physical body in the womb grows and practices its moves. According to the mystical tradition, an angel, like a baseball manager, also teaches the soul all about life.

Everything depends upon practice. Without preparation, without training, random directionless behavior often results. Ted Williams would practice batting until his hands were bleeding. Traditionally, Jews pray three times a day and make a minimum of 100 blessings, in order to embed their values deeply in their awareness so that they can respond appropriately to the challenge of the moment.

Stepping up to the plate is akin to being born into the world. A batter faces a series of pitches, challenging him to get a hit. Yet in the game, the batter has to forget everything he's practiced in order to respond to a pitch that takes less than four-tenths of a second to reach the plate. "How can you think and hit at the same time?" Yogi Berra once asked.

When a person is born, he has to face a series of challenges, from learning to walk to learning to think. In Kabbalah, as we are being born we also forget everything we've learned in the womb, as an angel takes away our knowledge of supernal realities by tapping us on the upper lip.³ The angel leaves us only with the longing to relearn those mysteries once we are a spirit in the material world. Education draws forth the knowledge and enables us to respond properly as life comes at us at the speed of light. As Earl Weaver, former Baltimore Orioles manager observed: "It's what you learn after you know it all that counts."

Even though we step up to home to begin, and even though we want to end up back home, we can't stay there. A batter can dig his heels in, go through all the warm-up rituals and act as if he's there to stay, but he has to leave. At the plate, he might eat the full meal of a home run or he might eat dirt and go back to the dugout. Either way, he's not going to stay forever.

Joe Kraus' essay "There's No Place Like Home!" in the book *Baseball and Philosophy*, suggests one reason why we need to go into exile and try to return safely. Following the thinking of Joseph Campbell, he writes that a "hero must leave his comfortable known world, strike out on his own to find adventure, and then return home a changed man. Think of Ulysses wearing a Giants cap as he ventures to Hades and back and you'll have the idea. Put differently, home doesn't become meaningful until you have experienced the risk that lies in front of it....home is all the sweeter when you've braved adventures to get back to it."⁴

As a batter seeks to circle the bases and improve the score for the team, we leave home and establish bases upon which we find the security and strength to move our world forward. From infancy to youth, from youth to maturity, from maturity to wisdom,

and from wisdom to home again, we pray we make the journey a sacred pilgrimage and the world a better place.

Every at-bat is, in one sense, the same. Someone takes a stick and tries to get on base. Although the walk to home plate and the size of the batter's box remain the same, each at bat is also totally different. At the plate, a batter has to ask himself: What am I trying to accomplish? What does this situation require? When do I leave behind one method and try another? How will I know I'm making progress?

A kabbalist could easily be asking the same questions on a regular basis. Every repetition of a prayer or ritual involves the same words and motions as the time before. And yet at each new stage of life, the act becomes different. Every word and every movement takes on new meaning by virtue of *kavvanah*, the mystical "intention" which goes with them.

The action is the body, the intention is the soul. Every ritual becomes a journey into mystery, a questioning of self and one's ability to respond to the needs of the moment. Playing baseball and playing the game of life both involve a testing of the self, for the sake of one's own improvement and for the sake of the larger team for which one plays.

As Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav said: "Become the kind of person who makes fulfilling physical needs a spiritual experience. Some people eat to have the strength to study the Word of God. Others, the more spiritually aware, study the Word of God in order to know how to eat. . . . Is there something you really want or something you wish would happen? Focus every ounce of your concentration on that thing or event. Visualize it in fine detail. If your desire is strong enough and your concentration intense enough, you can make it come true."⁵

The fundamentals of hitting include these qualities: Courage, body balance, eye-hand coordination, strength, split second reactions, and flexibility. Ignore any of these fundamentals and the entire action falls apart. "Be as strong as a leopard, as quick as an eagle, as fast as a hart, and as brave as a lion to do the will of your Parent in heaven."⁶

Another quality which helps a batter find success at the plate is restraint. Keeping one's hands back at the plate and waiting for as long as possible leads to greater quickness in coming through the hitting zone. The applications to our lives cannot be hard to draw. In Judaism, restraint is a fundamental quality that needs to be developed. Many tempting pitches come our way, whether by media pitchmeisters or others offering seemingly exciting adventures. Our own inner inclination toward things which temporarily might feel good to us urges us to act on impulses. In order to avoid short-term instincts with long-term negative consequences, we need to be able to hold back. Often we'll be able to let the bottom drop out of an idea that's like a split-fingered fastball, or pass on a plan that drifts with the breeze and proves to be knuckle-headed.

When hitting, a batter's stride should be low, light and short. Some coaches teach batters to try to hit ground balls. Their research shows a better on base average than when fly balls are hit, because with a ground ball the defense has to do three things, field, throw and catch, rather than just catch. Kabbalah also emphasizes staying grounded. The temptations to fly too high and/or too far have often led human beings, from Icarus on, to heights greater than could be handled. Four Jewish mystics, the tradition teaches, entered into the paradise of mystical contemplation and only one came out intact and healthy.⁷ The others encountered various fates: madness, death and apostasy, akin to overinflated ego, steroid use and disloyalty among baseball players.

Thus, traditionally, before engaging in the secrets of the universe, one was supposed to be forty years old, versed in the tradition and the parent of at least two children. Now, though, with the increased pace of life we need an enlightened population sooner rather than later. The mandate now requires teaching the deeper realms of existence at earlier

ages. Parents of Little Leaguers take note: It's not about pushing your kids to be stars, but to be thoughtful, decent people with a lively inner life.

The Ten Positions

Of great interest are the amazing correspondences between the ten places on the baseball field and the ten energy centers articulated in Kabbalah. The *Sefirot*, as they are called, are generated from *Ein Sof* and provide a structure for divine activity. Like the path electricity takes from its source in a power plant through transformers and power lines into a switch in the home, the *Sefirot* bring the energy of the infinite into the finite world.

Even though the various steps in bringing electricity from origination to utilization differ, electricity remains electricity. So too, even though the different *Sefirot* reflect varying aspects of the divine presence, the divine energy itself remains constant. Each baseball player wears the same uniform and yet each performs different functions.

The *Sefira* (sing. of *Sefirot*) associated with the batter's place is called Foundation (*Yesod*), just as home plate is the foundation of baseball. Additionally, as the *Sefirot* are also associated with different parts of the individual human body, the bat at *Yesod* coincidentally (or not) corresponds to the phallus.

Yesod moreover is identified as the place of the ego. Since the batter recapitulates the journey of making one's way through the world, the position truly reflects the need of the ego for worldly accomplishment. While every player's self-image is on the line, flailing at a pitch or striking out in a key situation brings an extra dose of humiliation.

Additionally, one can be more alone at the plate than anywhere else. The pitcher has the catcher, the infield and the outfield backing him up and seven out of ten times the best of pitchers will get the best of batters out. The batter gets signals for what to do from the manager and coaches, but it is completely up to him to execute.

The key difference between baseball and Kabbalah may at first seem a deal-breaker in making an analogy between the two. All ten positions in Kabbalah work together to channel the energy from above to below, including *Yesod*. The kabbalistic flow begins beyond the outfield wall in *Ein Sof*, travels from Outer Field to Inner Field, becomes concentrated at the *Sefira* associated with the pitcher's mound and is helped by *Yesod* to bring the divine presence into this world at the *Sefira* corresponding to the catcher. The batter seems to interfere with this intent, by trying to send the energy back toward infinity before its completion and resolution.

Ultimately, however, the apparent contradiction between Kabbalah and baseball illuminates the game of life. As in baseball, so in the spiritual life, without the conflict between ego and spirit, no game exists. If the Holy One did not want us to wrestle with our egos one can imagine we wouldn't have them. The rabbis tell the story of exiling the impulse toward selfishness, and in so doing, all creativity vanished.⁸ Without anyone building homes, planting vineyards, getting married, painting pictures or writing poetry, the world became an impoverished place. The rabbis brought the concern for self back into the world.

In baseball, the conflict between ego and higher sense of self is offered a resolution by playing as part of a team. As recent studies have shown, teams featuring homerun hitters, the most self-sufficient of batters, often do not win the World Series. We know that egos run rampant can tear a team apart. As the folk saying goes, "Those who think they can live without others are wrong. But those who think that others cannot survive without them are even more in error."⁹ Or as coaches like to say: "There's no letter I in the word team."

Without others getting on base and providing run support, the team cannot win on a regular basis. And without communal joy in celebrating what none could accomplish alone, life can be a barren experience. As Dennis Eckersley put it, "The greatest fun in baseball is afterwards, when you shake hands."

Furthermore, the team in the field, rather than being seen as the defense, can be viewed as making a collective effort to deliver the ball from the field to the catcher without allowing ego to disrupt the flow. In so doing, these players make a proactive effort that mirrors the traditional function of the *Sefirot*. However, without a batter there is no game and without ego there is no creativity.

The pitcher's position is designated number 1 in baseball, ostensibly because the pitcher initiates the action. In Kabbalah, on the other hand, the first position in the field is the center fielder. This makes sense because no pitcher would throw anything hittable without a team behind him. The inner teaching here is that we often focus on the most obvious and immediate action as the ultimate cause of the game, when in fact it is the context and greater framework that is most important. In fact the center fielder is in the optimum position to see the whole picture from above.

Thus, being at the head of the array of players that make it possible for the pitcher to try to hurl the ball into the catcher's mitt, center field maps onto the Tree of Life of the *Sefirot* positions at the point of *Keter*, or Crown. *Keter* provides the portal through which the energy of the infinite (beyond the outfield walls) can start to be brought toward home plate. Again, coincidence or not, the Crown Prince of Baseball, Joe DiMaggio, played center field.

Keter is associated with Will, and center fielders require decisiveness. They have to respond at the crack of bat on ball, as *Keter* needs to be alert to signals from *Ein Sof*. *Keter* has to span the huge gap for the transition from the infinite to the finite, as a center fielder has to cover more ground than any other position. Center Fielders have the maximum freedom in the outfield and need to be able to make lightning throws, just as *Keter* marks the start of the lightning flash of energy that courses through the *Sefirot*.

Right field goes along with *Chochmah*, Insightful Wisdom (right brain), and left field with *Bina*, Understanding (left brain). A right fielder has to have a stronger arm, to reach third base from farther away, and so too does right brain/*Chochmah*, associated with seeing the bigger picture, have more of a sense of expansion. A left fielder traditionally has a better glove, because more balls are hit that way, and more sharply too by the predominance of right handed batters. So too the left brain/*Binah* has to be able to catch big ideas from right brain/*Chochmah* and contain them for further analysis. And the center synthesizes the two. When it is unclear who should make a play in the outfield, the center fielder makes the ultimate decision.

In baseball, as in Kabbalah, the out(er)field works together as does the in(ner)field. Of course in the outfield, the distances traveled are greater. In Kabbalah, the outer field corresponds to the realm of spirit and intellect. Catching a ball and sending it toward the infield is akin to catching an idea and communicating it to the feeling, sensing body. Outfielders and outer field *Sefirot* need to be in constant communication and see the big picture, plan for variables and sprint rather than drift.

As for the infield, distances get shorter, reaction times have even less room for error and cooperation becomes even more intense. Second base and shortstop have to turn a double play with a combination of their *Sefirot* qualities, Grace/*Chesed* and Discipline/*Gevurah*. The thinking about who covers which base on bunts, hit and run plays and other situations requires complex interactions and experienced players.

The qualities required for playing second base correspond with the nimble qualities

associated with the *Sefira* of *Chesed*: agile feet, the crucial ability to pivot, alertness and the ability to direct teammates. Shortstops need strong arms, sure hands, and the capacity to “guard the gateway.” All of these are associated with the rigor and strength of *Gevurah*. Shortstops also need everyday endurance, and so it is no accident that Cal Ripken Jr. spent a great deal of his career at short as he set the record for most consecutive starts.

It is no accident that he eclipsed the record of Lou Gehrig, a first baseman. First base matches the *Sefira* of *Netzach*/Enduring Triumph. *Netzach* represents the ability to put values from the higher *Sefirot* into everyday practice. More outs are made at first than anywhere else, and that repeatable action is a quality of *Netzach*.

The reliability of *Netzach* is reflected in the tendency for first basemen to be taken for granted, especially in contrast to the hot corner at third with its flashy play, corresponding to the *Sefira* of Splendor/*Hod*. The hot/*hod* corner requires spectacular acrobatics, more shifting into different places to play and lots of chances to make plays. It is also a position noted for offering the most encouragement to the pitcher and the rest of the team. *Hod* is associated with the priesthood, which also has its spectacular elements, requires knowledge of many different types of offerings, and raises the morale and sense of connection of those it serves.

A pitcher harmonizes grace and strength, reliability and splendor. The pitcher gathers the energy of all the players around him in the field and hurls the ball toward the catcher. Again, incredibly, Kabbalah describes how the *Sefira* of Harmony/*Tiferet*, which overlaps the pitchers mound, brings together the energy of all the *Sefirot* surrounding it and emanates a ball of white light toward the *Sefira* at the place of the catcher.

While baseball requires a great deal of thinking, the pitcher needs to have more than his fair share of analytical skill and to translate that analysis into physical action. *Tiferet* lies in the middle of the Tree of Life of the *Sefirot* and mediates between the upper world, the outer field of thought, and the inner field of emotion and body. Just as a pitcher needs a variety of approaches with regard to speed and placement of a pitch, *Tiferet* demands constant improvisation to balance the tensions between the desire to give and to receive, the desire to be lenient and to be strict, the desire to uplift and the desire to comfort. A pitcher needs to have lots of heart to go with the use of the head, and *Tiferet* is the *Sefira* associated with the heart as the place of courage and thoughtfulness.

The catcher, of course, receives the pitch which is the representation of energy from all of his teammates concentrated in the form of the ball. So too, the final *Sefira*, Divine Presence/*Shechinah*, receives the transmission of the energy from all the other *sephirot*. *Shechinah* represents the indwelling presence of the divine, the bringing of the energy of the infinite into this world. The catcher, crouching low to the ground, is the closest to the earth. This *Sefira* is akin to the womb and the catcher’s mitt is womb-like.

The catcher is the only player who fully faces all the other players and sees the whole field, calls the pitches and positions different players. So too *Shechinah* turns toward all the other *Sefirot* and sends energy back up to the rest of them. The catcher is the master of the field, and the other name of *Shechinah* is *Royalty/Malchut*. It is no wonder that some of the best managers used to be catchers.

Management

The ten positions of the *Sefirot* on the Tree of Life can be mapped onto the individual player positions on a baseball field and also form the deep structure of an individual human being. Thus it turns out that thinking about baseball and Kabbalah offers us a way of thinking about how we play the game of life. We each manage a baseball team. It is the team made up of all the various aspects of ourselves.

Each of us has mental qualities that function like an outfield; each of us does a dance which balances between social grace and ethical rigor; each of us makes pitches to others with the hope that our communications will be caught without interference.

Our outer field, our minds, cover more territory than any other. We can plumb the depths of our imagination and we can explore the intricacies of outer space. We need to keep our minds ready to run, to respond instantly to an idea, to a message from above. Our right brain is expansive, our left brain more contained and analytical. Left fielders stop runners from advancing further than is warranted; left brain thinking prevents right brain ideas from running away into impossibilities. And yet the center ultimately anchors the outfield so the proper play can be made.

The center of one's being, the crown of one's consciousness needs to be able to determine when the time is ripe for the right brain to run wild, and when the left brain needs to rein in the thoughts. Center fielders need to be alert and decisive, and need to be take-charge sorts of people. In each of us, the crown needs to remain awake at all times, it needs to be able to assess which side to emphasize or put into play.

The inner field deals more immediately with physical reality and with the world of emotions. The ball moves more quickly, the cooperation is more intense, the balancing act is tighter. In our hearts we have to respond to demands at work and in relationships, we have to figure out when to reach out and give and when to just catch and contain.

Then we have to figure out what communications we are going to send to others. From the mound of possible words, we have to set a course, knowing what we want to accomplish, and to take the signals from others as to what they will be able to hear without their egos getting in the way.

Our inner manager constantly has to determine how to set up the players in the field, what plays to call, what strategy to follow. How to get the most out of our own divine aspects, and to build a sense of cooperation within our own team, all are functions that will be strengthened by learning from baseball management.

From the Inside Out

The creation of a baseball itself points us toward the most profound perspective on the game. The cover of a baseball holds together by virtue of the baseball stitch, which is worked under and over *from the inside out*. In baseball, we know that the most important game takes place inside the heads and hearts of the players, as individuals and in their communication as a team. While baseball takes place in the outer world, play does not begin until a pitcher readies himself internally to deliver the pitch. Every moment in baseball requires strategic thinking and inner preparation for a full range of possibilities.

We all know that when someone's head isn't in the game, or he's not playing with heart, that his performance will drop. A player might be able to get away with an outer shell of action and play well for a little while, but in the long run, the shell will crack without inner sustenance.

Kabbalah also focuses on the driving engine of life, the intentions that provide the secret source for action. Proper physical, emotional, mental and spiritual preparations lead to proper actions. Mindfulness moves mountains more efficiently than raw labor. In baseball, instinct takes over as the capstone to all the work and experience that has come before. So, too, in Kabbalah: Wisdom's fruits can be seen in actions which merge love, righteousness, justice, and peace more and more frequently with years of study and practice.

This exploration of correspondences between baseball and Kabbalah may seem like pure fantasy, a projection onto baseball of meaning deeper than it can bear, a wish fulfillment of yet another armchair philosopher fan. And yet, when we understand that all things material originated as divine energy, then everything points to something more supreme. Nothing is trivial, and we fashion an interpretive template for baseball not necessarily to explain the meaning of life, but to heighten the experience of rapture in our lives, to illuminate the glimpses of spirit within our world.

