The Codes of Baseball & Jewish Life Learn'm
or Learn to Duck
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- The connection between Judaism and baseball is well established
    - Torah begins with "in the big inning"
    - Both baseball and Judaism are understood best in a historical context. What makes baseball so meaningful to so many is that the game has remained essentially the same over generations. You can honestly compare players of one ear to another, asking how would Babe Ruth fair against Nolan Ryan? Would the Yankees of today hold a candle to the Yankee teams of Ruth, Gehrig and DiMaggio? So too Judaism has remained true to its core values and traditions even as new ways of expression have emerged.
    - For me baseball was the game of my father and grandfather, they taught to me, like our tradition says we should teach Torah, slowly, with patience and repetition. Countless groundballs and pop flys, hours answer questions as we watched together at the ballpark or listened on the radio. But even still baseball like Judaism has to be experienced to be understood. You know this if you have ever entertained visitors for a country that does not play baseball and tried to explain the game and its rule to them
    - Rabbi Steven J. Rubenstein writes, There is wisdom to be found in the game of baseball. Whether one concentrates on the base paths as the boundaries

within which we live, or focus our attention on the umpires as our rabbis, our arbitrators of the law, or the fact that the game itself has no time limits like other sports — there is something to be learned in how we play the game and how it relates to life itself.

- Tuesday night was the first game of the World Series. A classic matchup between two great baseball franchises the Boston Red Sox and the St. Louis Cardinals. I watched the first few innings of game one at Nat Bailey Stadium with some people from Temple Sholom. So far the first two games of this World Series are the wildest in recent memory.
    - Game changing errors by all star players
    - Umpires reversing calls
    - A near Grand Slam that was saved by a player that resulted in the player being taken out of the game for injury.
    - Managers arguing with umpires – once on the same call.
    - There were home runs and brush backs and at least 3 broken bats

- Through all of this I was consciously aware of the game within the game, the unwritten codes of baseball that dictated much of the action.
    - How a manger has to argue a close call, and can do so adamantly, but if the brim of his hat touches that of the umpire he will be ejected.
    - Or that if a pitcher hits your batter with a pitched ball and does not tip his own hat in apology then the next inning your pitcher must hit the batter of the other team in retaliation.

- How you don't walk in front of the catcher when you step up to the plate – that would be invading his space.
- How if you hit a homerun you jog briskly around the bases and don't stop to admire your effort – that would be disrespectful to the pitcher.
- How the umpire always puts his back to players when bending down to brush off the plate – don't give the fan's one more perspective about which to criticize you.
- To the untrained observer these things are lost or worse misunderstood as somehow suigenerious from the game itself
- But they are not - they are the unwritten codes of baseball conduct that must be observed right along side the written rules of the game.

- And so it got me thinking about two things:
  - What are the unwritten codes of Jewish conduct that must be observed along side those written in the Torah and Talmud?
  - How are these unwritten codes passed down and related *l'dor vdor* from one generation to the next?

- To take the lead-off question first – let me ask you. What are the unwritten codes of being a Jew. Not the written mitzvoth of the 10 commandments but the things about being a Jew that you know go hand and hand with living a Jewish life?
  - *Eat Chinese food on xmas eve*
  - *When something good happens to someone we plant a tree*
  - *You don't wear jeans to shul.*

    - *Shrimp is never kosher unless it is in sweet and sour sauce or on the buffet line*
- But in all seriousness there are other unwritten rules of being Jewish that we know we must live by
    - No mater how far removed from our tradition we feel, we go to synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and we say kaddish for our parents when they die.
    - We stay close to our families, we call our mothers even if they make us crazy and feel guilty
    - In general Jews don't hunt – its allowed but just not something we do
    - Food is an expression of love in Judaism – even if it causes problems for many of us.
    - Only a Jews are allowed to make Jewish jokes.
    - We speak truth to power and value the art of asking a good question more than a thoughtful answer
    - We can argue with God and struggle with our belief – its part of being Jewish.
    - The most important thing in life is to be a mensch – and we all know what that means even if it would take us pages to define it.

- There is a Hebrew term for these unwritten rules, it is *minhag* or custom.
    - Passed down from generation to generation - for many *Minhag* is as important if not more than the 10 commandments. They are the Torah we follow even if you can't find them anywhere in the Torah we read.
- Minhag / custom is as central to Judaism as it is to baseball.

        - In his book the Baseball Codes, Jason Turow writes: That because so many of the rules in baseball are unwritten they must be picked up through experience, through trial an error, through the patient and sometimes not so patient tutoring of opposing teammates who punctuate some lessons with a fastball to your ribs. Players learn what Major League Manager and former catcher Bob Brendly described as the basic tenants of the unwritten rules, Respect your teammates, respect your opponents and respect the game."
        - It may sound simple but teaching how to be Jewish has always had more resonance – made a more lasting impression than what Judaism is.
        - Which leads to my second question – how best do you teach the unwritten codes of Jewish conduct
            - The how of anything, but Judaism in particular is taught by example and modeling. By doing.
        - We transmit the codes of Jewish life, the way to be a mensch, to live with a love for God and God's creations through our actions and example.
        - There are things that you cannot learn from a book, rules about life, an ethical life that cannot be taught but must be experienced with a mentor and guide rather than a teacher and textbook.
    - As we think about the challenges and opportunities that face our community in this new era of modern

Jewish life I think we can learn a thing or two from baseball. (I think we can learn a lot from baseball)

1. Lets focus on the game within the game, the practice within the religion. It is beautiful and rich with meaning.
    a. What is your minhag, your Jewish custom? What about those of our congregation our larger Vancouver Jewish community? How have we made this ancient tradition our own for our own time?
2. Teach these customs to others by doing them with regularity and intention. Explain as you go, address the why behind the act. Keep custom alive by making it your own, not just a relect of an all but forgotten era.

- Lastly – Judaism like baseball requires that you experience it with others. You can't play catch with yourself, or pitch to yourself. Even watching the game is better when you have someone to watch it with.
    - Doing and 'Jew-ing' with others is both a custom and a written law in Judaism. Lo Tov adam lvado – it is not good for man to be alone.
        - Unless you're throwing a no-hitter then the unwritten code of baseball says you sit alone on the dugout bench and your teammates ignore you so as not to jinx your performance.