

Toldot 5774 Red Sox Victory

Shabbat Shalom.

I have a confession to make.

It's kind of embarrassing.

I fell asleep.

It was the top of the seventh and we were winning 6-0, so I was feeling pretty good about the Sox's chances. I guess it was a long day and all the late games must have worn me down. I lay down for a minute; the next thing I knew it was 4:30 in the morning.

I realized I had missed the end of the game, all the celebrating, the champagne, the goggles, the presentation of the trophy and the most valuable player award to David Ortiz who was simply incredible.

I felt bad.

I felt that I had missed something big.

I know I missed celebrating with my daughter who stayed up for all of it.

But I consoled myself by realizing that I had been up for the last two Sox championships in '04 and '07. In fact, since we moved here 10 years ago, the Sox have won the World Series three times.

Now that I think about it, it's kind of weird. They didn't win for 86 years, then we moved here.... and since then, they're World Champions three times.... I'm just saying...

And before you raze me too much for missing the end of the game, Rabbi Fel and I did make a Red Sox Golem, which we believe may have had something to do with their victory.... You can see more in our weekly YouTube video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQKZSA6aZV0>)

So, on Thursday, I tried to catch up on some of what I missed including Jon Farrell's post-game news conference. I read that he opened his remarks in a classy manner:

He said: "Before we get into any questions, I just want to congratulate Mike Matheny, the St. Louis Cardinals on a great season, a very, very good team. This was a stressful series; there's no question about it. As close as these games were from start to finish, [the Cardinals were] a very worthy opponent and we wish them nothing but the best."

Those were *mensh-y* words – appropriate and what you want to hear.

Start with appreciating your competition before you toot your own horn.

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Life is full of winning and losing. They are many different types of competitions. It's important to think about we act in those situations. How do we compete? What kind of winners are we? Are we able to identify with the losers? Or do we become braggarts who engage in schadenfreude?

And if we lose, are we sore losers? Can we put aside our own hurt egos to congratulate the other team or do we try to diminish their success? They only won because of the call - that ridiculous obstruction call!

(Well, that actually was kind of ridiculous.....) ☺

Our *parashah* is full of competition: we are introduced to Esav and Ya'akov – Esau and Jacob, twins who are so competitive that they are even wrestling in the womb!

This competition extends to their parents as Yitzhak loves Esav and Rebecca loves Ya'akov. While Ya'akov is the second-born, he cleverly manipulates Esav into selling him the birthright for some lentil stew. Things seem to get more out of hand as Ya'akov and Rivkah conspire to lie to Yitzhak to steal the special blessing of the first born.

Many scholars have pointed to the story behind the story in this narrative. Ya'akov and Esav represent more than just themselves. They become the Israelites and the Edomites, as God informs Rivkah: “*Shnei Leumim b'vitneikh* - two nations are within your womb.”

Another lens with which we can appreciate these two personalities is that they represent different ancient lifestyles that were coming into conflict with each other thousands of years ago.

Hairy, wild and a hunter, Esav represents the nomad. These people would wander through different territories and hunt game; they represent an earlier of stage of human development. Many ancient people throughout the world were nomads who were quite comfortable in the outdoors.

Ya'akov, however, represents a new model that was coming into existence. More and more, people were settling in one place, building an agrarian lifestyle. This allowed for cities and urban centers to develop, furthering commerce, culture, religion and the development of knowledge in general.

These two types were often in conflict. In ancient Israel, hunters were frowned upon – the preference was for the newer, agrarian lifestyle. In fact, Jewish tradition did not permit wild animals to be sacrificed; only domesticated animals were to be used.

We can understand Ya'akov's deception as the more urbane, sophisticated brother deceiving the more simplistic, impulsive outdoorsman. Esav's hairiness emphasizes his animal proclivities, as does his reaction to the news that his father has already given his brother the firstborn blessing that was supposed to be his.

How does he react? “*Vayitzak tz'akah gedolah u'marah ad-me'od* - and [Esav] screamed out and wept bitterly.” Like a savage, he lets out a primal cry.

Whereas, when Ya'akov is sent away from his parent's home, he seems calm and collected, albeit somewhat nervous as we will learn in the next *parashah*, in the next Torah reading.

In addition to these ancient lifestyles that were coming into conflict, Jacob and Israel become nations that are in conflict with each other. The Edomites and Israelites clash with each other and later on, in Jewish history, their descendants are understood to be the Amalekites who attack the Israelites as they flee Egypt. The Amalekites' descendants include King Agag who waged war with Israel during the time of Prophet Samuel, during King Saul's reign.

Haman himself is a descendent of Agag as he is called *Haman Ha'Agagi* – Haman the Agagite in the Scroll of Esther. Later on, Amalek become a symbol for the Roman Empire and for Christianity as well, who were often enemies of Israel and the Jewish people.

