

Dear Chavraya,

In the World Series spirit of this week, I will try a different pitch than my usual throw home. Sometimes it helps to throw a change-up, to slow it down a bit, take a little bit off in order to be more effective. It is about getting it over the plate, so homey in calling it the "dish," conjuring something of a kitchen's warmth. It is all part of the Torah of baseball. When my kids were young and there was something important to talk about, the ballpark was often the best place to talk. It was usually just one child at a time, just the two of us, always there in time to take in batting practice, to see players prepare, get themselves ready. As I'm sure for many of you, there is something of magic felt immediately upon entering the ancient sanctum of Fenway Park. Ever since I was a child, I prefer to enter from right behind home plate, to emerge into the sunshine or to be bathed by the ethereal light of a night game, ah, that's the best, to pause there right behind the screen at night, to take in the whole park, the field glistening as the diamond it is.

Whether in standing room or sitting, as soon we entered, looking all the way back to when it was my dad and I, and more recently to me and my own young ones, a big sigh of release, to breathe in the peanut scented air and relax. I remember going to a game once during the Ten Days of Turning between Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur. There was need to talk about *t'shuvah*, and what better place than at the ballpark, as witnesses to a game whose every effort is directed to homecoming, scoring only when finally arriving at home. The Torah of baseball is the Torah of life.

Drawing on commentaries of Shaughnessy as well as the Slonimer this week, the lessons have been obvious and heartwarming. I thought about it particularly during the first game of the World Series. David Price had been doing well, continuing to show his new persona, confidence carried over from his first ever post-season win the week before. Suddenly in the fourth inning he ran into trouble, managing to load the bases, two runs quickly scoring, the score now tied. With two outs and runners on first and third, you could see the tension in Dovidl's face as the camera zoomed in. In all of Red Sox nation, no one dared to breathe, wondering if this was a return to the old ways. Suddenly a great exhalation as strike three crossed the plate.

There was much Torah in that moment, feeling both for Price and, indeed, for the Dodgers batter who struck out. Most of all, I found myself thinking about the Red Sox manager, Alex Cora, and what he taught by what he didn't do. Once Price had loaded the bases, that might have been enough for another manager, enough to say enough. It took courage for Cora not to take a slow walk to the mound then, not to go out there and tap his pitcher on the arm and take the ball from him as he signaled to the bullpen. It took courage to show faith in the pitcher he knew Price could be, the pitcher who had started to emerge. It always takes courage to show faith in the face of adversity, especially when you know that the whole world is watching, ready to pounce. While I'm sure that Cora was also making a calculated baseball decision, he displayed an important element of *chesed/kindness* in what he didn't do. However desperate the moment seemed, he had to have known what the impact on Price would be to take him out in the face of adversity. He had to have known that some of those more heartless of fans

would have rained down boos on the old Price as he exited the field. That is the kind of discussion I would once have had with my kids as we watched the game of life unfolding on the field of dreams.

There have been so many other life lessons during this entire season, the post-season as a grand *siyyum*, as a formal ceremony of closure is called upon the completion of a holy book. Most of all, in a context so rife with big egos, I have been struck by the selflessness of players, each seeming to be more interested in talking about the team rather than their own accomplishments. It has seemed that in every game there has been a new hero, unsung and uncelebrated, stepping up to greatness in a moment of need. It is the teaching of the Slonimer, that every single person has their own task and purpose in this world, their own way of bringing *tikkun*. While wary of giving too much meaning to the needs of a team on the field of play, diamond dynamics yet become a metaphor that is real, and one that for a child is quickly translatable to the field of life.

In the context of this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayera*, it is we who are challenged along with Abraham and Sarah. It is we are called to question and to act, to consider the ways of right and wrong and the consequences of each, to weigh what it means for justice to be infused with righteousness. Sarah wants the best for her own child, Isaac, but cannot recognize the equivalent desires of Hagar for her child, Yishm'el. Avraham argues mightily with God on behalf of the people of the violent cities of Sodom and Gomora, yet remains silent on behalf of his own son. We are faced with the inconsistencies of our ancestors, and so too with our own. Giving us to wrestle with our own place and importance, the meaning of our deeds, one of the questions that courses through *Parashat Vayera* is that of what it means to live with integrity. The answer might lie in one word said twice by Abraham, once to God and once to his son, to Isaac. Sought out, called to act, to affirm his presence in relation to the other, Abraham says, "*hineni/here I am.*"

Baseball is not life, and yet, as does every facet of life, it offers teaching that can infuse the whole. As the closing pitcher, Craig Kimbrel, and his wife sought to care for their new born daughter who came into this world with a heart defect, the whole team became the little one's team, players noting that baseball is a game, being there for a child and her parents, that is life.

As Kimbrel stumbled a bit himself, at times not the pitcher he knew himself to be, there was some concern that he was "tipping his pitches," letting the other team see what he was about to throw. I'm going to intentionally tip my pitches now, letting you know exactly what I'm going to throw. Okay, it's a change-up, something we all need to try sometime. We all need to try a different approach from time to time, change the speed a bit, offer some surprise and see what happens. So we learned this week a bit about faith in others, integrity, kindness, and respect. Of values sorely needed and in short supply these days, so may we learn them and live them on the base paths of life.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Victor