Whether you think that the coincidences between the journey of life reflected in baseball and in Kabbalah are merely that, or a reflection of a larger grand design, there is one huge difference between the two that spurs us beyond being merely spectators of the game. While we can't all play major league ball, we can all lead major league lives.

May our study of Kabaseballah enable us to do just that.

NOTES

¹ Matt, Daniel, *God & the Big Bang* (Woodstock, VT, 1996), p. 41.

² The Soncino Talmud, *Berakhot 58a*, Epstein, I. ed. (London, 1938), pp. 359-60.

³ The Soncino Talmud, *Niddah 30b*, Epstein, I. ed. (London, 1938), p. 179.

⁴ Kraus, Joe, "There's No Place Like Home," *Baseball and Philosophy*, Bronson, Eric, ed. (Chicago, 2004), p. 10.

⁵ Rebbe Nachman of Bratzlav, *The Empty Chair* (Woodstock, VT, 1996), pp.24 and 21.

⁶ Yehudah ben Tema, *Pirke Avot*, Kravitz, L. and Olitzky, K. editors (New York, 1993), p. 87.

⁷ The Soncino Talmud, *Chagigah 14b*, Epstein, I. ed. (London, 1938), p. 90.

⁸ The Soncino Talmud, *Yoma 69b*, Epstein, I. ed. (London, 1938), p. 327.

⁹ Folk Saying in *The Word*, Noah ben Shea, ed. (New York 1995), p. 92.

Touching Base with Torah

Dan Gordon

Anyone who is physically fit, even moderately fit, can play baseball. It doesn't take a "jock" to be able to stand on a field and run after balls or take swings. But only a select few can become masters: those with skill, talent, luck, good coaches (teachers) and especially dedication. Likewise, anyone can study. Few are able to achieve the most complete levels of understanding. In order to understand our learning, a master scholar needs the appropriate resources in addition to skill, talent, luck, wise teachers and dedication. Without all these factors, the rest of us are just playing games.

In order to win baseball games, it is essential to get on base and to score runs. The journey around the four bases gives runners a new perspective at each stop along the way. It is entirely appropriate that there are seven ways to reach first base. They are as follows:

1. hit
2. error
3. base on balls
4. hit by pitch
5. dropped third strike
6. catcher's interference
7. fielder's choice

Seven is a significant number in Judaism and in life. The world was created in six days, with the seventh being the holy Sabbath, a day of rest, study and celebration. Every seven years, we are required to give the land a rest from producing its harvest. We know that many aspects of our calendar have scientific significance in the natural world. A day is connected to the rotation of the earth, the length of a month is tied to the phases of the moon and the days of the year correspond to the time it takes for the earth to revolve around the sun. The seven-day week, however, has no scientific explanation. The length of the week was developed by sacred text. This conceivably gives greater power to our study.

Seven fielders (not including the pitcher and catcher) protect the baseball field. These seven players are the *shomrim* (protectors) who completely watch over every part of the field. They are strategically placed at spots where the ball is most likely to travel. The opposing batter must find the places that a fielder cannot reach. Being able to place a batted ball between seven skilled fielders is as difficult as reading "between the lines" of sacred texts to understand the deeper, hidden meanings. It is said that the Torah was written with black fire upon white fire. The black letters provide the text of what happened; the white spaces between the words and lines provide the infinite possibilities when we strive for understanding. When you look at a baseball diamond and see seven fielders protecting such a huge space, you might think there are infinite places to hit the ball. That is correct, but it's not nearly as easy as it looks.

Getting to first is a major accomplishment. Barry Bonds set a new record in 2004 (or by reaching base safely over 60% of times he came to the plate (a .609 average). Over an entire career, Ted Williams is the only player to come close to reaching base half the time, holding the career record for on base percentage with just over 48% (.481). It is widely accepted that if a batter succeeds in getting to base even a third of the time (a

.333 average), he is doing well. Winning games is about scoring runs, but you can't even think about scoring without reaching first.

In studying Torah, we also recognize the importance of taking the first steps first. In fact, each step of study corresponds appropriately with the four bases on the diamond. Jewish scholars recognize four levels of Torah study, labeling them with the acronym PaRDeS. The pun here is that "pardes" in Hebrew is an orchard, but it also means "paradise," as in the Garden of Eden. We believe that attaining a high level of understanding Torah brings us closer to paradise. PARDES stands for:

P (peh)=P'shat: The basic, literal meaning of the words of text.

R (raish)=Remez: A deeper meaning, one that may include allusions, interpretations and other commentaries that bring us closer to having an intimate understanding of the text.

D (dalet)=Drash: From *midrash*. Now, things are getting exciting. The *midrashim* are the stories and other references that may have a distant connection to the original selection, but help shed new light on the material.

S (samach)=Sod: This is the mystical meaning, literally "secret." *Sod* is a level of understanding that few achieve. It is so powerful that it may be beyond written and spoken language. *Sod* is the ultimate level of Torah study.

We can touch all the bases around the diamond through the paths of Torah. Before we step up to the plate, let's go around the bases with a popular Biblical text to understand how PaRDeS works.

In Genesis 12:1-3:

God said to Abram, "Go away from your land, from your birthplace, and from your father's house, to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless those who bless you and he who curses you, I will curse. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."...

(and a little later) Genesis 13:14-17

...God said to Abram, "Raise your eyes, and from the place where you are now, look to the north, to the south, to the east and to west. For all the land that you see, I will give to you and to your offspring forever. I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth; if a man will be able to count all the grains of dust in the world, then your offspring will also be countable.

This is from the Torah portion called "*Lech L'cha*" named for the first two words that God speaks to Abram (who will later be known as "Abraham" or "father of many"). Let's go around the PaRDeS bases to briefly understand this passage on four different levels.

P'shat (simple, literal interpretation):

God tells Abram that if he listens to Him and leaves his home, he will be fulfilling a higher purpose. God is promising that Abram will be the leader of many, will have almost an infinite number of offspring (he is childless at this point), and his offspring will enjoy the land as far as the eye can see.

Remez (allegories hinted at by the text):

The two words, "*Lech L'cha*" are both formed by only two letters: *lamed* and the final *chaf*. In mystical *gematriya* (numerology), *lamed* has the value of 30 and *chaf* has the value of

20. Together, these two words add up to the value of 100, or 10 times 10. Even though the Ten Commandments were not yet given, ten and 100 are both significant for many reasons. Without going into all of them, we can begin by acknowledging our ten fingers and ten toes, and surmise that God is promising to be with Abram to help guide the actions of his hands and the journeys of his feet in multiple ways.

Also, when we look at the physical construct of the *lamed* and *chaf*, we see that the *lamed* reaches above the line and the *chaf* dips below it. In Chapter 13, Abram was told to raise his eyes to see the nearly infinite borders of his land and then told of his offspring as numerous as grains of sand. The presence of the *lamed* and *chaf* are hinting of the importance of being able to reach toward the heights of heaven while being aware we are always grounded in earth. Both heaven and earth offer infinite possibilities.

Drash (additional stories):

The purpose of the *drash* is often to answer questions not found in the body of the text. In this case, one of our questions might be, "Why did Abram have to leave home?" A popular *midrash* portrays Abram's father, Terah, as a maker of idols. One night, Abram smashed all the idols in the shop except for one. When Terah demanded to know what happened, Abram claimed that one of the idols had destroyed the others. "But that's impossible!" said Terah, "They are only made of stone and clay!" "Then why do you worship them?" challenged Abram. (Genesis Rabbah, Chapter 38). This *midrash* is one possible explanation for Abram's beginning his devotion to one God as well as his need to distance himself from his father and the ways of his father's people.

Sod (hidden secret to gain deep understanding):

The literal meaning of the words "*Lech L'cha*" is "go to you." Though God instructs Abram to take a journey that will distance himself from his place of birth, He is giving the marching orders with an internal, rather than external, command. Abram's true direction must come from within; his real home is not one of land and offspring but of inner strength. However, like Dorothy in the Wizard of Oz, Abram must make the journey and experience the struggles before he realizes "there's no place like home"...the home of knowing the inner truth of being connected to God.

Now, let's see what happens as we touch the bases around the baseball diamond to learn what these four corners have to offer.

P'shat. 1st base:

P'shat is what's there. The literal meaning of a text is the only place to start. Before you can begin any kind of understanding, you must first master what the text is saying. Though it is a simple level, you cannot go on to deeper meanings until *p'shat* is mastered.

Likewise, first base is the beginning of the journey toward finding home. You cannot begin to think of scoring without starting at first base. Have you ever heard the expression, "you can't even make it to first base?" This putdown implies that a person cannot even begin his journey.

First base is also the only base that allows a runner to pass it without fear of being tagged out, provided the runner does not turn with an intention to advance to second. The theory is that it is so important to make it to first there should be no hindrances. The runner is not expected to slide in order to put a stop to his progress. He runs as quickly as he can. A runner who does not try his hardest to get to first is demonstrating a lack of commitment, even a lack of *kavannah* (sacred intention). Sometimes, a batter will hit a ground ball or a fly ball and assume that he will be out. If the runner doesn't run his hardest, he'll be out for sure. Nothing makes a manager, fan or teammate angrier than

a player who does not run hard on every play. Often, it will seem obvious that a batted ball will be an easy out; but a runner with strong devotion might just beat the throw. It takes an effort to run out everything, just as it takes an effort to struggle with difficult texts. Sometimes, a text seems dry and full of seemingly meaningless details. Those with devotion, who try their best, will make it more often than those who are willing to accept defeat quickly. It takes an effort both to make it to first and to plow through the literal meanings of text. The effort is worth it and necessary to move on.

Remez: 2nd base

There is a deeper understanding in *remez*. You're halfway there, but there is so much more to the journey. With *remez*, we go beyond the simple, and begin to see what is possible. *Remez* is our way of looking more deeply into the text, going beyond the simple beginnings in order to move forward. *Remez* is about vision and possibilities.

2nd base gives us a different perspective. From second base, we have a clear view of the next batter. From this vantage point, when the batter swings, a perceptive eye can tell where the ball is going. This will give the runner an idea of what he needs to do to advance further.

From 2nd base, a fast runner is often, but not always, able to score on a single. Many factors must coincide in order for this to happen. It requires the skill and talent of the runner's baserunning ability. It requires the runner to have a good knowledge of the ability of the fielders to know whether they can make a throw. It requires the ball to be hit to the right spot in the field, so a fielder won't be able to throw him out. It requires guidance from a third base coach to tell the runner whether or not he has a good chance to score. But most importantly, the runner cannot score from second *without touching third base*. If he gets careless and runs by third, he will be out.

For our understanding of sacred texts, we also need knowledge, skill and guidance from wise teachers. All the variables that enable a runner to move forward are like the many commentaries we explore to augment our understanding. We must be careful not to skip any steps along the way. If we try to find the *sod* before exploring the *remez* and *drash*, we'll be lost for sure. Even when a batter hits the ball over the fence, a coach will often remind him to "touch them all" to make sure he won't be called out for being in a careless hurry.

Drash: 3rd base:

The *drash* provides a deeper understanding and also a new perspective. The *drash* enables us to make connections. We use the *drash*, other learning and stories, to help enhance our understanding. It's a different view of things. Though it may be far from the *p'shat* in its actual words, it's a connection that brings us closer to the deepest meanings of the *sod*.

Third base is the last connection we must make before we can reach home. Like 2nd, it is also a different view, but much closer to the final destination. It seems like a great journey to have made it to 3rd base all the way from first base. Though it's only 90 feet away from 2nd – and the same 90 feet from home — it's completely across the diamond from first. In fact, sometimes with the *drash*, we have to remind ourselves what the initial text was to get the connection.

The ninety feet between bases provide several obvious numerological connections. 90 is half of 180, which is 10 times 18, the numerological representation for life ("chai"). Each journey of 90 feet reminds us we have only achieved part of our goal. The distance between first base and third base is not as well known, and requires a deeper investigation. The distance from first base to third base is 127 feet, 3 3/8 inches. For this seemingly unusual distance, let's take a look at how the numbers add up:

127 feet, 3 3/8 inches

In the measurement of feet:

$1 + 2 + 7 = 10$. The 10th letter of the alphabet is *yod*, the first letter of God's name. Ten is the number of Commandments brought down by Moses from Sinai, the heart of our holy Torah. $1 + 0 = 1$, also signifying one God.

In the measurement of inches:

$3 + 3 + 8 = 14$. $1 + 4 = 5$. 14 is two times seven; seven days in the week remind us of the completion of God's creation.

There are five books in the Torah. The 5th letter of the alphabet is *hey*. *Yod + Hey* spell *Yah*, a form of God's name and also represent the first two letters of God's name. From 1st base or 3rd base, when you look toward the center, God and Torah are at the intersection of these two invisible lines.

Whereas from 2nd base there is really only one way to score – a base hit – 3rd base is so close that there are many ways to score: a hit, a sacrifice fly, a sacrifice bunt, a fielding error, a wild pitch, a passed ball or a “fielder's choice” (a ground ball in which the fielder decides to throw the batter out at first rather than gamble on trying to get the runner going home). In fact, there are seven ways of scoring from third. Remember that seven is a number of completion. As the creation was completed in seven days, these seven ways of scoring from third base help us complete the journey around the bases.

Even though there are so many ways to score from third base, it is hardly a sure thing. Sometimes, those last 90 feet are the hardest. Third base is about being “so close and yet so far.” The *drash* brings us very close to a divine insight, but it also requires something extra. Hard work and dedication is not always enough. By exploring the *drash*, we delve into the endless possibilities that help bring us “home” to our most complete understanding.

Sod: Home Plate:

Home plate is the beginning and the end. Home is what we are striving for, the mystery that is only revealed through the most dedicated, sincere efforts. As we approach home plate, we know we must come full circle in order for our turn at bat to mean much of anything. If we return to the dugout without touching all four bases, our time at bat will be incomplete. The *sod* is elusive; a secret, special meaning that is only found through thorough exploration of the various other techniques.

There is a popular *midrash* suggesting that, prior to birth, all babies are filled with complete knowledge of all the Torah he or she will ever need. Inside the mother's womb, the baby is nourished with Torah, and is completely filled with divine knowledge. When the baby reaches the outside world, an angel touches a finger to the baby's upper lip, causing the child to forget everything that had been made so clear in the womb. The evidence of this angelic touch is the “philtrum”, that small, indentation we all bear between our upper lip and nose. The purpose is so we spend our lives re-learning. The second learning is more mature, giving us the opportunity for greater understanding.

Crossing home plate is like returning to that moment when the angel first touched us. It is a powerful moment that says, “You're home now.” Returning to the dugout after scoring a run is much different than returning after making an out. When a runner crosses home plate, he is a conquering hero, greeted and congratulated by his teammates. It resembles a worshiper who has just finished blessing the Torah with an *aliyah*, being greeted with handshakes and “*yasher koach!*” (“with strength”) Everyone on his team is happy. The runner is pleased with his sense of accomplishment at scoring the run and the rest of the team celebrates a group accomplishment.

Of course, the runner's accomplishment is not his or hers to cherish alone. The entire team took part, either by their hits or their encouragement. It is like a classroom in which many students contribute to the discussion enabling all to gain understanding. The athletes slap each other on the back or the fanny; the students and worshipers shout "*yasher koach*" (a Hebrew version of "way to go!") or "*kol ha-kavod*" ("all honor and respect"). The cycle is complete...but only until the next time at bat or the next *pasuk* (verse) to learn.

The Tzedakah of Hitting

Dan Gordon

Giving is good. No matter how you do it, it is a mitzvah to give *tzedakah* (charity). We are taught, though, that there are ways to give that are nobler than others. Moses Maimonides, a twelfth century rabbi, scholar and physician, developed an eight step “ladder” that acknowledged the different possibilities for *tzedakah*. In ascending order of nobility, here is Maimonides’ *tzedakah* ladder:

1. Giving unwillingly
2. Giving less than one should but cheerfully
3. Giving after being asked
4. Giving before being asked
5. Giving without knowing the receiver
6. Giving anonymously to someone you know is needy
7. Giving anonymously to an anonymous person
8. Helping a person to help him/herself and no longer need assistance.

The highest level is to help someone become self-sufficient, and anonymous giving is also high on the list. While anonymous giving is very highly valued, some people give substantial *tzedakah* and receive credit for it. It’s certainly no sin to receive credit, it’s just a different level of giving. Not everyone can give a lot, but those who do provide a valuable service to the community. Synagogues, schools, museums and other necessary institutions could not exist without major donors who like to see their names on plaques. Each person is expected to give according to his or her ability. In the realm of *tzedakah*, some people make special efforts by putting coins in the *pushke* (a *tzedakah* box) or offering a sandwich to the street beggar. Though these people get no public recognition, they are also fulfilling the mitzvah, and perhaps at a higher level.

Baseball players have varying ways of making contributions as well. As we look at the ways hitters contribute to run scoring and wins, we see different categories of plays and players.

The homerun hitter is like the big money donor. Homeruns have a lot of glitz. Everyone notices the homer. And the hitter gets a benefit from it. The big homerun hitters get the most attention, the most coveted records, the most applause and often the highest paychecks. Sometimes, it is an exciting play that has little to do with outcome of the game, though. In recent years, we’ve seen Barry Bonds, Mark McGuire and Sammy Sosa hit more homeruns in single seasons than anyone in the last four decades. But many times, their teams did not win the games in which they hit homers. Pitchers often pitched around them when the game was on the line, so their homer was fun for the fans to watch, but didn’t make a difference. It’s almost like the donor who contributes a Torah to a synagogue that already has a dozen Torahs. The shul might need a new plumbing system more, but who wants a plaque acknowledging “The Rabinowitz Toilet?”

