

Baseball Zionism

Lech Lecha, 5776 October 24, 2015

Rabbi Saks

Years ago my father was speaking to our rabbi about baseball. My father told the rabbi that he had never gotten over the Dodgers leaving Brooklyn and that he was still hoping for the return of a major league baseball team to Brooklyn. The Rabbi exclaimed, “You are a baseball Zionist, waiting for the return of your team to their homeland.”

Chicago Cubs fans can also be considered baseball Zionists. Their fans are considered to be among the most loyal in sports despite the fact that they have not won a National League pennant since 1945. To add insult to injury on Thursday, which was October 21, 2015 the Mets completed a sweep of the Cubs ending the Cubs pursuit of that elusive pennant on the very date in which the 1989 blockbuster film *Back to the Future Two* predicted they would win the world Series.

Being a Cubs fan is tough but yet, to their credit they remain faithful. Brooklyn Dodgers fans should not give up either. Though the ongoing 58 year old “exile of the Dodgers” feels like an eternity to Brooklynites and the ongoing 70 year “drought” in Chicago feels like an eternity to the faithful, it is short compared to the exiles and suffering that we as a people have endured. God promised Abraham the land of Canaan as an inheritance for his descendants over

3,500 years ago. Yet, between then and now we have spent the majority of our history as a stateless and persecuted people. Whether you are a Brooklyn Dodger fan, a Cubs fan or a Jew it is easy to become dispirited. Our sages teach us not to give up hope. The Talmud (Berachot 32b) “If a man sees that his prayers continue to go unanswered, he should continue to pray, for scriptures state: (Ps 24:14) Wait for the Lord; be strong and let thy heart take courage, wait for the Lord.”

In 1897 the First Zionist Congress chose *Hatikvah* meaning *The Hope* as its anthem. The song expresses the 2,000 year old Jewish yearning to return to our homeland. For a people to reestablish their state after two thousand years of exile was unprecedented, yet, only 51 years later that yearning became a reality.

While we as Jews take the long view we must not fail to seize the moment. Had Sarah not acted decisively and demanded that Abraham banish Ishmael, it is possible that Isaac would have learned idolatry from his elder half-brother, Ismael who according to Rashi was engaged in idol worship.

As the Mets were playing the Cubs in the National League Championship Series a congregant informed me I was facing a dilemma. On one hand I am a Mets fan but this congregant informed me that if the Cubs win the World Series the Messiah will come. Strangely enough, I could not find any Talmudic references correlating the Cubs winning the World Series and the arrival of the

Messiah. That being said, even if the Cubs were to beat the Mets it would have not been guaranteed that they would have won the World Series and I could have been stuck without the Messiah and without the National League Pennant and the shot of a World Championship. I recalled the Talmudic teaching (Yoma 80a) “he who tries to grasp much, does not grasp [anything].” In other words, “One bird in the hand is better than is worth two in the bushes.”

While we should take the long view we must not pass up opportunities when they arise or else we will find ourselves constantly empty handed. As the Mets offense was struggling over the summer there was concern that trading prospects and spending money to acquire better offensive players in the short term may turn out to be detrimental in the future. However, it was wisely decided that after years of struggle, the future of the Mets was now and they must strike while they had a real chance in making a playoff run. In 1948, the Zionist leadership was faced with the decision as to whether or not to declare a Jewish state as the British mandate came to an end. They too wisely decided that the future is now. Let us plan for the future plan for the future, for the future is near and it may even be today.