



A Baseball Question About Life

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A Baseball Question...

How fast should a pitcher throw the ball to a batter who refuses to swing?

Hint: Does it matter? Yes, it does!

Answer: you decide and tell me...

I like baseball. I always have. While in New York, of course, I was a Yankees fan. Now in Los Angeles I root for the good old Brooklyn Dodgers. Sorry, I do not care how long they have been here in LA, for me the Dodgers will always be Brooklyn.

Baseball is an interesting game. It is not as physical as football and not as fast as basketball. Baseball can be both fast and slow, both hard and soft in this way, it kind of reminds me of the Torah. One can enjoy a game and relax at the same time.

For me, baseball has a sense of nostalgia. It reminds of me of a time that we say was much better than present times. Yet, let us be honest, whether it was the days of my childhood or my parent's childhood or my kid's present childhood, the times are not really too much different. All our fond memories of a better era gone by, if we are candid about it, are not very truthful. But, so what? Sometimes it does not matter what really was, it matters only how we choose to remember it. Isn't this so?

Whenever we look back over history, we remember times gone by and reminisce about them with emotional warmth and comfort. Yet, the truth be known, however warm our memories, some of those memories might have included some very cold nights, in poverty, in an overseas country or in some other less fortunate circumstances than now. Nonetheless, we remember with warmth the good that once was and nevermore shall be.

Life is full of contradictions. There are times when we must take things literally and then there are other times when things must not be taken literally. Sometimes it is good to be nostalgic and reminisce about a by-gone era,



regardless of how good or not it really was. On the other hand, sometimes romanticizing the past inhibits one from properly seeing and appreciating the present. In the end, what we have is this, fiction and reality, the romancing over the past and the harsh realities of the past. Both of these form where we are today and where we are going tomorrow.

The greatest problem we all face in building our futures is not paying attention to the building blocks we are using today. Let this come as no surprise, that which we face in life tomorrow is the result of that which we do today. What we will see tomorrow all depends upon what we are looking at today. If we are seeing the real picture today, then tomorrow's reality, built upon what we see today, should also be foreseeable and therefore something we can handle. However, when we are not paying attention and we blur the line between what is real and what is not, then what we build for the future will be built upon a weak foundation of falsehood, one that is easily shattered and toppled.

Nostalgia about the past is fine, as long as we remember it for what it was, a dream, an image, a picture and an idea. Certainly never let us look back upon a time of hardships and problems and romanticize how good it was, because it certainly was not.

When we dream nostalgically, we are only looking at a small part of the whole, the small part that we enjoyed. We blow up that small part to cover over all the other not-so-nice parts. In a dream, this is fine. However when the dream becomes confused for reality, this is a big problem. The problem is that the dream of yesterday becomes the vision for tomorrow. What we end up building is not our dream of yesterday, but rather the nightmare of what the past really was, beyond the fantasy of the dream.

Dreams, have their place, this is true. They can and should be used to motivate. However, never should a dream be used as blueprints to build a society. For society is made up of real people, in a real world, with real everyday problems. These are factors that dreams do not and cannot take into account. Therefore, dream a dream if you wish, but when it is time to work, please, wake up first, and then go to work. Working in a dream-like state only detaches one from reality and thus all the work built in such a state is destined to topple. Reality requires awareness.

So now, let us go back to baseball and ask again the above question. How fast should the pitcher throw the ball when the batter refuses to swing? Let us review some possible answers before I draw my own conclusions.



Answer #1 - The batter refuses to swing at the ball, so why should the pitcher throw the ball in the first place? Let the pitcher refuse to throw until the batter agrees to swing.

Answer #2 – The batter refuses to swing, what purpose is there to pitch? Rather, let the pitcher talk to the batter and discuss what is going on.

Answer #3 – The batter refuses to swing, so the pitcher throws the ball right at him, striking him in the head. Next time, the batter will know better than to let a pitch go by.

Answer #4 – The batter refuses to swing. The pitcher realizes that he is still the pitcher and that the game must go on. He continues to do his job the best he can. He throws three strikes and the batter is out. The batter is “booed” off the field and his team is severely harmed by his actions.

Each one of these scenarios, you should know is not just about baseball. It is about life in general. Each one of us is a pitcher and each one of us is the batter. Answers one through four describe how we each deal with aspects within our own lives.