This is not to say homeruns aren’t valuable. They often do win games, and, just as important, they put people in the seats. The New York Yankees shared their home games with the Giants in the humble Polo Grounds until Babe Ruth came along. All those homeruns gave baseball such an increased popularity that the Yanks were able to build

a new stadium. Its real name is Yankee Stadium, but everyone called it “The House that Ruth Built.” Likewise when baseball had such negative publicity after the strike in 1994, it was the homerun race of McGuire and Sosa that is credited with bringing fans back to the ballpark. Like it or not, a synagogue with several Torahs and a brand new social hall with pretty stain glass windows can be very attractive to those who are “shul shopping.”

But let’s take a look at some other hitting techniques that look more like unselfish gifts. First of all, we have the *sacrifice fly*. With a runner on third and less than two outs, the batter hits a fly ball to the outfield that is deep enough to score the runner. He has made a contribution to the team and he has sacrificed himself...but not that much. He may have been trying for a base hit or even a home run that fell short. He doesn’t get the same accolades as if he had hit a homerun, but he still doesn’t lose anything. He is not charged with an *at bat*, so his batting average doesn’t drop. And he does get credit for an RBI. That’s not as glamorous a statistic as the homerun, but it’s not chopped liver. As far as *tzedakah* is concerned, the sacrifice fly is nice, but it is at a lower level.

Next on the list would be the *sacrifice bunt*. Here is a situation in which the batter also gives himself up, but gets a little less in return. He still is not charged with an *at bat*, so he loses nothing in his batting average. He usually does not get the benefit of an RBI, because most sacrifice bunts are just to move a runner to second or third base. The sacrifice bunt demonstrates more humility than the sacrifice fly. Managers do not expect their power hitters to humble themselves so much as to lay down a bunt.

The play that represents the ultimate act of *tzedakah* in baseball is the one that does not show up in any statistics. With a runner on first or second base and less than two outs, the batter hits a ground ball to the right side of the infield giving the runner a chance to advance one base. The batter is thrown out, charged with an *at bat*, and his batting average drops. But he has unselfishly moved the runner along. When the player negotiates a new contract, this play did not give him any valuable statistics to brag about. This is as unselfish as anonymously putting money in a *pushke*. It may not do that much good, but it is a great example of someone doing what he can in the most noble way he can.

And the highest level of *tzedakah* doesn’t happen on the playing field. When a veteran player spends time with a rookie and teaches him how to use his skills more effectively, he is enabling the rookie to help the team. Because this rookie may take the veteran’s job away some day, the teacher is performing an unselfish act of *tzedakah*. Again, it won’t show up in statistics, but it will do an awful lot of good.

Teaching Halachah Through Baseball: The Role of Mesorah (Inherited Tradition)¹

Shmuel Jablon

In the Beginning (or My Big Inning)....

I didn't always think I was destined to be a rabbi. When I was a teenager, I was convinced I was going to be a sportswriter. As a twelve year old in St. Louis in 1981, a friend and I started our own baseball newspaper, *The Redbird Chirps*. Since he is a month older than I, I had the designation as the presumed then-youngest sportswriter in America. I have many fond baseball memories from that era. While I was learning about writing, I was able to interview some truly great baseball stars who were also truly great men. I was privileged to speak with people such as my boyhood hero Lou Brock, "Satchel" Paige, "Cool Papa" Bell, Joe Morgan, Ozzie Smith, Ralph Kiner, Willie Stargell and many others.

One particular interview that stands out was in the dugout at Busch Stadium in St. Louis on a late spring evening in 1982. My partner and I approached the Hall of Famer Frank Robinson (when he was managing the San Francisco Giants) for an interview. He told me that he didn't give interviews within a half-hour of game time. "Please Mr. Robinson," I said. "We're only thirteen years old." "Young man," said the Hall of Famer, "Never use your age as a crutch." He then relented, and gave us an interview (and autographs) to go along with this valuable life lesson. I took that lesson, and many others, to inspire me to use any talents I had in order to serve G-d and the Jewish people — and to never let my comparatively young age stand in the way of assuming tremendous professional responsibilities.

I am sure that as a thirteen year old I did not grasp the full importance of Robinson's lesson. I didn't even include it in my article (How could I have known that it, more than anything else, would stay with me as an adult?). However, I clearly understood that many of the greats of the baseball world had their true greatness in the type of person they were (or were at least perceived by my young mind). For example, my article on Robinson ended in a way that could never be accused of being unbiased.

During the 1981 off-season, Frank Robinson was elected to the National Baseball Hall of Fame in his first year of eligibility. When he got the call from the Hall telling him he was elected, Robinson "felt very good about it. I felt relieved and felt very fortunate, and very good. I had a good career, played on a lot of good ball clubs, and that certainly helps you as far as your individual performance is concerned. I knew I was up and thought that I would probably make it one day but it was nice to make it on the first ballot!" He certainly deserves it! Congratulations to Frank Robinson — a gentleman and a star!²

When I wrote about Willie Stargell, who was ending his Hall of Fame career with the Pittsburgh Pirates, I was similarly in awe. As I remember, I am sure it was because he'd given me an autographed baseball and one of his famous golden "Stargell Star" patches (which he normally awarded to teammates for outstanding effort and accomplishment in a game), as well as a great interview. My article ended:

Willie Stargell's very presence is awe inspiring. He is soft-spoken and commands respect. Former teammate and now coach Harvey Haddix described Stargell as, "A real gentleman!" And that he is!!!³

Using Baseball in Jewish Education:

As a rabbi and the Head of Lower School at Fuchs Mizrahi School in Cleveland, I have acquired an interesting reputation as the “baseball rabbi.” I’d like to think this is not only because of my past as the youngest sportswriter in America, nor only because of my outstanding collection of Cleveland Indians ties (which I wear to work) and memorabilia, nor even because when there is a question about kosher food at Jacobs Field (where there are two *Glatt Kosher* (adherence to the strictest standards of dietary laws for beef) hotdog stands under Orthodox rabbinical supervision) I get the questions. I think it is because we have been successful both at using baseball as an incentive for Torah learning, and also in using some of the messages of baseball to emphasize Torah values.

There is no question that baseball can be quite useful in cementing the bond between rabbis and students. My students know that baseball has been (and remains) a part of my life. It is part of what makes me a “regular person” in addition to a rabbi. As many of them share this interest, baseball is part of what draws them to me. They know that my questioning skills were sharpened as an interviewer of baseball players, and my love of history developed through reading countless books about baseball players and teams of the past. I make use of this common bond (as well as extensive baseball knowledge) regularly. Baseball makes its way into classes about values and about history.

Even as a young writer, I knew the importance of baseball players serving as good role models for American youth. After our interview, I quoted my boyhood hero, Lou Brock, as saying, “The fans in St. Louis know baseball, they’ve been that way for years. *I hope that they, as well as all other fans, will remember me as a fine person.*”⁴ Twenty one years later, I invited Andre Thornton (two time Cleveland Indians all-star) to our school, as he is an example of an athlete who is not just an entertainer, but is a role model. He spoke to the students about his maintaining his deep faith despite enduring family tragedy (he lost his first wife and a daughter in an auto accident.), as well as of his service to the Cleveland community.⁵

My students also learn of the heroism of Jackie Robinson, who endured much abuse as the first African American in the modern major leagues. Recently, I shared with students a beautiful, values-based poem written entitled “Life,” by Jim “Mudcat” Grant (a former 20 game winner with the Minnesota Twins after being not-so-wisely traded by, naturally, the Cleveland Indians):

Life is like a game of baseball and You play it every day.
It isn’t just the breaks you get, But the kind of game you play.

Stop and look the whole team over, You’ve got dedication there.
You’re bound to be a winner with men who really care.

Your pitcher’s name is courage; You need him in this game,
For truth and faith your keystone men, the grounders they will tame.

Your center-fielder is very fast though small and hard to see.
So watch him when he gets the ball, he’s opportunity.

At first base there’s religion. He’s stood the test of time.
At third base there’s brotherhood, The stalwart of the nine.

In the left field there's ambition. Never let him shrink.
For in right field there's a husky man, I'm told his name is work.

Your catcher's name is humor, he's important to the scheme.
While honor's pitching from the bullpen, your game is always clean.

With love on your bench, you've perfection no less,
And a winning team, with joy and happiness.

The other team is strong son, greed, envy, hatred and defeat.
Are four strong infielders you'll have to buck to make your game complete.

Deceitfulness and a man called waste Are always playing hard.
Selfishness and jealousy, None can you disregard.

Carelessness and falsehood Are the big boys in the pen.
You'll have to swing hard, son, When you come up to them.

There's one more man you'll have to watch. He's always very near.
He's the pitcher for this team, I'm told his name is fear.

The game will not be easy. There'll be struggle, there'll be strife
To make the winning runs, For it's played on the field of life.

So stand behind your team. There'll be many who'll applaud.
Just remember that you are the player, And the umpire there is God.⁶

Baseball has also served me well as an incentive for greater Torah study. Providing incentives for learning (Incentives are not to be confused with a prize only one student can receive. Incentives can be achieved by any number of students who reach the desired high level) is reflected in the halachah of the seder night. Rav Yosef Karo, in the definitive halachic work *Shulchan Aruch*, writes, "It is a commandment to give children candies and nuts in order that they should notice the changes (that happen seder night) and ask about them."⁷ Rav Yisroel Meir haKohen (known as the "Chafetz Chaim") explains that this is to encourage the children to stay awake through the story of the Exodus, and to ask questions. Because teaching one's children about the Exodus is the central commandment of the seder, the parent needs to assist the child in staying awake and maintaining interest, even quite late in the evening.⁸

Rabbi Shlomo Aviner explains, "The young child has love and desire for the Holy. But sometimes there are many difficulties and obstacles — thus we help him... By giving a reward we assist him to overcome and to persevere on the good path."⁹

My students flock to ask challenging questions about the Jewish texts we learn and the prize of 36 baseball cards for particularly excellent questions is part of what promotes their Torah learning. In our "Mishnah Clubs" students in grades four through six typically complete two tractates of Mishnah yearly (per club!). Knowing that they will receive the reward of a Cleveland Indians baseball game at Jacobs Field (complete with a visit to the Kosher stand), provides an incentive for students to trek in the Cleveland winter snow or summer humidity — or to stay after school — for extra Torah study. As Rabbi Aviner notes, the desire for Torah is already within the child. However, I use baseball to assist

them in fulfilling this desire on a regular basis. This will lead to them not only attaching Torah study to something else that is fun, but also to the sacred “habit” of regular study of Torah becoming engrained with them.

I even told my students that I believe Jacobs Field itself was built, at least in small measure, in order for us to have a place to go to reward the Mishnah Club! This is based on the great Torah commentator Rashi’s comments to Genesis 1:1 where he writes, “The world was created...for the Torah that is called the first of His ways (Proverbs 8:22), and for Israel that is called the first of His harvest. (Jeremiah 2:3).” It is also hinted at in the Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 2b, which tells the story of what will happen when the Messiah comes. The nations that oppressed the Jewish people will come before G-d claiming that what they did (building markets, bridges, fighting wars, etc.) were all to enable the Jews to learn Torah. G-d will chastise them, and tell them that they did it only for their own immoral purposes. The Talmud, however, does not state that these things were not indeed done to enable the Jewish people to learn Torah. It only states that the Persians and Romans certainly didn’t have this in mind (even if G-d certainly did). Thus, even if the Indians organization and the city of Cleveland don’t realize this, there is little doubt in my mind that Jacobs Field was built for the Fuchs Mizrahi School Mishnah Clubs! When one looks at the history of the Indians, and the amount of times the team may have moved away, as well as the amount of times taxes to build a new stadium failed, the building and success of Jacobs Field indeed seems like a near-miracle directed by the Divine hand ¹⁰

Students also enjoy asking halachic questions based on baseball. May one play ball on *Shabbat*? Are baseball cards *muktzeh* (forbidden to move) on *Shabbat*? May a Jewish player play in the World Series on *Chol haMoed Sukkot* (the Intermediate Days of the Festival of Sukkot)? Such questions show their ability to integrate what we are learning in Mishnah and Jewish law to another area of interest. Some have even written short articles on these subjects, which follow this essay.

Thus, the seemingly “this worldly” game of baseball helps me to elevate my students’ level of Torah study, and thus their spiritual lives, far beyond when they leave either my classroom or Jacobs Field!

Mesorah (Inherited Tradition)

One of most striking areas of similarity between Jewish values and those of baseball is the importance of *mesorah* – i.e., inherited tradition.

The foundation of Judaism can perhaps be best summarized by the first Mishnah in *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of our Fathers).

Moses received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua. Joshua transmitted it to the elders, who transmitted it to the Prophets who transmitted it to the Men of the Great Assembly. ¹¹

The Torah was given, word for word, by G-d to Moses on Mount Sinai. This includes both the Written Torah, known as the “Torah” or “Five Books of Moses,” and the Oral Torah (known as the Talmud) — much of which explains the commandments of the Written Torah. The Written Torah was transmitted word for word, and the Oral Torah detail for detail, by Moses to his student Joshua. It is the Torah that has been successfully transmitted throughout the history of the Jewish people. Indeed, Maimonides codifies the understanding that the Torah we have today is identical to what Moses received as being a core Jewish belief. ¹² Jews who keep the Sabbath, dietary laws, laws of family purity, etc.

derive tremendous strength from keeping G-d's laws in essentially the same manner as they have been kept for nearly millennia.

Respect for Different Minhagim (Inherited Traditions):

Interestingly, the concern for inherited tradition transcends that of Toraitic and even rabbinic laws. Observances of *minhagim* (customs within normative Jewish life), passed down by families and communities, are a vital area in Jewish law and thus the *mesorah* (inherited tradition).¹³ This has many practical implications in Jewish life. For example, the Hebrew pronunciations of both Ashkenazic Jews (Jews whose ancestors were from Germany and Eastern Europe) and Sephardic Jews (Jews whose ancestors were from Spain and North Africa) are acceptable. However, when one is praying, most rabbis rule that one is obligated to pronounce Hebrew in the way of their ancestors, even if this is different than “modern Hebrew” commonly spoken in Israel.¹⁴ Another example is that of the law enacted by the rabbis of the Ashkenazim of not eating legumes on Passover. In contrast to their Ashkenazic counterparts, the rabbis of the Sephardim never enacted such a law. Therefore, we have two quite acceptable rabbinic positions, as well as an absolute obligation for Jews to follow their ancestral observance.¹⁵

Naturally, just as we must respect various halachic traditions in Judaism, we also try to respect different traditions within baseball. Just as there are wonderful Jews who pronounce Hebrew, pray and observe Passover differently, there are differences between teams and even leagues. Normative Judaism and normative baseball both find ways to accommodate differences. For example, an Ashkenazi Jew who goes to a Sephardic synagogue must quietly pray using his own customs. However, if he is asked to publicly lead the prayers, he must use the congregation's pronunciation. This is because of the rule of *Minhag haMakom haMinhag*—the custom of the place is to be the custom used in public. Baseball has a similar system when teams playing are accustomed to different rules. For example, the game always begins with a meeting at home plate where the umpire will not only accept the lineup cards, he will explain the stadium's unique “ground rules” to the representatives of both teams. Thus, the visiting team must adapt itself to the rules of the local stadium. Similarly, an American League team that goes to play in a National League stadium (either due to inter-league play or due to participating in the World Series) must similarly adapt to the lack of the designated hitter. These differences may be theoretically debated. However, in practicality, equally acceptable rules and traditions are deserving of respect.

Although questions such as “Do you believe in the designated hitter?” may not have the same importance as, “Do you believe in the religious significance of the modern State of Israel?” there is a parallel in the need to teach mutual respect and love for those holding differing views. This is what Rabbi Aviner calls “a divergence of opinions and not of hearts” and goes back well into Talmudic times. The Talmud teaches:

Rav Aba said in the name of Shmuel: For three years the House of Shamai and the House of Hillel disagreed. This group said, “The law is like us,” and that group said, “The law is like us.” A Heavenly Voice came and said, “Both are the words of the Living G-d,” and the Law follows the House of Hillel. When afterwards they asked, “If both are the words of the Living G-d, why has the House of Hillel merited to be the one to establish the Law?” Because they were peaceful and humble, and they taught their words and the words of the House of Shamai, too. Not only that, they repeated the House of Shamai's words before their own. This teaches you that all

who diminish themselves are raised up by the Holy One Blessed be He. All who chase greatness, greatness flees from them. All who flee from greatness, greatness chases after them. (B.T. Eruvin 13b)

Family Loyalties:

Parents pass on to children not only their love of the game and all that goes with it (from baseball card collecting to games of catch), but love of specific teams. This becomes a vital part of family *minhag* (custom). According to *Memories and Dreams*, the quarterly magazine of the National Baseball Hall of Fame, there are even fan clubs for teams that have long since moved away from their original homes. The traditions of the Brooklyn Dodgers, New York Giants, Philadelphia Athletics and others live in the hearts of families of those who once faithfully attended their games.¹⁶

I have seen this intense familial loyalty towards baseball teams in my own work. When I have arranged for Indians legends Bob Feller and Andre Thornton to visit our school, parents (and some grandparents) were as excited as their children. Recently, I spoke with a grandfather of children in our school. Both a devoted Orthodox Jew and Indians fan, he was proud of having taken his grandchildren to their first baseball games. He also had some disappointment that his grandchildren did not have the opportunity to cheer for some the stars of the past. "This was before your time, rabbi," he told me, "but I remember players like Earl Averill. He was a real *mentch* (gentleman)! Today's players are just interested in the money. Even second rate, so called relief pitchers get millions of dollars." Of course, the thought of again watching the Indians — the beloved team of his youth — with his beloved grandchildren brought a smile to his face and tears to his eyes.

