

Harold Levine
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My Personal and Congregational Jewish Journey Looking Back On The Past and Forward To The Next Century

I have accepted the task and the honor of speaking to you this evening, and you have the task of listening to me. I hope that we will complete our respective tasks at the same time.

Thus far, my Congregational Jewish journey has been fostered by Rabbi Weinberg and by Marla. I have always felt very comfortable approaching Rabbi with numerous questions about various aspects of Judaism, and by whom I hope to be excused for exceeding the maximum word limit for this talk. When I was in Marla's Torah chanting class 4 years ago, she required the students to give a D'var Torah when we chanted Torah. This helped me to get used to speaking to the Congregation, thus preventing any stage fright – or Bimah fright - that might have occurred. I hope that she does not regret it now.

During the High Holy Days, we say to one another "L'shanah Tovah Tikateyvu, May You Be Inscribed For A Good Year". This phrase suggests the idea that the things that will happen to us during the coming year are Ba-shairt, meaning preordained or destined. To me, it is a nice image and a nice thing to say, but my Jewish journey thus far causes me not to believe that the events of the coming year are Ba-shairt.

Sometimes, though, things occur which make me not so resolute in my belief – [or in my disbelief]. Sometimes, there will be an unlikely sequence of unlikely negative events, which results in a positive outcome – or at least a silver lining to these negative events. Since the World Series ended this past week, I will give an example from baseball.

- Are there any CUBS fans? Very good.
- Are there any WHITE SOX fans? Very good.
- Are there any fans of the Detroit Tigers?

Some of you may have heard of Hank Greenberg, who played 1st base for the Detroit Tigers from 1930 to 1946 and the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1947. He was a power hitter with a career, regular season batting average of .313. His career spanned roughly the same period of time as that of Joe Di Maggio. But their similarities end there. Di Maggio was from California, while Greenberg was from New York City. Also, Greenberg never married a glamorous Hollywood star, he never did commercial endorsements for Mr. Coffee, and he was not mentioned in a popular song by Simon & Garfunkle. Throughout his career, Greenberg had to endure anti-semitism, much of it quite virulent, such as during the 1945 World Series when Cubs owner P.K. Wrigley referred to Greenberg as "A Damn Dirty Jew". Some of it was just innuendo, such as from Dizzy Dean who called him Moses.

After the 1946 season, the newspapers quoted Greenberg saying something very negative about the Tigers. The quote was taken very much out of context. The owner of the Tigers was so incensed, that he didn't give Greenberg a chance to explain. He quickly traded Greenberg to the Pittsburgh Pirates – the worst team in baseball at that time, where he would have no chance of getting into the World Series.

So Hank Greenberg played the 1947 season with Pittsburgh of the National League. That season was very noteworthy because it was Jackie Robinson's first season in Major League Baseball – with the Brooklyn Dodgers. As bad as the bigotry and abuse had been for Hank Greenberg, it was just a small taste of what Jackie Robinson would have to endure – even from his own teammates.

A 1999 biographical film about Hammerin' Hank, showed an incident in which Robinson and Greenberg collided at 1st base. Fortunately, no one was injured. After Greenberg helped Robinson up, he gave him a pat on the back and some words of encouragement, which Robinson greatly appreciated. During subsequent games, Greenberg would give him more encouragement.

When the movie described the circumstances of Greenberg's ignominious trade to the Pirates, I thought it was so sad. But after seeing the collision at 1st base and the ensuing pat-on-the-back and kindness that Hank extended to Jackie, I began to think that maybe Greenberg's trade to Pittsburgh was

Ba-Shairt so that he could be there for Robinson. And maybe the bigotry that Greenberg endured was so that he would be able to empathize with Robinson.

So moving forward into the next century, I am not sure whether some things might be Ba-Shairt. So now I need the help of you, the Congregation, in order to continue my Jewish journey. I would like to know what you think about this – whether some things are Ba-Shairt. Please tell me your opinions in person or by e-mail. I would love to hear from you.

Also, I have a VHS copy of that film. Anyone is welcome to borrow it.

Shabbat Shalom!