Think now, how you thought about the question when I first proposed it at the beginning of this essay and take a moment to think how you thought about the four answers I provided.

Did you see yourself in any of the four answers above? Did you come up with a fifth solution, or a sixth? And let me make sure to ask, how real and grounded is the solution you have chosen and identify with? Are you dealing with real issues, or are you dreaming? Is your answer theory or practice? Is your answer something real you can do and others can follow, or is your answer one that just sounds good, but never comes to fruition because not everything that sounds good can become a reality? Here we are stuck with dreams again.

We all have responsibilities in life. Yet, as many as are our responsibilities, we have many more excuses to justify not fulfilling them. Many times we are living in a dream. It is fine to dream as long as one knows one is dreaming and one can wake up to address the real issues in life. Yet, a problem arises when one is dreaming and cannot tell that one is dreaming and actually thinks he is awake. Such a one goes through life trying to apply dream-like solutions to real-life problems. Reality dictates that dream-like solutions to problems do not work in the real world.



Nostalgia and dreaming of the past, fantasizing how the past was so much better than the present is one of these dream-like states. We sometimes allow ourselves to be deceived into believing that the real situations of the present are just like those fantasized about the past. One then endeavors to apply a rule or behavior from the past that one believes has worked in the past to a present situation.

If this course of action is well thought out then it might very well work. However, if one is just dreaming, if one says the way things are today should be the way they once were, therefore let us apply yesterday's solutions to today's problems, such is a recipe for failure. Real problems require real solutions. Dreams and fantasies cannot help us cope with the real world.

There is a difference between fantasizing about the past, longing for its old ways and dreaming about a utopia, be it set in the past or future, and longing for its fulfillment today. The past was certainly no utopia; it was as bad then, as it is now. We have never to date in human history achieved a utopia.

Therefore, we should continue to strive towards human betterment, be it on the individual and collective level. If nostalgia is recognized as the fantasy for what we hope can be the best, then it is well and good. We should encourage it and support it. However, when nostalgia becomes an escape from present stress and an attempt to set back the clock into a fantasy of betterment, which in reality was just as bad if not worse than the present, then such nostalgia is a psychological illness, a danger to properly seeing and dealing with the present. Such types of escapisms and flights from reality should be condemned and shunned.

I do not need to describe precise examples of how these embraces of nostalgia are applicable today. I am certainly not talking anymore about baseball. I am addressing significant serious problems and issues being faced by certain segments of the religious public.

Now, let us go back to baseball. In a game, all players on both sides are there for one reason, each to do their job, to play their best game and to try to win. If, therefore a batter comes to bat and refuses to do his job, he is doing a terrible disservice to the entire game. He is indeed thwarting the purpose of everything.

We each have our job to do, regardless of our excuses. Thus, when the pitcher comes to throw his balls, his job is to strike out the batter. If the batter refuses to swing, that only makes the pitchers job all the easier. The game still goes on, the pitcher does his job, and the batter is struck out. Like a fool, the batter can proclaim all his excuses why he chose not to swing; but in the end, he is struck



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out, and he hurts not only himself, but also his whole team. No excuses or vindications can justify one who by choice chooses to hurt others.

Life is our baseball game. We are all up at bat from time to time. We are all part of a team. Indeed, we are all "Brooklyn Dodgers" (when one understands the Kabbalah secret of the name "Brook-lyn" and yes, there really is such a secret). We are all Dodgers in that our job is to dodge the evil inclination that is throwing pitches at us every inning of life, trying to strike us out.

Well, our job is to play ball. Our job is to take that pitch from the evil inclination and hit it out of the ballpark. We do this, when we are strong, when we are disciplined, when we are committed to the game, to do the right thing and to do our best. This is how we serve HaShem. This is how we observe Torah.

We are now in a time of teshuva, coming back to HaShem. So think of it this way. It's time to play ball. So go out and hit a homerun, for HaShem, for Torah, and for yourself.

Baseball can be good. Baseball can be nostalgic. Then again, so can anything else. Baseball is my game. It is my metaphor to teach you the ways of life. You may embrace my metaphors, or choose a set of your own; whatever leads you to Life.

So, let me conclude with this. Go Dodgers! And you know who you really are, especially if you are from Brook-lyn! Now, play ball!!