Some of the families who have grown up in Cleveland have even asked me how I could be an Indians fan. When I explain that my parents grew up in Brooklyn and watched the Dodgers leave town, they understand that there was no "family team." When I explain how, as a teenage sportswriter, the management of the Cardinals (my home town team) was not nice to us, thus causing us look elsewhere for a favorite team, they nod with understanding at one who experienced the childhood pain of rejection. Finally, when I explain that I went to Oberlin College, near Cleveland, and then decided it was time to again root for the hometown team, they smile as one who lovingly welcomes a convert to their midst. Thus, they are no longer surprised at my intense loyalty for, and historical knowledge of, my adopted team (and appreciate my three year old son being able to identify "Chief Wahoo" from fifty feet away)!

To be fair, though, not all of our students are devoted to the Indians. I will always remember explaining to parents how I use baseball as a teaching aide and incentive in our school. One father in the audience, a devoted New York Yankees fan, half smiled and said, "Ah, rabbi. You say baseball, but you mean the Cleveland Indians!" Indeed, he was very concerned that his son — a particularly close and devoted student of mine — not leave the family tradition of Yankeedom in order to follow his "rebbe" to join the long suffering tradition of the Cleveland Indians.

The inherited baseball tradition has the amazing ability to literally connect generations within families and communities. The slogan of the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown reflects this. "*Preserving History. Honoring Excellence. Connecting Generations,*"¹⁷ is an apt slogan not only for the Hall of Fame, but for baseball itself. This is a Jewish lesson. The first Mishnah in Pirkei Avot (itself a "Hall of Fame" of Oral Torah giants), quoted above, makes reference to the connection of generations through the sacred transmission of Torah. The Torah is passed from generation to generation and is given intact to us. Later in that Mishnah, Torah teachers are bidden to "raise up many students" to preserve

this chain of transmission. Later in the chapter we are taught to honor the greatness of those who have demonstrated incredible excellence in Torah studies. Yossi Son of Yoezer of Tzreyda says, "Let your house be a gathering place for the sages. Cling to the dust of their feet and thirstily drink their words." (1:4) It is not surprising that baseball, which in its ideal state carries many similar values, resonates with many Jews.

Perhaps more than any other sport, baseball has focused on being "family friendly." Baseball games have an appeal, for Jewish families, not only because of the cerebral and historic nature of the game, but because a baseball stadium tends to be a place where families can safely go. At Jacobs Field, as at other baseball stadiums, fans are told that a lack of proper language, running on to the field, throwing things, etc. will all result in ejection from the stadium and potential arrest. The stadium has luxury boxes, to be sure; but unlike other stadiums, it also has a children's playground.¹⁸ Kevin Keane, a broadcaster on WTAM Radio in Cleveland, discussed on his show that fact that attending a football game was simply not the same as attending a baseball game. Though a football game may be a place for families, it's not a place for families with young children! He commented, "By the nature of the game, there is danger in football and the venue reflects that each Sunday. We sure don't want to ever put our family in danger even if there's a little part of us that enjoys that element in the NFL. Baseball is wholesome family fun, football is a right of passage along the way to manhood in the American male sports culture."¹⁹

It is little wonder that while football may be entertaining to watch on television, it is unlikely to become part of a Jewish family's tradition in anywhere near the same way as baseball. It is unlikely that there will be a book, "What's Jewish About Football?" Football simply doesn't resonate in the same way.

The bond of baseball tradition within families can be intensely powerful, and indeed bring families closer together (itself a very Jewish value). In his beautiful book, *Our Tribe*, author Terry Pluto masterfully intertwines the history of his Indians with stories of the relationship between himself and his father. Pluto's father passed away after suffering more than four years from the effects of a major stroke. It was their common love for baseball that helped them through difficult days. He writes:

For my father and me, the Indians have been like a second family — a more interesting family. When I was growing up, he talked to me of players from the 1920s through the 1950s. Starting in the 1960s, we were on common baseball ground. Since the stroke-enforced silence built a wall around his life, the Indians have been one of the few ways to penetrate it. I can talk to him about this team, or the teams of his youth. I can look at pictures of the players, and suddenly I realize that it's like a family album...I thought of how he'd come home from work, and I'd convince him to take me to an Indians game; he'd come home, change his clothes — and we'd be in the car, on the way to the Stadium. He could not have been home for more than fifteen minutes. He had to be exhausted. He could have said, "Let's listen to the game on the radio, I'm tired." Instead he took me to the games...I remember my heart beating a little faster as we drove into the Stadium lot, and we could see the ballpark looming right in front of us — all 80,000 seats worth. I remember the huge Chief Wahoo neon sign above it all...I remember those walks from the car to the Stadium, my little hand in his big paw, my hand lost in his — and feeling more secure than I ever did in my young life.²⁰

As Pluto writes, "Baseball is not art, it's not classical music- but when it glues a family together, it's special and it's important."²¹

Messirut Nefesh (*Self Sacrifice*)

Baseball has a rich value of sacrifice. Baseball players routinely intentionally bunt or hit long fly balls in such a way as they shall surely be out — but that will advance their teammate to another base. Sacrifice bunts and flies don't hurt batting averages; but they don't help them either! Nevertheless, a player who cannot properly sacrifice is not as valuable of a member of his team. As a teenage sportswriter, I wrote about the value of the self-sacrifice of baseball players in volunteering for service to the nation. When, as a fourteen year old, I reported on my interview with Ralph Kiner, I wrote:

He [Kiner] played three years in the Minor Leagues (1941-43) and was scheduled to be promoted to the parent Pirates. Unfortunately, though, the governments of Germany, Japan and Italy changed his fortune. He went into the military service and World War II. He lost two and one-half years in the service. However, he's not sorry. "World War II was a big war and you wanted to be a part of it...It was all part of the overall duty of everybody to go in if you could. I volunteered for the Naval Aviation program and wound up being a flyer. Looking back on it, it cost me a couple of years in the Major Leagues. But I never looked at it as a problem."²²

Twenty years later, I used the example of Cleveland Indians Hall of Fame pitcher Bob Feller as an example to teach the Jewish value of *messirut nefesh* (self-sacrifice). My students learned of Feller as an example of a baseball player who was not merely an entertainer, but who qualified as a hero. Just two days after the attack on Pearl Harbor (December 7, 1941), he volunteered for the United States Navy; even though, as the sole support of his mother and ailing father, he would likely never have been drafted. He missed almost four seasons as he served on the U.S.S. Alabama in combat. This likely cost him a chance at 300 victories. But when I asked him during one of his visits to our school if he had any regrets about volunteering, he told my students and me, "Of course not...I'm very proud of my military career; I am proud of the United States, I'm proud of my baseball career."²³ Clearly, Bob Feller represents the very Jewish value of *messirut nefesh* — self-sacrifice for a higher cause.

Self-sacrifice is clearly a Jewish value. For example, in the story of Purim, Queen Esther is afraid to go unannounced to King Ahasueros in an attempt to set in motion a plan to save the Jewish people from the genocidal designs of the wicked Haman. Should the king not wish her company and be angered by her unannounced visit, she could be executed for this "crime." When she tells her uncle Mordecai that she doesn't wish to go, he admonishes her that she has a duty to do what she can to rescue the Jewish people.

If you are silent at this time, the Jewish people will be saved some other way; and you and your father's house will be lost. Who knows if it was for this occasion that you rose to the throne? (Esther 4:14)

Esther takes Mordecai's words to heart. She tells him to have the entire Jewish people fast and pray for three days. She will then go to the king and, "If I am lost (killed) then I shall be lost." (Esther 4:16) She is willing to sacrifice herself for the Jewish people. Ultimately, her mission is successful and the Jewish people are saved.

Further, in Jewish law, one must sacrifice one's life *Al Kiddush Hashem* (for the Sanctification of G-d's Name) rather than transgress any of three core sins — idolatry, murder or sexual immorality. One must even be willing to sacrifice one's life over smaller issues if one is living under a ruler who is trying to destroy Judaism itself. Though life has precedence over most things, some things are even more important than physical life.²⁴

The Closing Inning:

Of course, nothing can compare with the Divinely revealed, inherited tradition that is the Torah. Yet, it's undeniable that many of baseball's core values are "Jewish." These include the values of inherited tradition, respect for different— though equally valid —practices, and the value of self sacrifice. Perhaps this is why I have felt that, like everything in life, baseball can be properly viewed as a gift from G-d.

NOTES

¹ This article is dedicated to my son Akiva Eliyahu, born 2 Adar Bet, 5765 (March 13, 2005).

² *The Redbird Chirps*, August, 1982, 2.

³ *The Redbird Chirps*, September, 1982, p.6.

⁴ *The Redbird Chirps*, November, 1982, p.3.

⁵ See Terry Pluto, "The Conscience of the Indians," in *The Curse of Rocky Colavito* (New York, 1995) Chapter 16.

⁶ Jim Grant, "Life," accessed at <http://www.emudcat.com/poetrynu.html> .

⁷ *Orach Chayyim* 472:16.

⁸ *Mishnah Berurah* s.k. 50.

⁹ Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, *Chinuch Teva'i* (Bet El, Israel) p. 118.

¹⁰ See http://cleveland.indians.mlb.com/NASApp/mlb/cle/ballpark/cle_ballpark_history.jsp, as well as Edward Walsh's *Gateway: Blueprint of the Future-Jacob's Field* (Cleveland, 1994) for a historical review.

¹¹ *Mishnah Avot* 1:1.

¹² Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Yesodei haTorah* Chapter 9, as well as the "Thirteen Principles of Faith."

¹³ Rabbi Isaac Herzog, Responsa *Heychal Yitzchak, Orach Chayyim* #3.

¹⁴ Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak haCohen Kook's introduction to *Mishpatei Uziel* (republished, Jerusalem, 1992), responsa by Rabbi Bentzion Uzziel.

¹⁵ *Shulchan Aruch*, Section Orach Chayyim 453:1.

¹⁶ *Memories and Dreams* Winter, 2005 and web sites such as www.philadelphiaathletics.org, www.thestlbrowns.com, and <http://www.bayou.com/~brooklyn/>.

¹⁷ www.baseballhalloffame.org .

¹⁸ Information about stadiums as "family friendly" are readily available on the internet at such sites as www.gonomad.com/family/baseball.html and www.ballparksofbaseball.com (in addition to teams' own sites, accessible through www.mlb.com and www.minorleaguebaseball.com).

¹⁹ Kevin Keane, WTAM Radio Cleveland, and personal email to the author, February 4, 2005.

²⁰ Terry Pluto, *Our Tribe* (New York, 1999), pp. 19, 23.

²¹ *ibid.*, p. 32.

²² *The Redbird Chirps*, June, 1983, page 6.

²³ Bob Feller, interview at Fuchs Mizrahi School, February, 2004.

²⁴ Maimonides, *Book of the Commandments*, Positive Commandment #9 and Negative Commandment #63.

An Orthodox Defense of the Designated Hitter

Shmuel Jablon

It might strike one as odd for an Orthodox rabbi (even an Indians — and thus American League — fan) to defend the designated hitter rule. For more than three decades baseball purists have attacked this reform of the orthodox rules of baseball.

Of course, one could simply say that it's only Torah that is unchanging. Baseball, like all man made things, can change. But I would suggest that, in reality, the designated hitter rule actually brings baseball further in line with Jewish tradition. The designated hitter rule clearly delineates roles among players. A pitcher is not a batter (which is apparent when one looks at batting averages of pitchers in the National League). A special kind of batter (the designated hitter) is not a fielder. Both roles are important, yet are clearly not the same. This distinction of roles is indeed a very Jewish concept.

The designated hitter rule, as adopted by the American League in 1973, says that a team may designate one player to bat in place of the pitcher. This results in the pitcher only pitching, one player only batting (in the pitcher's stead), and the other eight players both batting and playing a position in their field. This rule recognizes that pitchers generally have neither the training or ability to be major-league quality batters. This was a dramatic reform of the baseball rules. It should be noted that there have been other changes in the rules of baseball. At the end of 1800's the distance to home plate from the pitchers mound was lengthened. In the 1920's the spitball was outlawed (though each team could "grandfather" two spitball pitchers per team until they retired). At the end of the 1960's the pitching mound was lowered. There have been various changes in how statistics have been kept. Rules for stolen bases and saves have also evolved over the decades.¹

Within Judaism, there are clear differentiations of roles among different kinds of Jews. The most notable example is the distinction between *Kohanim* (Temple priests), *Levi'im* (Temple Assistants) and *Yisraelim* ("regular" Israelites). Among the Jewish People, G-d has defined the Tribe of Levi to be the tribe that is responsible for fulfilling certain sacred functions in the holy Temple. Within this tribe, there is an even more select group, the *Kohanim*, who are responsible (among other things) for offering the sacrifices and blessing the Jewish people. These are not just privileges, they are obligations. The Talmud states:

Said Rav Yehoshua ben Levi: How do we know that the Holy One Blessed is He desires the blessing of the *Kohanim*? It says (Numbers 6), "And they shall place My Name upon the Children of Israel and I shall bless them." Rav Yehoshua ben Levi also said: Any *Kohen* that blesses shall be blessed. Any *Kohen* that does not bless will not be blessed. As it says (Genesis 12), "I will bless those who bless you." Rav Yehoshua ben Levi also said: Any *Kohen* that does not go up [to bless the people] transgresses three positive commandments —those of "thus you will bless," "say to them" and "place My Name upon them."²

Kohanim also have extra laws of holiness they must keep, such as not coming into contact with a dead person who is not one of their close relatives and not marrying either a divorcee or convert.³

During the times of the Temple, there is one *Kohen*, the *Kohen haGadol* (High Priest) who performs certain roles that only he — and not even any other *Kohen* — may perform. Chief among these roles is the offering of the Yom Kippur sacrifice⁴, including the aspects

of the service in the Holy of Holies where he is the only human being allowed to enter, and only on Yom Kippur⁵.

This does not mean that *Yisraelim* are unimportant. All Jews have commandments that they must perform and opportunities to achieve holiness. They may even be held in higher regard than a member of the priestly class. The rabbis are clear, for example, that a *Yisrael* who, despite being the child of an adulterous or incestuous union, is a Torah scholar (an earned achievement) is regarded higher than a High Priest who despite his exalted inherited status is unlearned.⁶ All elements of the Jewish people are essential for their spiritual and physical strength. However, the fact remains that there are undeniable distinctions that are forbidden to be blurred. Each must follow the laws pertaining to them, and nobody may assume the privileges or obligations of the other.

There are also distinctions between men and women. Men and women have some different roles, most visible in regards to ritual practice. The Mishnah states:

All positive commandments that must be done at a certain time — men are obligated and women are exempt. All positive commandments that need not be done at a certain time, both men and women are equally obligated. All negative commandments, whether or not they must be done at a certain time, both men and women are equally obligated — other than not rounding the corners of the hair or [the *Kohen*] not becoming impure by virtue of contact with the dead.⁷

Despite the attacks of some, this is not a reflection of inequality. As a matter of fact, there is a very strong view in rabbinic literature that women are on a higher spiritual level than men, which they have proven at various points in Jewish history. For example, the Talmud states, “In the merit of the righteous women of that generation were the Jewish people redeemed from Egypt.”⁸ Women also didn’t participate in the sin of building the golden calf in the desert (Exodus 32), nor in the sin of the evil spies who said it would not be possible to conquer the Land of Israel (Numbers 13). Rather, Jewish law is a reflection of the different roles assigned the genders (in some areas). Women are exempt from performing most positive time bound *mitzvot* (commandments), such as praying three times daily at set times or putting on *tefillin* (phylacteries) every morning. Women are presumed to be involved in other obligations (having primary responsibility for raising, and the only biological capability of bearing, children). Thus, they are not part of a minyan of ten individuals with the obligation to pray at a set time, nor can they lead services for men (who have this obligation).⁹ All of these roles are vital in Jewish life, but are indeed different. A man is not a woman, and a woman is not a man.... Just as in the American League, a pitcher is not a hitter, and a designated hitter is not a fielder. Both roles are essential, but are certainly different.

Baseball, like Judaism, has a love of tradition deeply ingrained within it (See my other essay in this volume.). Whether or not the designated hitter rule results in more exciting games, or wiser pitching strategies that take only pitching and not pitchers’ hitting into account, is a lively debate among baseball historians and fans. It is my contention, however, that defining the roles of various players results an even more traditionally Jewish-oriented game.

NOTES

¹ For a nice summary of the chronology of baseball rule changes, see http://www.baseball-library.com/baseballlibrary/excerpts/rules_chronology2.stm)

² Babylonian Talmud, Sota 38b.

³ *Shulchan Aruch*, Orach Chayyim Chapter 128 Laws 40-40-41 and Yoreh Deya Chapters 369 and 373.

⁴ Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of the Yom Kippur Service, 1:2-3, 2:1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 2:2.

⁶ Mishnah Horayot 3:8.

⁷ Mishnah Kedushin 1:7.

⁸ Babylonian Talmud, Sota 11b.

⁹ In Jewish law, one cannot lead or discharge others in their obligations unless they are equally obligated. Perhaps this can be compared to voting. I can only vote in the district in which I reside as that is where I have rights and obligations. The fact that I cannot vote in another district doesn't make me unequal. It means my responsibilities are in a different area.

Is Ball Playing Allowed on Shabbat?

Tzvi Levitin, 5th grade student

Iam going to ask and answer a very difficult question: Can you play baseball on *Shabbat*?

