

The Shul
at the Lubavitch Center
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July 23, 2016

Balak

17 Tamuz, 5776

Baseball Cards

Baseball cards, the original sports "trading cards," have been around since the mid-18th century. Although now it is popular to collect other sports cards, there's still something special about baseball cards.

No longer simply full-color printing on card stock, sports cards today include "chrome" cards, cards with holograms, and even cards with authenticated autographs or jersey materials.

As kids, many of us collected, flipped and traded baseball cards. As adults, we bemoan the fact that we, or our parents, threw out the cards when we got older. "If we had just saved them," we sob, "we'd be millionaires by now!"

Baseball cards are truly a preoccupation for many. The Baal Shem Tov, founder of the Chasidic movement, taught that everything we see or hear can teach us a lesson in our lives as Jews. Certainly, then, baseball cards could be a reason for introspection.

For starters, one can look at the fact that the cards are an accurate record of the player's career. How many of us, famous or otherwise, keep an accurate record of those aspects of our "Jewish" career which should, in fact, be itemized? For instance, do we give a fair amount of time to Torah study in comparison to our other pursuits? Do we give charity generously - at least the 10% which the Torah requires?

Baseball cards often have a few sentences about the highlights of the player's career. What about our Jewish career. Would we be proud to publicize those highlights?

How many times have you been "at bat" - involved with a mitzva (commandment) - and how many of those times did you actually get a hit? Did you make it to second or first base, or were you tagged out for various reasons? Did you ever hit it out of the park for a home-run?

A statistic which is even more significant for us is RBI's. One of the Baal Shem Tov teachings is that the whole reason why a person might be born and live for 70 or 80 or 90 years is just to do one favor for another person - "Runs Brought In," so to speak. Helping someone get to home base, spiritually or materially, is the whole reason why we exist, according to the Baal Shem Tov.

But since we don't know exactly which person it is that we're meant to help, we need to have a pretty high statistic of RBI's. Start working on your batting today, so you can help someone home tomorrow.

An article about baseball cards does not, of course, mean to say that collecting them is a Jewish activity. Whether as hobbyists, professionals or amateurs, we Jews "collect" mitzvot.

Giving charity, visiting a sick friend, spending time with an elderly person, welcoming guests, celebrating with a bride and groom, honoring our parents, attending a Torah class, reciting a blessing on the food we eat, praying, affixing a mezuzah to our door, lighting Shabbat candles, putting on tefillin. After we do them, these and hundreds of other mitzvot that we perform are then lovingly sorted, classified and preserved by G-d, who will surely soon agree that it is time to reveal the invaluable worth of our mitzvot with the coming of Moshiach, NOW!

(from <http://www.lchaimweekly.org/>)

Friendly Enemies

This week's parsha offers us the opportunity to meet the unofficial founders of the Human Rights Organizations of our time. Here we see the ancestors of Kathleen Ashton, who is the head foreign affairs person of the European Union, the leaders of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the left-leaning anti-Semitic professors of academia the world over, the neo-communist Putin and the rest of the well-meaning, ever protesting "friends" of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

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Bilaam is engaging in public prophecy concerning the Jewish people, and all for our own good. He, like his diplomatic descendants of our time, is the one person that really knows what policies we should follow in order to guarantee our long-range future survival and success. Therefore, his words are soothing, beautifully phrased and dripping with friendship and compliments.

But in his heart of hearts Bilaam and certainly Balak mean us no good. They protect terrorism, educate generations to hatred and violence and yet hypocritically cluck in amazement when violence, kidnapping and rocket attacks against Jews continue. On the surface one can find almost no fault in the words of Bilaam.

The Jewish people were and are so enamored by his compliments that our prayer services every morning begin with his statement of how goodly are the tents of Jacob. Jews love and treasure every complement, no matter how patently insincere and begrudgingly given, from non-Jewish sources and persons.

King Solomon in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes cautioned us that it is much more beneficial to hear criticism from a friend than complements from those who do not really like us. Nevertheless, we have always been naïve when it comes to Bilaam and his intellectual and diplomatic descendants.

The Torah itself tells us that the Lord reversed the curses of Bilaam and turned them into blessings. What curses are meant in this statement? We do not read in the Torah of any direct curses or even sharp criticisms aimed at the Jewish people uttered by Bilaam. So why does God have to interfere, to reverse seemingly nonexistent curses? The answer to this is a relatively simple one. The Lord Who not only hears what we say, but more importantly knows what we mean, sees beyond the beauty of the words of Bilaam.

There is a well-known story that I have often related of two women that constantly fought and cursed each other. The rabbi of the community intervened and on Yom Kippur eve forced a reconciliation and extracted a promise that they would only say nice things to each other hereon in. The women were forced to agree to the rabbi's terms. However, walking home after Yom Kippur services one of the women turned to the other and said: "Blessed may you be, but you know what I mean!"

The Lord fully understood what Bilaam meant with his "blessings" and compliments to Israel. Hence, His intervention and the reversal of the unspoken curses into spoken and eternal blessings and compliments. Not much has changed in the world since the days of Balak and Bilaam. Jews the world over and here live in a hateful and dangerous environment. We would do well to realize that we should be wary not only of those who openly curse us and even of those who claim that they have our best interests in heart when they advise and criticize us.

(by Rabbi Berel Wein from Project Genesis at www.torah.org)

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Davening and Shiurim Schedule	
Friday, 7/22 — 16 Tamuz Shacharit — 7:00 a.m. Parshat HaShavua Shiur — 7:45 a.m. Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:00 p.m. Shabbat, 7/23 — 17 Tamuz Shacharit — 9:00 a.m. Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 9:33 a.m. Berachot Gemora Shiur — 6:55 p.m. Minchah & Seudah Shilishit — 7:55 p.m. Ma'ariv — 9:10 p.m. Sunday – Fast of 17 Tamuz obs., 7/24 — 18 Tamuz Fast Begins — 4:17 a.m. Shacharit — 8:00 a.m. Shulchan Aruch Shiur — 8:45 a.m. Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:55 p.m. Fast Ends — 8:57 p.m. Monday, 7/25 — 19 Tamuz Shacharit — 6:50 a.m. Parshat HaShavua Shiur — 7:45 a.m. Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:05 p.m.	Tuesday, 7/26 — 20 Tamuz Shacharit — 7:00 a.m. Parshat HaShavua Shiur — 7:45 a.m. Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:05 p.m. Wednesday, 7/27 — 21 Tamuz Shacharit — 7:00 a.m. Parshat HaShavua Shiur — 7:45 a.m. Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:05 p.m. Thursday, 7/28 — 22 Tamuz Shacharit — 6:50 a.m. Parshat HaShavua Shiur — 7:45 a.m. Minchah / Ma'ariv — 8:05 p.m. Tanya Shiur — 9:00 p.m. Friday, 7/29 — 23 Tamuz Shacharit — 7:00 a.m. Parshat HaShavua Shiur — 7:45 a.m. Candles — 8:02 p.m. Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:00 p.m.