This ancient, sibling rivalry continues throughout history.

If we combine these two interpretations - the Nomad vs. the Agrarian and Israel vs. its enemies and move forward in history we can find another connection.

In their pithy, but masterful book, *Five Cities of Refuge*, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner and David Mamet point out that “deprived of being able to own farmland [especially during the middle ages], Jews became urban. Required to loan money, they became bankers. Forbidden to own guns, they became pacifists. And outnumbered, they learned not to pick fights.”

That is mostly correct - Jews were forced into these occupations, away from the land and its more physical lifestyle. Jews turned inwards, toward the realms of ideas and thought. Upon reflection, this may have been our great salvation - since that allowed us to concentrate our efforts on building a civilization of learning.

“On virtually every front, for two millennia, Jews renounced all things physical, from combat to prowess, taking their refuge in the power of mind, or what Heschel called the universe of time. We would survive with the cunning of intellect.”

That worked to a certain extent - it allowed us to thrive in the realm of ideas, building and expanding a heritage that grounded us in intellectual endeavors, but it left us physically vulnerable. Since we had no army, we could not defend ourselves adequately from anti-Semitic attacks like the the killings of the Crusades, the Inquisition, terrible pogroms and massacres and finally, the Shoah - the Holocaust.

Mamet and Kushner call this “the folly of powerlessness.” Since there is much hatred in the world and a significant amount hurled against us, we cannot survive without *any* power. Gandhi taught that one could be passive in the face

of all evil - even the Nazis. One could sit and practice active non-violent resistance and this would stop the evil.

But sadly, he was wrong; one could not stop the Nazis with this type of resistance. And while many Jews resisted bravely, without our own army or any country that would help us, we were on our own. Even the US, which could have bombed the rail lines to Auschwitz, did not.

And so the Zionists, returned to the land of Israel, building it and themselves in the model of Esav to a certain extent. "A new generation of Israel now identifies now identifies with Esau's power as much as Jacob's intellect."

But this is not so simple either.

Last year, Rabbi Jaffe and I taught the Shalom Hartman Institute's Israel Engage program. And there, we asked hard questions including: does Israel use its power morally?

Mamet and Kushner paraphrase the great Israeli author: A.B. Yehoshua: "having to do two thousand years of cramming in just fifty years, we Israelis are still a little new and awkward at it."

What does that mean? It means that we studied our tradition and thought about being powerful and how to utilize power morally, but only in theory. Since the destruction of Jerusalem two millennia ago, we did not hold any physical power. We were powerless, and we fell victim to terrible hatred and violence.

All we usually had to defend ourselves were our texts and our ideas. We did not actually continue to develop a moral system of governing, we had no reason to.

But suddenly 65 years ago, all that changed. As was Israel was coming into existence, we now had to govern and think about how to fight morally. We fell to mistakes and missteps. And, Israel's power has not always been used morally.

We now have to balance "the archetypes of mind and body, morality and power."

That is not an easy thing to do.

Dr. Tal Becker, one of the chief negotiators for Israel in the peace process spoke here at Emunah on Wednesday evening. He reminded us that Israel has much to learn in how to utilize its power over other populations ethically.

In my mind, it all starts with thinking about the other. Imagine if Jacob realized his brother's pain when he learned the blessing had been purloined from him.

Imagine if he apologized to his brother?

In order to build a world of peace, we need to imagine ourselves in the place of the other. What did Esav feel?

What does a Cardinals fan feel right now to use a trite comparison?

And in Israel, what do the Palestinians feel? What is their experience today?

And, let me add, since sadly this is even more rare, that this means that the Palestinians need to understand and feel our pain.

Only by experiencing each other's understandings of the world - acknowledging each other's pain and suffering, can we truly move to a more peaceful state.

Toward a world that focuses more on congratulating the team that lost than gloating in victory, a world that acknowledges the suffering of the other, even our enemies.

This idea is embedded in our tradition and practice. For example, before and during *Pesah*, we remember the suffering of the Egyptians during our time of redemption, not merely because it's the right thing, but because it makes us in to better people, more sensitive and compassionate human beings.

There is a fast of the firstborn we observe to remember the death of the Egyptian firstborn. And at the Seder, we take wine out of our glasses - minimizing our joy. And we abbreviate the Hallel psalms so that we will remember the pain of others even during the celebration of our redemption.

Perhaps with more sensitivity, with more awareness of the pain of the others, we can cultivate our raise our own moral sensitivity. Whether that's on a sports field or in the much more weighty realms of politics, we can have compassion towards those on the other side, and that in turn, can lead us to place of peace – to a place where we can remember that we are all siblings.

Shabbat Shalom.