To start with, what is *Shabbat* and what is it for? *Shabbat* is from Friday at sundown through Saturday at dark. During this time there are certain things that Jews aren't allowed to do. These are called the 39 *Melachot* (creative labors that are forbidden on *Shabbat*) and *Muktzah* (things that cannot be moved). The 39 *Melachot* are considered *De'orita* (Toraitic) because they are taught in the Mishnah¹ (the central text of the Oral Torah), based on verses in the Written Torah. They are derived from the things that *Bnei Yisrael* (the Jewish nation) did while building and working in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) and *Beit Hamikdash* (Temple). The laws of *Muktzah* are rabbinic, a continuation of the *Shabbat* laws. These rabbinic prohibitions were designed, in part, to keep observant Jews from transgressing Torah law. The reason why such Jews have *Shabbat* is because G-d rested on the seventh day when He was creating the world.

Playing ball outdoors without an *eruv* (a wire or wall that by turning a public area to a private one allows observant Jews to carry things on *Shabbat*) is totally unacceptable, because it is carrying in public, and thus forbidden. There are two opinions for the question of whether one may play ball on *Shabbat* even within an *eruv*. The first one is by Rav Yosef Karo, the Sephardic rabbi who wrote the *Shulchan Aruch*. He said² that playing ball is not allowed on *Shabbat* for two reasons; one is because when playing ball on the ground, you may make holes and want to fill them in, which is a *melachah*. The second is because a ball is not a *kli* (a vessel). Since it has no standard use on *Shabbat*, it is *muktzah* and should not be used or even moved. The next opinion is by Rav Moshe Isserles; he was an Ashkenazic rabbi who wrote the *Rama* (additions to the *Shulchan Aruch* for Ashkenazim). He agrees that you can't play ball on the ground. But if you play on concrete or something else hard (so there's won't be holes), he has a different opinion. He says if the ball is made for being used as a "ball" it is a *Kli*; so therefore it is not *muktzah*. Therefore, you could play with the ball.

About one hundred years ago another Jewish law book was written by Rabbi Yechiel Michael Halevi Epstein called the *Aruch Hashulchan* (literally, the Setting of the Table). The author describes something called *Ruach Shabbat*. *Ruach Shabbat* means if something is appropriate for the spirit of *Shabbat*. It quotes the Talmud Yerushalmi about G-d destroying a town due to ball playing on *Shabbat*, because it was not in the spirit of *Shabbat*.³ *Ruach Shabbat* is important because G-d might punish observant Jews if they do not use the gift of *Shabbat* properly. The author also notes that *Shabbat* is for resting, praying, learning Torah, and spending time with family and friends. This is echoed by the author of the more modern book, *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchato* (Keeping the Sabbath According to Its Laws)⁴ as well as other rabbis.

My answer to this unique question is that baseball should not be played on *Shabbat* because it is not appropriate for *Shabbat*. *Shabbat* is for relaxing and having a meaningful time with others and for Hashem, and not for running and sweating.

NOTES

¹ Mishnah Shabbat, Chapter 7.

² Book *Orach Chayyim*, Chapter 308, Law 45.

³ Book *Orach Chayyim* Chapter 308, Paragraph 79.

⁴ Rabbi Yehoshua Y. Neuwirth, *Shemirat Shabbat KeHilchato* (Jerusalem, 1979), pp. 182-3.

Are Baseball Cards *Muktzeh* on Shabbat?

Noah Bar-Shain, Eitan Lindenberg and Zaki Setnik, 4th graders

Muktzeh is an adjective that is used to describe things that are forbidden to move on *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov* (though you are allowed to move these objects on *Chol haMoed* — the Intermediate Days of a Festival). *Muktzeh* literally means “set aside.” You have set it aside because you are not planning to use it on *Shabbat*. Remember that a verb cannot be *muktzeh*. Only a noun can be described as *muktzeh*. Something that is forbidden to do on *Shabbat* is a *malacha* (work that is not allowed on *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*), and is therefore *assur* (forbidden).

Muktzeh is not a law from the Torah. It is a law from the rabbis.¹ One reason they made the law was to prevent people from sinning and doing *melacha*, which would be a direct violation of the Torah. The way observing the laws of *muktzeh* prevents someone from doing *melacha* is that if you can’t move something, you won’t forget and accidentally use it in the way you are not allowed. However, you are allowed to move these things indirectly or in an unusual way (such as moving a pen with your foot). The reason moving something indirectly is allowed is because though if you move something directly, you might forget and start using it in a forbidden way, but if you move it indirectly, you won’t forget.

There are several kinds of *muktzeh*. The first category of *muktzeh* is *muktzeh machmat gufo* — something not allowed to move because it has no permitted use on *Shabbat*. For example: dirt, rocks, sticks and money have no use on *Shabbat*. Therefore they are *muktzeh machmat gufo* and you are not allowed to move them directly on *Shabbat*.²

The next category is *muktzeh machmat melachto* — something not allowed to move because its primary purpose is not allowed on *Shabbat*. For example, a hammer is *muktzeh machmat melachto* because it is usually used for building (which is not allowed on *Shabbat*). However, if you want to use it to crack open a nut, you may move it directly.³

The next category is *muktzeh machmat chesron kis* — something not allowed to move because it is valuable to you. This could be valuable in money, or just because it’s special to you. These are things you would not normally allow other people to ever touch so that nothing will happen to them. Therefore, when *Shabbat* started, you had already set them aside. For example, a valuable painting or toy, or just a special picture or letter, would be *muktzeh machmat chesron kis*, and you are not allowed to directly move it.⁴

A baseball card is a card with a picture of a baseball player on the front and his statistics on the back. Some cards have other things on the back. Some people collect baseball cards so that in the future they can get money for them. Other people collect baseball cards just for fun, because they like them. They like to look at the statistics, the picture and sometimes consider how good the player is and compare them with other players and their cards. Some people collect them for both reasons. It is forbidden to trade or sell baseball cards on *Shabbat* because you cannot buy or sell things on *Shabbat*. However, are they *muktzeh*?

Baseball cards are not *muktzeh machmat gufo* because they would provide allowed entertainment. Reading is allowed on *Shabbat*. Baseball cards are not *muktzeh machmat melachto* because they are not tools used for any work forbidden on *Shabbat*. However, they might be *muktzeh machmat chesron kis*. You might have a very valuable card and you wouldn’t let anyone touch it. If you have a card like this, it is *muktzeh machmat chesron kis*. If you have cards that are not very valuable and you let everyone look at and touch them, then they are not considered *muktzeh* at all.

NOTES

¹ Mishnah Shabbat, Chapter 17.

² *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 88:7.

³ *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 88:5.

⁴ *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* 88:6.

Is Baseball Permitted on *Chol haMoed* (Intermediate Days of Festivals)?

Yaakova Aeder and Annie Jaffe, 6th Graders

In order to ascertain whether baseball is permitted on *Chol HaMoed* it is necessary to define the laws of *Chol HaMoed*. Having defined the laws one needs to apply them to various situations related to baseball.

Yom Tov, which means “good day,” is the term used for a holiday commanded in the Torah. Passover, Sukkot (The Festival of Tabernacles), and Shavuot are the Three Pilgrimage Festivals and are examples of *Yom Tov*. On days designated as *Yom Tov*, many Jewish people go to synagogue and pray. One is not permitted to do many kinds of work (e.g. use electricity, fire, or anything that uses batteries that has not been prepared before the holiday). Two large meals are usually eaten each day of the holiday. As with all Jewish days these holidays start the previous night. For instance if the holiday is on Wednesday, then the *Yom Tov* would start on Tuesday night.

The holidays of Passover and Sukkot are seven days in Israel, and for Orthodox and Conservative Jews, eight days outside of Israel. In Israel, the first and last days of the holidays have the status of *Yom Tov*. Outside of Israel the first two and last two days of the holidays have this status. The middle days of these Festivals are known as *Chol haMoed*. *Chol HaMoed* is a cross between a regular day and *Yom Tov*. *Chol*, which means regular — as in a regular day — and *moed*, which means holiday, combine to make *Chol HaMoed*.

Since *Chol HaMoed* is a part of the holiday, there are many laws which apply. Included are restrictions on work that can be done. In general, work would not be allowed on *Chol haMoed*. However, there are exceptions. What kinds of work are allowed on *Chol HaMoed*?

One is permitted to do what is necessary to have needed provisions for the holiday. This is called *tzorchai moed* (needs of the holiday). For instance if one ran out of orange juice and needed more, then they would be permitted to go shopping for more. However, large shopping trips, farming, or other time consuming or difficult work are not allowed because of *Tircha yetaira* (going to extra trouble); the Torah does not want you to do extra work on *Chol HaMoed*.

One is also permitted to do certain kinds of work that qualify as a *Daver Aved* (matter of loss), which means that something would be lost by not doing something that one would regularly do. For instance, if one was to take off from work for *Chol haMoed* and was not going to get paid then this would be a *Daver Aved*. One is only permitted to go to work if doing so is needed to support their family. For example, it says in the Mishnah¹ that one may water an irrigated field during *Chol haMoed* or during *Shmittah* year (the seventh year, the year that observant Jews let their fields rest) from a spring of water so that the fields won't die. But we cannot draw water from a cistern, or dig ditches arounds grape vines (which would qualify as a *tircha yeteyra*, as explained above).

It also says in the Mishnah² that one may bring in fruits that robbers may steal. This is a case where someone is drying their fruits on their roof and the fruits are ready to be retrieved. One would be permitted to bring the fruits lest they be stolen. One is also allowed to take in his flax in from soaking so it does not get ruined. If one left them to get ruined or stolen that would be a case of *Daver Aved*. It is important to note, though, that if one had planned for these fruits to be gathered on *Chol haMoed* — but could have done so before — then one may not go and get them because they should not have planned in this way.

In the Mishnah ³, we learn of another type of permitted work — that of *tzorchai rabim* — the needs of the community. After a short discussion of examples of work that are allowed to avoid a financial loss, the Mishnah says that one is allowed to fix broken cisterns on public property. One can also repair roads, streets, *mikvaot* (ritual baths), mark graves, help with the public needs, and even go into the field to remove *kelaim* (a mixture of seeds, which is forbidden). All of these are examples of *tzorchai rabim*, the needs of the community.

Finally, certain activities are permitted due to *Simchat moed*. *Simchat moed* is doing things to enjoy *Chol HaMoed*. One is supposed to enjoy *Chol HaMoed*. (However, the enjoyment must not override that of the holiday. Therefore, we learn in the Mishnah⁴ that one may not get married on *Chol haMoed*. The Mishnah also discusses⁵ whether a *Kohen* (priest) can examine someone to see if they are afflicted with *tzarat* (a skin disease that renders one ritually impure) on *Chol haMoed*.) Rabbi Meir says that a *Kohen* is allowed to examine the skin and proclaim the person pure. He is to be silent if he would have to proclaim the person impure. However, the rabbis say that he may not examine the person at all. This is because if the *Kohen* finds that he is impure, he must tell him, which would ruin the joy of the holiday.

Of course, work that is *Pikuach nefesh* (saving someone's life or limb) must be done on *Chol haMoed* (as well as *Yom Tov* and *Shabbat*)!

On *Chol HaMoed*, it is permitted to watch and play baseball; but there are many rules and regulations. First, if you happen to be a kid with great talents and are on a Little League team and you play because you enjoy it you are allowed to play because of *simchat moed* (the joy of the holiday, as explained above). If you are part of a National League or American League team (professional) and play to support your family you are not allowed to participate in a game. However, there are two exceptions. First, if you love your job playing baseball and that's why you play, you are allowed to engage in the game for *simchat moed*. Second, if you could lose your job or lose a lot of money if you don't play in the game, then it is a *daveraved* (loss, as explained above) and you may proceed in what you regularly would do.

If your team makes it in to the World Series, you may play (even if you wouldn't lose money by not playing). Since being in the World Series may be a once in a life time chance, it would qualify as a *Daver Aved*.

NOTES

¹ Moed Kattan 1:1.

² Moed Kattan 2:3.

³ Moed Kattan 1:2.

⁴ Moed Kattan 1:7.

⁵ Moed Kattan 1:5.

American Jews in America's Game

Martin Abramowitz

Yes, we may remember them as coming with bubble gum, but they appeared first toward the end of the nineteenth century as tobacco package inserts, then became giveaways or artwork in newspapers and sport magazines, Cracker Jacks, matchbook covers, vending-machine postcards, candies, cookies, hot dogs, potato chips where even the best preserved cards carry grease stains!, Wheaties, Kellogg's Pep, Post Cereals, Spic 'n Span, Jello, ice cream, and bread. They were also branded and given away by minor and major league teams, gas stations, shoe stores, soda distributors and Police Departments. There were "regional" sets; "team issue" sets" and commemorative" sets. Tim Wiles of the Hall of Fame calls baseball cards "cultural icons in America." I call them pieces of immortality. Yes, having a line or two in the record books also counts, but, in some deeper sense, if you don't have a baseball card as a major-leaguer, you didn't play the game. For at least the first half of the twentieth century, you were not likely to have "a card of your own" if you weren't a starter, or if you happened to be having your best years in the middle of a World War. Of the 141 Jewish Major Leaguers 41 never had that piece of immortality. I started this project (Jewish Major League Baseball Cards) in large part because I felt I owed it to those 41.

There were other reasons for working on these cards. First of all, I'm a collector. I "have" (Remember the patter in Brooklyn in the 50's as we went through freshly opened Topps packs: "have him/need him...") the cards of 97 of the 100 players who had cards, either as major leaguers or as minor leaguers. At least I have a shot at finding the three I'm missing (Guy Zinn, Ike Danning, Herb Karpel) But it was killing me that I'd never have a COMPLETE collection.

Secondly, this was an opportunity to work on something with my son. It would be good for our relationship, and it would be good for him to see his father "modeling" commitment, organization, resourcefulness, etc.

I'll leave the explanation to the poets and sociologists of Baseball in America, but it's surely no accident that the "historiography" of Jews in baseball is a saga of family authorship: cousins, and fathers and sons. The seminal work was the 1965 *Encyclopedia of Jews in Sports* (the cousins Jesse and Roy Silver, with Bernard Postal), followed by father-son team Harold U. and Meir Z. Ribalow's 1985 *Jewish Baseball Stars*, and the recent wonderful *Big Book of Jewish Baseball* (Peter Horvitz and his son Joachim). This card set, *American Jews in America's Game*, is another father-son creation:

A "light-bulb" moment: there we were, in the Spring of 1999, my 11-year old son Jacob and I, sitting around the kitchen table, "playing" with our baseball card collections, Jacob counting his Ken Griffey Junior's, and I leafing through my Play Balls, Goudeys, Zeenuts, and tobacco cards of Jewish Major Leaguers, bemoaning the fact that I would never have a complete collection. Not only did Jacob offhandedly remark, "so make your own cards"; he casually sketched a Jewish star inside a baseball, drew a box around it, said, "here's your design," and returned to his Griffey cards.

What a great idea! A complete, specially designed set of Jewish Major Leaguer Baseball cards. To do this right, a bunch of things had to fall into place: we needed a defensible all-time roster of Jewish players; the photos of all of these players; and their complete career stats, including their years in hundreds of minor-league towns and cities. We also needed a sponsor, a producer, the encouragement of Major League Baseball, the players and their associations.

I saw my job on this project largely as bringing together and building on the great work already done over the years by folks who have spent their lives, either professionally or just for the love of it, collecting and working with stats and photos and stories.

There is actually a scholarly tradition in the area of identifying Jewish ballplayers. Particularly, in the 80's and 90's, people like Bob Greenberg, Neil Keller, David Spaner, Peter Horvitz, Shel Walman, and Ephraim Moxson have come together in cyberspace and print to create *the* definitive list. David is a film critic in Vancouver, British Columbia, but his 1997 intensively researched *Total Baseball* essay "From Greenberg to Green," set the modern standard for list-making. Shel and Ephraim have carried that standard forward as editor and publisher of the bi-monthly *Jewish Sports Review* (JSR). They have updated and amended the list as necessary, and I am proud to have contributed three "finds" (one of them, Guy Zinn, from David), and one "de-certification" (Bill Schwarz, who was indeed a Jewish major-leaguer with the New York Highlanders in 1914, but did not get into a game.). The JSR standard is inclusive, welcoming converts, and, where there has not been conversion to Judaism, asking only that at least one parent have been Jewish, and that the player was not raised in/did not practice a religion other than Judaism.

(Of the 141 players, 122 were born into families in which both parents were Jewish, six converted to Judaism, and 13 had only one Jewish parent- the mother in six instances, the father in seven. Not surprisingly, all the converts and all but one of the one-Jewish-parent players began their careers after the twentieth century had passed the two-thirds mark.)

So I've had it easy, with regard to deciding "who's in, who's out". Whenever someone's asked how I could have excluded so-and-so or included someone else (and I get a lot of those queries!), my answer has been, "I'm using the best source we have, which is the *Jewish Sports Review*....and no, Rod Carew did not convert to Judaism".

I assumed that finding the photos would be one of the easier tasks, considering the great photographic archives of the Hall of Fame and the *Sporting News*. Wrong! The folks at both places were and have been extremely supportive of this project, but came up virtually empty in the search for photos of the card-less players. So much for the "great idea".... until, following up an e-mail suggestion by one of the editors of *Sports Collectors Digest*, I visited with George Brace, on a November 2000 morning in the sunroom of his home in an ethnic neighborhood on the North (Wrigley Field) side of Chicago. In his late 80's, "Mr. Brace," as his daughter Mary called him, was tucked into an easy chair as the sun streamed onto his patch-work quilt. He knew why I was there, seemed genuinely pleased to talk about his career, willing to be helpful, although it struck him as a little odd that anyone would want to do an "ethnic" baseball card set. Then came the magic moment: "Would you like to see the collection?"

Mary walked me down to the basement where a bunch of file cabinets shared an alcove with the family's washer and dryer. In the laundry room of this basement stood what is probably the most extensive baseball photo archive in America. From the early 1920's to the early 90's(with time out for World War Two), he had taken most of those photos himself, during his long career (while also working nights in a Chicago factory) as the photographer for the Cubs and White Sox. If a player on any major league team was on that team long enough to make a road trip to Chicago, his photo was in one of those file cabinets. And if he played before the 1920's, chances were good that "Mr. Brace" had found and archived a photo.

It turned out that the Brace Collection had all but about a dozen of the missing photos. This is where historical research skills were required. Bernie Wax, the Director Emeritus of the American Jewish Historical Society, sat with me at a Brookline breakfast

place, and helped me map out a strategy to find the missing photos. Bernie scoured newspaper archives for obituaries, and tracked down relatives (who were thrilled to be contacted), while I called around to the research libraries of universities whose baseball teams had included Jewish players who went on to brief major league careers. We also benefited from the generosity and inspiration of a handful of collectors, dealers, publishers, and the staff at the Hall of Fame. We've acknowledged them all (as well as our guest authors: relatives and fans of particular players) by name in one of the first cards in the set. George Brace, looking jauntily out at us while holding his camera, gets his own card. Mr. Brace passed away in June of 2002, and it was then that I thought I realized—and Mary verified—that the \$15 disposable Kodak photo which he took of me and Mary in their sunroom was the last photo in the Brace Collection.

If "Mr. Brace" was the key to the photos, it was Mary who solved the next problem. For the players whose major league careers were very brief ("a cup of coffee", in the lingo of the clubhouse), their "story" was not just their major-league days, but their months and years playing in the literally hundreds of small towns and big cities which hosted minor-league clubs. (Remember, this was in the days before college baseball and network TV combined to decimate the minor leagues.) So I needed complete minor-league career records. Mary led me to Ray Nemecek, an energetic elderly baseball researcher in Naperville, Illinois, whose "day job" had been editing a newsletter for collectors and dealers of... antique doorknobs! (This turns out to be important, because it was during some down time in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, at the annual convention of the Antique Doorknob Collectors of America, that Ray wandered over to a local funeral home and "dug out" the record proving that Sam Fishburn was Jewish. Fishburn was one of our three "finds".) Ray thoroughly and cheerfully mined his database to produce a comprehensive career profile for each of our players.

I should say a word here about the critical role of the American Jewish Historical Society in this effort. It was Bernie Wax, a Jewish communal colleague in Boston, whose eyes first gleamed when I showed him the Brace Collection photos. It was Bernie and Stanley Remsberg of the AJHS Boston operation who brought their enthusiasm about this project to Michael Feldberg in New York. A great baseball fan as well as an entrepreneurial historian, Michael immediately recognized this crazy old man's project as a contribution to American Jewish history as well as to the history of baseball. Working with a supportive Board, it was his vision which led AJHS to underwrite the research, photo, and design costs of this project, and to commit its resources to making the card set happen....which leads to our encounter with our publisher.

Re-enter my son Jacob, now 13 in the Summer of 2001, writing his obligatory once-a-week letter home from Camp Ramah in Palmer, Massachusetts, and looking for something to say..."Hey dad, there's a kid in the next bunk who gets these great packages of baseball cards in the mail; his father owns "Fleer"!....The last thing Fleer's Roger Grass needed on Parents Weekend 2001 was a visit by me and Michael Feldbergbut that's what he got, responding graciously, immediately, and generously: "This is not something we would do commercially or distribute in our market; you guys are both crazy...but I love it, and I think men of our generation will love it...and I'll produce it for you, and I'll work with the folks at Major League Baseball and the Players Association to make it happen."

One of the questions I've been frequently asked is, "How good or mediocre were these players? Everyone knows Koufax and Greenberg, and maybe Moe Berg; weren't the rest of the crew below-average players?" The "Torah on one foot" answer is that we were actually slightly BETTER in most categories than the "universe" of players who are in the record books from 1871-2002. "The rest is commentary".

Baseball is a numbers game, so let's look at some numbers. First of all, it's clear that Jews ARE underrepresented in the population of major league ballplayers over time; our 141 players are about eight-tenths of 1% of the roughly 16,700 recorded major leaguers through 2002—let's round it up to 1% for simplicity's sake. So assuming we've been 3% of the American population over the last century, we "should" have had 3 times as many Jewish players.

So we are clearly "underrepresented". But what about those players we HAVE had? What can we say statistically about whether they were "better" or "worse" than average? Well, on the "down side" two measures of "failure" might be the number of players who stuck around for only one game, or never got in enough games over their careers to take them past at least one official definition of a "rookie": 60 innings pitched or 30 games played at other positions. Twelve Jewish major leaguers had one-game careers, just under 9% of our all-time roster. Sounds laughable, right? *However*, 1,438 non-Jewish major leaguers met the same fate: ALSO just under 9%! (actually slightly higher than the Jewish rate). How about the criterion of sticking around long enough to get past "rookie" status? Eighty-one of our 141 Jewish players (57%) exceeded the "rookie criterion".

So much for the "longevity stats". How about the "performance stats"? On the offensive side: we had 22,246 hits, and a .265 average, with 2032 home runs, and 10,602 RBI's. We struck out about 8% more often than we walked (9698 K's to 8957 walks) and we violated the Eighth Commandment by stealing 995 bases. We've hit for the cycle once (Harry Danning in 1940, one of only twelve major league catchers—out of about 1600—since 1871. His brother Ben tells me his homer was inside-the-park; not bad for a catcher... it was at the cavernous Polo Grounds, a drive that rolled to the clubhouse steps, the last time that a homer in a "cycle" performance was inside-the-park. And of course one of our boys—Shawn Green—had the single best nine-inning slugging performance in the history of baseball: 4 homers, a double and a single against Milwaukee in 2002.

Our 2,032 homers represent nine-tenths of one percent of the 219,667 recorded homers, so once again, Jewish Major Leaguers have held their own, getting slightly more than their statistical "fair share" of homers. Our .265 collective batting average is three points higher than all players from 1871-2002.

On the mound, we compiled an 1,134-1,114 record, with 810 complete games (164 of them shut-outs) and 11,632 strikeouts. The fact that our pitchers are 20 games over .500, a winning percentage, to be precise of .504, means that we've done slightly better than the entire non-Jewish pitching corps (since by definition, the won-lost record of *all* pitchers HAS to be .500, and our boys are slightly above it.) We've also thrown 5 of the 230 no-hitters (three for Koufax, two for Holtzman), about twice as many as our "statistical fair share"; our player Hall of Famers roster (Greenberg and Koufax) is statistically what one would predict: two out of slightly less than 200. Our group ERA is 3.66, a bit lower (that means "better") than the 3.77 racked up by all Major Leaguers.

The one performance stat which I've examined on which we fall short is stolen bases; we seem to have been slightly less than half as fleet or daring as all major leaguers; we stole only 995 (less than Ricky Henderson!), when our "expected fair share" would have been 2097 of the 262,144 steals in the record books.

(Footnote: aggregate stats for all players 1871-2002 were generated with miraculous speed by Sean Forman, a University of Massachusetts mathematician who has established baseball-reference.com precisely to respond to inquiries like this. I was referred to Sean by Gabriel Schechter, a Hall of Fame researcher and author who is a descendant of Solomon Schechter! For more recent stats, see [www.jewishmajorleaguers.org/.](http://www.jewishmajorleaguers.org/))

All in all, fans, I think it's safe to say that we can hold our heads up. Beyond the "stats", what else can we say about these players and the essence of their careers, and what those careers mean in the history of the American Jewish experience?

Meir Ribalow commented to me on "...the importance of the *best* Jewish players to the Jewish community. It's less the cumulative and overall stats that matter; it's that Hank Greenberg could slug with *anyone* and was a physically huge (for the time), powerful symbol of athletic strength that made him so important to the American Jewish community... or that Sandy Koufax bears comparison with *any* of the greatest pitchers who ever took the mound. The best pitcher of them *all* might have been a Jew. The symbolism of all that, in a fair-minded democracy that looks to individuals as 'champions' of those they represent, is hard to overestimate."

They have played for 40 different Major league franchises in the history of the game, including all but one of the current 30 teams. (Let's give the Diamondbacks some time.) No less significantly, they worked their way up from or down to no fewer than 275 minor-league towns.

Six players began their major league careers in the nineteenth century. Of the 130 players who made their debut in the twentieth century, 24 came up in the first quarter, 45 between 1926 and 1950, 31 in the third quarter, and 30 from 1976 through 2000.

Although 68 of them came from New York and California, their origins also included 21 other states, in addition to Russia, France, Canada and the Dominican Republic. At least three were the sons or grandsons of rabbis. There were six pairs of JML brothers. Ten players changed their last names, all but one of them before Hank Greenberg's days. All of them (except Herb Gorman, who died suddenly in the Spring of 1953 on the San Diego field in his twenty-ninth year, after one unsuccessful at-bat for the Cardinals the previous September) went on to other things, becoming baseball coaches, managers, and executives, but we also count (this is a partial list): at least one policeman, Jewish community worker, military man, broadcaster, attorney, school-teacher, automobile dealer, equities trader, stock-broker, industrial metals mogul, restaurateur, real-estate owner and broker, spy, insurance salesman, movie actor stand-in, record-store proprietor, mayor, Hollywood studio transportation chief, appliance salesman, garden-store owner, and professional football player.

From 1939-42, there was only one "player" in the baseball card industry: Gum, Inc. of Philadelphia, producer of Play Ball cards. The '39 and '40 Play Balls were thick cardboard squares using black and white photographs: no player name, or ornamentation on the front on the '39's; the 40's had line drawings of the "tools of the trade" (two balls, a bat, a glove, and catcher's mask), which framed the name plate below the photos. There are people who maintain that the '40 Play Balls were the most elegantly beautiful cards of all time. It was downhill after 1940; the 41's were weakly colorized versions of the 40's; the color made them seem like drawings. By 1942, Gum, Inc. was probably suffering from a war-induced paper shortage and a declining market; there were two smaller photos on each card, and no text on the reverse-not even the Play Ball "brand". Play Ball vanished with that issue; Gum, Inc. reinvented itself after the war as the Bowman Company, which went "card to card" against Topps in the early 50's, before fading, and re-emerging toward the end of the Century as a unit of Topps.

During those four years, there were Play Balls of 10 Jews: 8 players, an umpire (the "beloved" Dolly Stark), and a former player and coach who was, by 1939, the "Clown Prince of Baseball": Al Schacht. The Players were Maury Arnovich, Moe Berg, Harry Danning, Harry Eisenstat, Hank Greenberg, Buddy Myer, Goody Rosen, and Fred Sington. There have been more Jewish ballplayers in a single year (in the post-expansion era), but these

eight men, when there were 16 rather than today's 30 major-league franchises, *proportionately* represented the single largest concentration of Jewish players in the major leagues. As a collector, I call them "the Play Ball Jews" in honor of the cards they appeared on... but it strikes me that perhaps all 141 Jewish Major Leaguers have been "Play Ball Jews"; they have all "played ball with America," using their talent and their love of the game to find their place and establish their identity in a society which at first posed a threat of rejection and may today pose a threat of assimilation. Like the rest of us, they have "played America's Game."

Would these old-timers, long or recently gone (Alta Cohen, the oldest living former Dodger, died recently at almost 95), have cared about these cards? I am certain that the 40 first-timers would be thrilled. Of course, the two players who subsequently converted from Judaism might have objected to their inclusion (if they played major league ball as Jews, they're in this set. Jewish tradition does not encourage us to name or exclude them). Conversely, I believe the six players who converted *to* Judaism would be delighted, as would the few who have taken pains to identify Jewishly (most prominently, Greenberg, Koufax and Green). What about the others, who are the vast majority of the 141? Who knows? But I'm encouraged by what Hank Greenberg in his later years said to Lawrence Ritter in *The Glory of Their Times*: "It's a strange thing. When I was playing, ...I wanted to be known as a great ballplayer, period. I'm not sure why or when I changed, because I'm still not a particularly religious person. Lately, though, I find myself wanting to be remembered not only as a great ballplayer, but as a great *Jewish* ballplayer."

With a few exceptions, these players will not be remembered as great ballplayers, and many of them would not be remembered at all, but now and forever they will *all* be remembered as American Jews in America's Game." This set is dedicated to their memory.

NOTES:

- Converts to Judaism: Allen, Jutze, Maddox, Newman, Tufts, Yeager
- Name-changers: Baker, Bennett, Bohne, Corey, Cooney, Reese, Markell, Ewing, Kane
- Brother combinations: Sherry, Cohen (Sid/Andy), Danning, Pike, Rosenberg, Mayer
- Descendants of Rabbis: Schemer, Starr, Radinsky

Memoir of a Jewish Major Leaguer's Wife

May Abrams nee Thaler

I was born and raised in Brooklyn in what was then called Boro Park but is now known as Sunset Park. When we lived in Brooklyn we were Orthodox Jews but my family switched to a Conservative Shul when we moved to Philadelphia. I graduated Pershing Gr. High School. Went to New (?) Utrecht High School until 1942. Moved to Philadelphia and finished school there.

As I look back, it was divine providence that brought us to Philadelphia. I never would have met my husband-to-be, Cal Abrams, if we had remained in Brooklyn. He came from a big Philadelphia family. Both he and his mother were born there. In 1946 I attended a friend's wedding and Cal was there since it was his cousin's wedding. I must admit it was love at first sight. Within two days he was on his way to Danville, Illinois for his first full season of ball in the minor leagues. When he came home after the season ended we got engaged and we married within five months. We went to Mobile, Alabama as part of our honeymoon. That was a Dodger farm team, Class AA.

The year 1947 was the very beginning of my baseball life. For a girl growing up in Brooklyn loving the Dodgers, it was a dream come true. I married my own honest to goodness baseball player who someday was going to play for the Dodgers. Fortunately, having spent a lot of time in Ebbets Field, I was well versed in baseball and quite excited to be part of the "game." To the average fan the life of a baseball player and his family is exciting and glamorous. To a degree, that's true. There were fun times but there also was pain and heartache and very little money. In our day we had no union to protect our rights. The players were at the mercy of the owners. Unless you were a super-star you lived with the possibility of being traded, once again uprooting the family. If you went into a slump there was always someone waiting to take your place. There was a lot of insecurity in baseball. Things are quite different today. The big money has made a vast difference not only for the players but for the families as well. Naturally whatever happened to Cal directly impacted on my life. With all the ups and downs and the struggles, I'd do it all over again given the opportunity.

On most, if not all, teams, I was the only Jewish woman and felt very much an outsider. Most of the women in baseball came from "small town USA" and probably didn't know a Jew. I was a New York Jew, well dressed and more sophisticated and I think I intimidated them. That was a particular problem with the Dodger wives. Things were better when we left the Dodgers and went to Pittsburgh, then Baltimore, Chicago and finally Miami. No matter where we lived, whether it was Mobile, Alabama, Baltimore or Pittsburgh the Jewish community embraced us. The Jews of Mobile and Baltimore sponsored a "Cal Abrams Day." They were so proud to have a Jewish ballplayer and his family in their midst. In 1956 Cal was sold by the Chicago White Sox to the Miami Marlins in the International League. Our daughter Caren was born in February, our older daughter Ellen was in school and I also had a five-year-old in kindergarten and Cal had to go to Miami. I was left at home until mid-May when I rejoined him in Miami. He had a very successful year—was voted most valuable player but at that point we decided it was time to "hang up his spikes." With three kids school was becoming a problem and we found the constant uprooting very difficult. We needed some stability in our lives. After Cal's retirement we added a fourth child. Our family now consisted of two boys and two girls. After living on Long Island for 40 years we moved to South Florida in 1990. Prior to our move we were members of the Jewish Center of the Hamptons in East Hampton. Happily, when we came to Florida we

found Temple Kol Ami (now Kol Ami Emanu-el). I'm still a member of that congregation. It's a very special place and I do treasure my membership.

I have been a Life Member of Hadassah since 1964 and a past president of a large Long Island chapter. Cal and I were always involved in Zionist causes and visited Israel twice prior to his death.

Baseball is still very much a part of my life. I often hear from some of Cal's devoted fans and I love the fact that he is still remembered. It has changed me and my life forever.

Q: He was very protective of Jackie Robinson, especially in an incident with Dodgers in 1949 in Cincinnati. Any recollections about the integration of baseball and, perhaps, Mrs. Robinson would be most helpful.

Q: Cal was involved in a play in 1950 that is related to the Dodgers losing the pennant to the Phillies and that fans wouldn't let him forget the incident. How did you (and he) deal with this unpleasant and unfair situation? Did fans truly remember him this way? Did they remember all the good things he'd done as well?

1.) In answer to your first question regarding an incident in Cincinnati, I truly do not recall the incident. As for Jackie Robinson, I'm sure Cal's relationship with him had something to do with also being a minority. When Cal came to the Dodgers, Jackie had already established himself as a super star so Cal was not involved in his problem integrating the Dodgers. I never got to meet Rachel Robinson. As the lone Jew on the Dodgers, Cal was in a constant fight to land a permanent position on a team overloaded with talented players with nowhere to go. Being Jewish was hardly an advantage.

2.) As for the 1950 play that cost the Dodgers the pennant, a real baseball fan would have known that it was not Cal's decision to try to score from second base. The coach gives the signal and you do what they tell you to do. The coach who waved Cal home, Milt Stock, was fired the next day, yet they blamed Cal. Remember, Cal was the first out—Hodges and Furillo were up next and could have saved the game but they couldn't produce and the Phillies came back and won the pennant. Of course, for a long time everywhere we went people would want to know why Cal had tried to score from second and he patiently over and over again would recount the whole scenario. In spite of the "blame game" Cal was very philosophical about it. He felt the play was forever etched in Dodger memory and as a result he would always be remembered. For two years following his death, Cal was still getting fan mail. I know he would be tickled to know he hasn't been forgotten.

P.S. On Sunday, Feb. 13, 2004 I was the "pinch hitter" for Cal at a baseball function being held here in Weston, Florida. They honored Jewish baseball players in conjunction with the printing of 142 baseball cards featuring Jewish players. I stood in for Cal and did not let them forget him.

Why Baseball is Jewish [1990]

Avi Schulman

You can scarcely open a Denver newspaper or watch the news or listen to the radio without being bombarded by the debate over whether Denver should receive a major league baseball team. I am sure that you are aware that next Tuesday, Denver voters will go to the polls and vote whether to support a tax that will build a baseball stadium. You have probably heard arguments in favor of bringing baseball to Colorado: it will bring a much needed lift to the economy, providing new jobs and opportunities for expenditures of money. You have undoubtedly heard arguments opposed to the one tenth of one per cent sales tax: that it takes money from the common person in order to benefit the future big money owners of the team.

Well, to paraphrase Dr. McCoy from Star Trek, "I'm a rabbi darn it, not an economist." I would never offer from this pulpit merely secular, economic arguments on an issue. Instead, I want to present a case for baseball that you have probably not heard before. I am going to vote in favor of building a stadium and bringing major league baseball to Colorado because, because baseball is Jewish!

You may be surprised by this bold statement. Among you Bronco fans this may even smack of heresy. I have lived in Colorado long enough to know the impact that the Denver Broncos have on this state. Rabbis and other clergy know better than to schedule an important event which conflicts with a Broncos game; especially if they are playing at home. The fervor of true Bronco fans can be frightening; their intensity rivals that of any religious fanatic.

Yet, at its core, football is not really Jewish. First of all, look at the nature of the game. You play the game with a football, which is also known as what? A pigskin! Phooey. It is *treif* already. And what is the point of the game? To travel back and forth across a field, trying to run or pass the pigskin into your opponent's end zone. Football is really a miniature form of war. It is all about turf, protecting yours and invading the enemy's. It is played in the trenches, with huge hulking linemen slugging it out like opposing armies across the Maginot line. It is primitive, primordial, prehuman. Karl Mecklenburg, star defensive player for the Broncos alluded to this when he said, "I started out as a noseguard, then played guard, then inside linebacker. Now I am playing outside linebacker. I guess I am moving up the evolutionary ladder."

At its core, football is violent. Judaism abhors violence. "Seek peace and pursue it." Now this is a very Jewish statement, one that many baseball players would affirm as well. To draw upon George Carlin's brilliant contrasts, football and baseball are complete opposites. In football, the quarterback throws a bomb. In baseball the batter can bunt. In football, you have the blitz; in baseball, the sacrifice. In football you score in the end zone. In baseball you cross home plate.

And let's face it, how many Jewish guys are playing professional football? Lyle Alzado's out of the game. Name me another Jewish pro football player? Today there are about a thousand players in the National Football League.

Speaking of Jewish athletes, how many professional basketball players are there? Right. One. Danny Schayes, and he is no longer with the Nuggets.

Pro basketball is not very Jewish either. Here you have a bunch of guys, five to a team, so you have just half a minyan. They are all very tall, at least six feet, eight inches on the average. How many six foot eight inch fellows are there in the congregation tonight?

With basketball the players are crammed into a court, and told to run up and down, back and forth, until sweat is pouring off them onto the floor. No Jewish mother would put up with that kind of mess. They all mill around until one player throws up a shot. If he scores, they run down to the other end of the court and do it all over again. Run, shoot the ball at this little hoop, run down to the other end, shoot at the little hoop. What is the point of all this *narishkeit*?

To play football, you don the armor of pads and helmets. For basketball, you put on skimpy shorts and a shirt. However for baseball you wear a nice, respectable suit. You do not have to be a behemoth or gangly freak to play baseball. A lot of players are built like you and me. Look at the names of ballplayers. No Skeeters or Magics or Air Jordans. Instead you have baseball players like Johnny Temple, Wally Moses, Hank Greenberg, Saul Rogovin, and the immortal Sandy Koufax. If you dig deep enough you may even find a Jewish name lurking underneath the player's moniker. Jimmy Reese sounds pretty average. I just found out his birth name was James Hymie Solomon.

For me, personally, both Judaism and baseball are inextricably connected to my childhood. Perhaps I associate baseball so strongly with being Jewish because I grew up a fan of the Dodgers. The Dodgers are, in my opinion, the most Jewish of teams.

As a boy I remember listening to Vin Scully announce a Dodgers game. To my young mind, he could have been a sage describing the heroic actions of my people. Occasionally he mentioned venerable figures from the past, legendary Dodgers like Duke Snider, Jackie Robinson, and Pee Wee Reese. These players were the *Avot*, the founding fathers of the Dodgers as far as I could tell.

The history of the Dodgers goes back to the fabled land of Brooklyn, which for a true Dodgers fan is somewhat akin to the Land of Israel. Back in the 1940's they were an upstart team, paralleling the experience of the sons and daughters of Jewish immigrants. They were smart and aggressive. As one writer recently noted, the Dodgers played in "small, homely Ebbets Field, whose cheap seats extended around the entire outfield, where the fans were all crowded together, just like in the Jewish neighborhoods...in Bronx and Brooklyn. Seeing America more and more as a place where Jews struggled, scrapped, tried hard, looked for an edge, and got ahead. I took to the Dodgers as my team."¹

Brooklyn was the holy land. When the Dodgers moved to Los Angeles, it was devastating for Brooklyn fans. It was destruction and betrayal. It was like the Dodgers had gone into exile. They had entered the Diaspora of California. Little did they know that the Dodgers would flourish in the Diaspora.

I idolized Sandy Koufax. He was the most dominating left handed pitcher of the early 1960's. He was the ace of the Dodgers pitching staff, the stopper whom they always could count on. Yet as every Jewish kid of the time knew, Sandy Koufax would place his Jewish principles above the game when it came to the World Series. He would not pitch on Yom Kippur.

For me, baseball and Judaism are not only linked to my childhood, they are connected to my family. My parents still live in Long Beach, California. I have one brother in Los Angeles, another in San Diego, a third in Boston. I know that at any time I can pick up the phone and ask any one of them how the Dodgers are doing. Well, to tell the full truth, I could get an answer from any one of them except my mother. My dad runs a health food store, my eldest brother is a lawyer, another is a doctor, the youngest is a landscape architect, I am a rabbi, and you know what we all can talk about? Baseball - baseball and family and Judaism.

Last month I was in California for a family wedding. During the weekend I was talking to one of my brothers about a serious matter. One of us slipped in the fact that Nolan

Ryan had just pitched his sixth no-hitter. Then one of us said that perhaps Nolan Ryan was a greater pitcher than Sandy Koufax. Well we had one heated discussion. Forget the serious matter we had been talking about. This was baseball and we had some passionate opinions to express!

Baseball is a lot like Judaism in its respect for the past. The marvelous second baseman, Joe Morgan, was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame this past week. Morgan was quoted as saying, "I still have a problem believing people are saying Mays, Musial, and Morgan in the same breath. I am a baseball traditionalist. I believe in the history of the game and the people who have preceded me."

Joe Morgan's humility is much to be admired. Imagine his reaction if he heard the Jewish saying, "We are but midgets standing on the shoulders of giants." For all traditionalists the past was always better. For Jews we are convinced that our grandparents were more pious, more observant, more religious. For baseball fans, the game was played better when there were fewer teams; when each player worked harder to hone his skills.

Jews and baseball fans are acutely aware of the triumphs of the past and the great figures who preceded us. We have Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Baseball has Tinkers to Evers to Chance. We have Moses who led us out of the land of Egypt. Baseball has Babe Ruth, who led the game into the modern era. As with baseball, we lovingly recall the past and relive its key events. For some baseball fans and for some Jews, the past is a jumble of dates and statistics. 61 home runs.... 613 commandments. 56 game hitting streak... 49 days between Passover and Shavuot.

The quintessential book of baseball statistics is called *The Baseball Encyclopedia*. It is a monumental volume recording the statistics of every ballplayer who ever played the game. Listen to the rapturous reviews given it. One reviewer wrote, "*The Baseball Encyclopedia* has gone through enough editions to assume some of the immutability of scripture." Another said, "Open it to any page and you are drawn into labyrinthine passages of baseball's past. The book is sturdy, handsome, and Talmudic." Bill James said, "There is one volume in every field that you could spend your life studying without beginning to exhaust the possibilities, and in my field, this is that volume." Perhaps Bill James had in mind the saying of Ben Bag Bag who said, referring to Torah, *Hafoch bah v'hafoch bah, d'cholah vah. Turn it and turn it again, for everything is contained in it.*

For many fans of Judaism and baseball, it is the legends of our traditions that we like the most. Every baseball fan knows the legend of Babe Ruth pointing his bat to centerfield, indicating where he was going to hit it. Every fan knows that on the next pitch he hit one to the precise spot he pointed out. Did he really? Who cares? The legend is larger than fact. So too, every Jew knows that as a boy Abraham worked in his father's shop, making idols. One day Abraham's father left and Abraham, who believed only in one God, destroyed all the idols except the biggest. When Abraham's father returned, he was aghast and asked his son, "What happened?" Abraham pointed to the big idol and said, "He did it." His father did not believe idols could really hit, which was Abraham's point. And my point is that this is a legend that everyone knows. Did it really happen? Whether it happened or not is not the issue. The stories of Babe Ruth calling his shot and Abraham breaking the idols are *midrashim* that enrich and elucidate the playing of the game.

Both Judaism and baseball are lifetime pursuits. I love them passionately. Fortunately, we can already play out our Jewish lives here at Temple Sinai and throughout Colorado.

I hope we will be able to enjoy major league baseball in the near future in Denver. In the meantime, it is time for the seventh inning stretch. Let us all rise for *Aleinu*.

NOTE

¹. Ted Solotaroff, "Fan as in Fantasy," *Tikkun*, 5.3, page 21.

Living With Imperfection

Louis A. Rieser

Introduction

In the old days, when the baseball season only lasted 154 games, Judaism and baseball mixed on a regular basis. The World Series would fall out during the High Holy Days and transistor radios hid under the suits of certain fans. When the game was on we kids divided our time between services inside and the game on radio outside on the front walk. At that age I didn't appreciate the parallel. Inside we would recite the *U'ntaneh Tokef* – "In truth do You ... record and seal, count and measure, remembering all that we have forgotten." Outside we would count and measure every ball and strike, every hit and catch; we would remember every error for good and for bad.

The work of Yom Kippur, if attended to conscientiously, is to take stock of our shortcomings and to make atonement. On this day, more than any other, one stands to acknowledge our human imperfections. We recite the long litany of the *Al Het*, counting out our sins. And for those devoted fans who review and recount the baseball stats there is a similar process of counting the errors and noting the imperfections.

Judaism and baseball both live comfortably in a world of human imperfection. While this may sound like a dubious honor, it actually is a high compliment. Moments of perfection, when everything falls into place, may appear miraculously in our lives, but our day to day reality is of an imperfect world. Baseball, unique among sports, and Judaism both acknowledge the uneasy balance of living with imperfection.

To fully appreciate the blessing of imperfection one must understand the shortcomings of perfection. There are sports where perfection is achievable. In gymnastics, for example, the goal of a perfect 10 captures the imagination. When little 14 year-old Nadia Comanec earned the first perfect 10 for her gymnastics program at the '76 Olympics people were in awe. There was a palpable sense that a threshold had been crossed. Nadia set the standard for all who followed, not only in gymnastics, but also diving, skating and other individual sports. There is an unquestionable beauty and harmony one feels watching these performances. Nonetheless, perfection has its drawbacks.

Consider a few of perfection's liabilities. First, it is obvious that the moment of perfection is fleeting. What is possible this time, will not always be possible. At some point every perfect performance yields to the imperfect. From perfection the only direction is down. Second, perfection is almost entirely a solo act. Of course Nadia Comanec and her peers have had their phalanx of coaches, but in the moment they stand alone. Perfection is an individual achievement. It is mind-boggling to think that two people could achieve perfection at the same time – and even harder to think that a team of people could rise to that level simultaneously. The perfect stand alone, while the imperfect band together. Third, if you achieve perfection, there is nothing more to do. Certainly an athlete would need to work hard to maintain that level, but in a basic sense there is nothing left once you have vaulted to the very top. What improvement can one add to perfection?

By contrast, when you are part of the game for the long haul, today's momentary perfection (if it is ever achieved) gets swallowed up by tomorrow's errors. Whether baseball or everyday life, the long season assures that everyone will have ample opportunity to shine and to err. Former Baseball commissioner, Francis T. Vincent Jr., summed it up this way:

Baseball teaches us, or has taught most of us, how to deal with failure. We learn at a very young age that failure is the norm in baseball and, precisely because we have failed, we hold in high esteem those who fail less often – those who hit safely in one out of three chances and have become star players. I also find it fascinating that baseball, alone in sport, considers errors to be part of the game, part of its rigorous truth.¹

What Commissioner Vincent calls the rigorous truth of baseball is true for the rest of life as well. Just as baseball teaches one to live with failure and yet strive to improve, so Judaism allows us to transcend our errors to approach a more perfect future.

According to the dictionary an imperfection is a blemish; a way in which one is defective. Perhaps that is true, but it focuses on the negative. Viewed from a different angle our imperfection defines us as human. Indeed many of our most cherished values come as a result of our being imperfect, and these are reflected equally within the teachings of Judaism and the experience of baseball.

The Certainty of Errors

On the ball field, imperfections show up as errors. You can bobble the ball, overthrow it or just hold on to it; you can blame it on bad hands or the proverbial hole in the glove. The majority of errors fall into two categories: misjudgments and throws that go wide of the mark.

Sin can be defined in much the same way. At root the Hebrew word *het*, sin, means to miss the mark, about as close to the word error as one might want. Originally an archery term, it means one intended to do it right but something went wrong along the way.

Additionally, errors and sin share the quality that they only refer to a discrete act. If you make an error on one play, it does not mean that you will make an error on every play. Even though the ball rolls under your glove this time, the next time you can do it right. Each play is distinct, every act represents an independent choice. Even if this one instance goes wrong, the next time everything can come out right.

The idea that an error, a sin, refers to one distinct action is powerful. Consider the 10th inning of the 6th game of the 1986 World Series. In the bottom half of the inning, with two outs and a one run lead, Kevin Mitchell scores on a wild pitch to even the score. Then Mookie Wilson hits a routine grounder to first base, but the ball rolls under Bill Buckner's glove. In a moment rated as one of the 10 most memorable in World Series history by *Time Magazine*, the Red Sox lose the series, and Buckner is marked forever by his error.

Even though the visual image of that error is imprinted in the minds of long-time Red Sox fans, in the record books it is only one error that sits alongside the other statistics of hits and runs; plays successful and not. Buckner is remembered for his error, but he was also noted as one of the top 10 most valuable players in 1981 and 1982. Even in the fateful year of 1986 he had 102 runs batted in. Each play has its own worth – good or bad.

Important consequences follow from the certainty that every player will make errors and every person will sin. We can see these consequences within our individual, communal and spiritual lives.

Humility

A Hasidic master, the Koretzer, taught:

“If men did not sin, the Lord would have no occasion to employ His attributes of mercy, compassion and the like... it follows that even sinners please the Lord: they bring into play His worthiest attributes.”²

It is an intriguing thought. The proof of our imperfection – our errors and sins – brings forth mercy, compassion and humility.

The best batters miss more often than they connect. Ted Williams, whose 1941 batting average of .406 stands as a challenge to any contemporary hitter, once commented that “those that fail ‘only’ seven times out of ten attempts will be the greatest in the game.”³ In order to achieve greatness in hitting you must accept your failure to hit most of the time. It is a humbling experience.

Even the very greatest – the record setters – know that their stunning achievements will not protect them. Eventually all records fall. Babe Ruth’s 1927 record of 60 home runs in a season stood until Roger Maris hammered 61 homers in 1961. But the 1998 battle between Sammy Sosa and Mark McQwire smashed that record which then lasted only three years until Barry Bonds registered 73 homers. Every record will eventually fall and that should promote a sense of humility.

Rabbi Joshua ben Levi taught that “Humility is greater than all other virtues” (B.T. Avodah Zara 20b). The talmud describes the disputes between the School of Hillel and that of Shammai. While they held differing views neither side could claim precedence over the other until finally a *bat kol*, a Divine voice, declared, “Both are the words of the living God, but the law follows the school of Hillel.” Why? “Because they are gentle and humble. They teach both their words and those of the School of Shammai; indeed they mention the words of the School of Shammai before their own teachings” (B.T. Eruvin 13b). In much the same way the *menschlichkeit* with which Sammy Sosa and Mark McQwire conducted themselves as they fought to set the new home run record in 1998 drew disillusioned fans back to the game of baseball.

We are not often privy to know what goes on behind the scenes when a player really fouls up, but I imagine it is not so different from the classic process of *teshuvah*, repentance. In the first instance *teshuvah* implies that it is possible to make a change and to improve one’s ways. The work of *teshuvah* requires several steps. First, you need to know what went wrong, to admit your failing. Then you need to know what to do to repair the error. Finally, it takes resolve to commit to doing better the next time around. Even this is no guarantee that it will all go smoothly – we remain vulnerable and fallible. The task is to keep at it. As Rabbi Tarfon taught: “You do not have to finish the work, but neither are you free to desist from it” (M. Avot 2:16).

Communal Responsibility

It is obvious that no one individual can cover the entire field, it is simply too large. But it is equally obvious that just putting nine players on the field does not make them a team. In order to transform a group of players into a team they must recognize each other’s strengths as well as their imperfections. They need to be able to blend their different skills and know how to complement each other, to provide cover but not to take the other’s space.

Baseball is interesting because of the interaction between the players. When the game becomes primarily a pitcher's battle, the game is not as interesting. Of course, there is the constant communication between the pitcher and catcher, but the fans aren't privy to those signals. While there is a tension that builds as the game stretches on, nonetheless there is something missing. The TV sportscasters know it – they reduce the game to the action highlights. The fascination in baseball is how these nine skilled individuals can overcome their individual deficiencies and transform themselves into a team: a community with shared goals.

One key to team play is the ability of the players to back-up one another. It is fascinating to watch the movement on the field when a batter squares off to bunt. As soon as the batter squares off to lay down the ball, the pitcher runs in to cover the ball along with the catcher, the second baseman and the right fielder shift to provide back-up to the first baseman. Half the field is in movement for a ball that may travel only a few feet on its own. Teamwork is key.

All of that movement happens because of one simple fact – sometimes people make errors. If the ball goes under the glove of the first baseman, he needs someone to back him up. Because every player is imperfect, it becomes the team's responsibility to cover for one another.

We all need back up. Watch the Torah service in a traditional synagogue. By tradition, the Torah, the Divine record, must be read perfectly; a standard that eludes imperfect human beings. As the *Baal Koreh*, the Torah reader, chants the tune, the *gabbai*, standing at his side, follows him word for word. If the reader makes a mistake, the *gabbai* fills in the blank and the reader returns to correct the reading.⁴ In some synagogues, the backup is provided not solely by the *gabbai*, but by all the people in the synagogue. Everyone follows word for word, and mistakes bring out stereo corrections. For the uninitiated it seems horrible, as if everyone is jumping on every mispronunciation. In fact, it is the opposite. Since everyone is responsible, they are all part of the team and share the responsibility to assure that the Torah is read letter perfect.

The sense of shared responsibility runs deep within Jewish teaching. There is a verse in Leviticus 26:37 that reads simply, "and they shall stumble over one another," but is understood to suggest that one person will stumble because of the sin of another person. It seems odd to say that one person will be held liable because of another. But this is the source of the well-known talmudic adage, "all Israel is responsible one for another" (B.T. Sanhedrin 27b). This principle finds expression in various ways – for example, if you see a person about to commit a sin, you should inform them of the risk. But we recognize this principle easily on the ball field where every player needs to provide solid back-up for his teammate.

Wholeness

When all the pieces come together, when these several players become a team, then magic happens and nothing else matters. Mike Makley's 1975 poem, "The New Kid", captures the feeling that comes when everything works right.

Our baseball team never did very much,
we had me and PeeWee and Earl and Dutch.
And the Oak Street Tigers always got beat
until the new kid moved in on our street.
The kid moved in with a mitt and a bat

and an official New York Yankee hat.
The new kid plays shortstop or second base
and can outrun us all in any place.
The kid never muffs a grounder or fly
no matter how hard it's hit or how high.
And the new kid always acts quite polite,
never yelling or spitting or starting a fight.
We were playing the league champs just last week;
they were trying to break our winning streak.
In the last inning the score was one-one,
when the new kid swung and hit a home run.
A few of the kids and their parents say
they don't believe that the new kid should play.
But she's good as me, Dutch, PeeWee or Earl,
so we don't care that the new kid's a girl.⁵

A team is greater than the sum of its individual parts. Nine accomplished players who cannot figure out how to complement one another will not gel into a team, while nine mediocre players may shine when they work together with precision. A team succeeds when everyone plays their part.

Strangely the same thing happens in prayer. Praying in a minyan is different from praying alone. It is difficult to convey the transformation that occurs when a group of people suddenly become a community in prayer. Rodger Kamenetz' poem, "Why Ten Voices", suggests that in a minyan, as on a team, each person has an indispensable role to play.

"Why Ten Voices"
One voice in bitterness, one voice in joy.
One voice explaining, one voice complaining.
One voice in the ecstasy of having not.
This makes five.
One voice soothing, one voice urging.
One voice halving, one voice doubling.
One voice silent for the world to come.
This makes ten.⁶

The minyan gets made not solely because 10 individuals file into a room. It is certainly possible to have a sanctuary filled to capacity and still lack the spirit that animates fervent prayer. Nonetheless, as anyone who has prayed in a near empty room can attest, the transformation that occurs when the 10th pray-er joins the minyan is palpable. In this case, 10 is more than simply one greater than nine. When the minyan is made, forming the smallest definition of community, a wholeness exists. The wholeness of the minyan exists not because there are 10 perfect beings gathered, but because the gathering of 10 or more human beings, each flawed in a different way, forms a more perfect union.

Conclusion

Judaism's willingness to live with imperfection may best be illustrated by the *lulav* and *etrog*, the symbols of Sukkot. The four elements of the *lulav* and *etrog* are the willow

branch and the myrtle, the date palm and the citron. They differ in many ways. Among the many explanations for why these four elements are chosen is one that focuses on their imperfections. Of the four only the *etrog* has both taste and smell. The palm has taste and the myrtle has smell. The willow, alas, lacks both. Still they do not constitute a *lulav* and *etrog* until they are all held together. The midrash teaches that taste represents learning, while smell represents deeds. Some people have one or the other, a few have both, and others lack both. What, the Midrash asks, is to be done with this diverse and flawed group?

“The Holy One says, Let them be joined into one bundle so they might atone one for the other. When you do so, I am exalted” (Leviticus Rabba 30:12).

When is God exalted? Not at some fleeting moment of perfection, but when we gather together in community with all of our flaws. The *lulav* and *etrog* bring together those imperfect ones who may lack smell or taste, learning or deeds, or both with those few (nearly) perfect ones who claim both. Every one is necessary. It suggests that a gathering of only perfect people, or of only those flawed in a certain way, would not really be a community. The implication is that those with learning back-up those with deeds; and vice versa. Each brings their strength to back up another’s weakness; and each brings a weakness to be backed up by another’s strength. In Jewish life, as in baseball, community – the team – emerges out of the relationship. When community emerges, God is exalted.

NOTES

¹ Quoted in Ernest Kurtz & Katherine Ketcham, *The Spirituality of Imperfection: Storytelling and the Journey to Wholeness* (New York, 1992) pg. 1

² Louis I. Newman, *Hasidic Anthology* (New York, 1963) Pg. 445.

³ <http://baseball-almanac.com/hitting/hibavg2.shtml>

⁴ According to the Shulchan Aruch, Orach Hayim 142: If one reads and makes an error, even in the grammar of one letter, we return him to that place.

⁵ http://www.baseball-almanac.com/poetry/po_new.shtml

⁶ Rodger Kamenetz, *The Missing Jew* (St. Louis, Mo. 1992) pg. 60.

When A Rabbi Catches A Sermon

Michael M. Cohen

On one wall of my office there is a collection of quotes. They are tidbits of wisdom and insight; instant lessons for me to point to and teach, or give someone something to read if the phone rings and I need to answer it.

One of those quotes belongs to John Hammond from an article a few years back in *Rolling Stone Magazine*. Hammond was the great music entrepreneur who discovered Dylan, and I believe Springsteen and others. His quote, which I have read from time to time from the pulpit, goes as follows:

"I am still a New Yorker who owns no house, who thrives on city weekdays and country weekends. I still would change the world if I could, convince a nonbeliever that my way is right, argue a cause and make friends out of enemies. I am still the reformer, the impatient protester, the sometimes-intolerant champion of tolerance. Best of all, I still expect to hear, if not today, then tomorrow, a voice or a sound I have never heard before, and something to say which has never been said before. And when that happens I will know what to do."

A contemporary film director was recently quoted as saying that without imagination there is no hope. We all live with that imagination and hope, and those dreams we carry that propel us along. They stop us from falling asleep at night and get us out of bed in the morning; wondering if the next letter or email, or perhaps phone call will be the one we have waited for. We carry these dreams and hopes at different levels of our psyche, usually tucked away so we can carry on with our lives. Some are grand dreams, fantasies, might be a better a word; some are less grandiose and therefore more obtainable, but still a dream.

It is perhaps one of the reasons why saying *brachot*, blessings, are so important. Through blessings we transform the ordinary into the unordinary, the finite to the infinite. Through *brachot* we see our lives and our actions in a larger setting. It is therefore not surprising that the rabbis of the Talmud said that we should say a minimum of a 100 blessings daily. But even a *bracha* doesn't work without imagination.

Every year my family and I make the trip from Vermont to Chicago, Evanston to be more exact, to visit my wife's parents. Chicago is a great city: great restaurants; great museums; and great sights. There is my favorite street, Devon Street with its Indian Restaurants, Jewish bakeries and Jewish Bookstores. Ah, some Chappati right out of the oven and a new Torah commentary. What more could one want! And then there is sports. Chicago is one of the best, if not the best sports city in America.

Ideally two baseball games and a basketball game are what I aim for in between all the people Alison has us scheduled to see. I had discovered a few years back the ticket window at the United Stadium where the Chicago Bulls returned tickets were sold before gametime. I even made it into a first round playoff game three years ago. And at the end of last season I was able to see the Bulls against the Indiana Pacers where a Bulls T-shirt was launched, from the court during a time-out, to the crowd that I caught. Then I did not know that it was a foreshadow of what would happen during this year's visit.

With the Bulls not making it into the playoffs this year the possibility of going to three baseball games opened up. Now there are some people who think that if you are in Chicago Wrigley Field is the only place to see a game. Truth be told there is no other park like Wrigley Field anywhere: from the ivy covered brick walls; to throwing back opposing team home run balls; to the way they sing *Take Me Out to The Ballgame*, to their tradition

of mostly day games. This mentions nothing of Sammy Sosa, who hit a homerun in both games that I went to, and lost a fly ball in the Ivy allowing for the Florida Marlins to score a game winning in the park home run. A uniquely Wrigley moment.

My teacher, Rabbi Jack Cohen, who made *Aliyah* (immigrated to Israel) many years ago and was one of the early disciples of Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan said "If you don't understand baseball, you can't understand life," or to paraphrase Leo Durocher, "Baseball is like a synagogue. Many attend, few understand." One of the major themes of Judaism is the attempt to end the exile to get back home. The opening of Torah is a tale of exile-expulsion from the Garden of Eden-things didn't work out the way we wanted, our world vision was shattered. As Joni Mitchell sang, "we've got to get ourselves back to the Garden." The reality of alienation and the longing for home are reflected not only in the opening of the Torah, but also in the on going saga of the remaining four Books of Moses - the effort to go home - in this case the land of Israel. Baseball and Torah teach the importance of sacrifice to reach home. If the journey and effort is what is important, then we also learn from how we read the Torah something about failure where the Torah ends not with our entering the land, the promise. But standing on the shores of the Jordan River looking in. One team wins the World Series, twenty-seven teams do not. Let us also remember a .300 hitter is a desirable hitter to have on your team. A batting average of .300 means 3 hits and 7 outs every 10 times at bat. That is to say you fail 7 of 10 times. Yet such a batter is considered great even though he or she fails most of the time!! So in failure we learn there can also be success as Rav Steinsaltz reminds us, that we should regard the faults or failures as something constructive, "like the beginning of a new and beautiful story."

But, there is also Comisky Park (since renamed US Cellular Field). I like Comisky Park. It's not Wrigley Field but it has a lot going for it as well. For example when they built the new Comisky Park they did two important things. First, though located on the border of a questionable neighborhood they did not flee to the suburbs and build there. Second, they put down a grass infield and outfield and not Astroturf (Remember what Richie Allen said of Astroturf when it first came out - "If a horse can't eat I don't want to play on it.") It is a handsomely built structure with a very informative and easy to read scoreboard. From the upperlevel as you leave it also offers a wonderful panorama of the Chicago skyline.

There is also the interesting social and cultural phenomenon that has taken place during the last few years; at more and more ballparks you can get Kosher hot-dogs. Roi, my son, is a vegetarian, except when it comes to Kosher hot-dogs! So before we took our seats we purchased our hot-dogs and drinks and settled in for the game. The other good thing about Comisky Park is that it was easy to get good seats. So we had first row seats on the second level on the third base side between home plate and the dugout. The other good thing about Comisky Park is that it is so wheel chair accessible. All the first row seats on the second level are wheel chair accessible.

The White Sox were playing the overpowering Cleveland Indians, their first four batters were all batting over .300 and the next two over .280. Quickly the Indians scored runs. It would be actually the second of three straight games where they would score 13 runs in each game against the White Sox.

By the third inning Roi had finished his hot-dogs and it was time for me to wipe the now drying ketchup off his face. I turned to my right to get a napkin. Dave Justice was at bat. As I reached down to pick up the napkin I noticed out of the corner of my eye what appeared to be a foul ball heading roughly my way. Before I could even think, my baseball chromosomes stood me up and had me move two seats to my right.

I remember saying to myself- "Oh my gosh its coming to me!" Before I could even get nervous and think about dropping it, and as it was beginning to arch its way down on its trajectory, I put out both bare hands (I always tell my kids to catch with both hands) and brought the ball into myself. I stared at it for what was probably a second, though it seemed alot longer, again saying to myself, "I caught a foul ball!" I then raised my hand with the ball in it to the crowd who cheered me on. I thought about tipping my yarmulke to the crowd but decided not to.

Roi was elated. Father and son moments don't get much better. He held onto the ball the rest of the game, but I did tell him that it was mine. He already has two baseballs from Wrigley Field from previous years, but those are other stories.

Baseball players tell us that when they are hitting the ball consistently well, the ball looks the size of a grapefruit and they can see the individual threads of the stitching even as it is swirling and spinning at them at close to 100 miles an hour. I now know what they mean; even now I can bring back in my mind as the ball was coming towards me being able to see the individual stitchings clear as daylight. There was even a moment of suspended animation when the ball appeared to freeze in mid air and then continue into my waiting hands.

As the game went on, and I continued to drink in the excitement of what had happened, I translated the whole catch into a metaphor about life. Its about when your dreams come your way. Are you ready to catch them and not drop them? And if you need to are you able to shift your location to capture the moment, to capture the opportunity? John Lennon sang, "Life is what happens to you while you are busy making plans." And that is the exciting thing about life, you never know when that ball, that dream, that vision, that hope may come your way.

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Red Sox, Abraham & Sarah, & Faith

Andrew Klein

This week's Torah portion is filled with wondrous stories. Stories of longing and hope fulfilled, stories of faith in God even in the face of loss and despair, and stories of God's great miracles.

Here's one of them.

Three visitors came to the tent of Abraham and Sarah, and Sarah overheard one of them saying to Abraham, "I will return to you next year, and your wife, Sarah, shall have a son."¹ Sarah was listening at the entrance of the tent. "Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years."² He was 100, and she was 90. In the words of the Torah, "Sarah had stopped having the periods of women. Upon hearing this prediction, Sarah laughed to herself, saying, 'Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment – with my husband so old?' Then the Lord said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Shall I in truth bear a child as old as I am?' Is anything too wondrous for the Lord?' God said, 'I will return to you the same season next year, and Sarah shall have a son.'"³

Several chapters later, the Torah continues, "The Lord took note of Sarah ... and did for her as spoken. Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age.... Abraham gave his newborn son ... the name of Isaac.... Sarah said, 'God has brought me laughter; everyone who hears will laugh with me.'"⁴

And the name Isaac means, "He will laugh."

Needless to say, *Neis gadol hayah sham!* A great miracle happened there!

Abraham and Sarah had longed for a child their entire lives. God had promised Abraham that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens, but there still was no child. And I'm sure that by the time Abraham was 100 years old, at moments, his faith must have wavered.

100 years is a long time to wait for a miracle! A long time to stay faithful and trust in God.

Wednesday night, under a full moon/lunar eclipse, *Neis gadol hayah po!* A great miracle happened here!

After 86 years of waiting and praying and faithfulness, The Boston Red Sox won the 100th World Series!

Now I can't say for sure that God was responsible for *this* miracle, although some might think so.

But much like Sarah and Abraham, a generation of people all across New England have chosen to wait and trust and keep faith in their beloved Red Sox.

Natick resident, Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, said, "New England is a region so used to fretting, frustration, and second guessing, we are now going to have to rethink what it means to be a Red Sox fan." Kushner continues, "I would like to think that winning will make us more normal, but will it be as much fun? Ultimately, we will be healthier, but life won't be as interesting without the struggle."⁵

So for Sarah, for Curt Schilling, and for Sox fans, waiting, trusting, and hanging in there brought joyful results. Lifelong dreams were fulfilled, and a new legacy was created for generations to come.

My question for each of us tonight is,

"What is your world series?"

"What is your heart's desire?"

“What do you really want to give birth to in your life?”

“How much are you willing to trust and persevere and be patient for the miracle for which you truly long?”

This season’s signs of transition, the falling leaves and the changing weather, prepare us for a time of introspection. It’s a seeming paradox that as the light of our days diminishes, we approach the holiday of Chanukah, the time of year when light abounds and great miracles are remembered.

What is it that you really want to accomplish? Think about the hard work and the faith required to get there. Miracles do happen, and today’s the only day we have to play.

Let’s take a few moments for private prayer.

CLOSING SONG

Take me out to the ball game,
Take me out with the crowd.
Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack,
I don’t care if I never get back,
Cause it’s root, root, root for the Red Sox,
If they don’t win it’s a shame.
For it’s one, two, three strikes, you’re out,
At the old ball game.”

NOTES

¹ Genesis 18:10

² Genesis 18:11

³ Genesis 18:12-14

⁴ Genesis 21:1-6

⁵ *Boston Globe*, October 28, 2004, “Victory Transforms a Region’s Identity.”

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