DOES SHAME BELONG IN THE HALL OF FAME?
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Bear with me – I am going to talk about baseball for a few minutes tonight in this sermon, I will get to Torah and even Talmud, but it might take an inning or two.

This past week the baseball writers association, the body that votes on candidates for the Baseball Hall of Fame chose for the 10th time and in his final year of normal eligibility to not elect Barry Bonds in to the Baseball Hall of Fame.

If you follow baseball at all you already know this and have probably posted at least one opinion, maybe two conflicting opinions about it on social media or in discussions with friends.

If this is the first time you are hearing of it and are really considering getting up or changing the channel, again please bear with me – just a few more pitches and we'll get to the broader teaching.

Barry Bonds, the all-time leader in Homeruns (762) and most homeruns in a single season (73) as well as the most intentional walks of any player in baseball history makes him one of, if not the greatest baseball players of all time.

I have a bit of a special connection to Bonds, beyond being a native San Franciscan and thus a Giants fan, the team Bond's played for at the height of his career; I also went to school with him. Well not really with him, but next to him.

Bonds graduated my small private elementary school the year before I enrolled in grade 2, he then went to High School next door at a Jesuit High School, our playground shared a fence and even as a 7-year-old I remember watching him play baseball on the High School team and hearing him smack the ball, sometimes into our yard.

All of this is to say that I am a fan, and though I never met him I feel a bond with bonds.

But Bonds is known for something else as well, his career records and achievements appear to be directly connected to his use of performance enhancing drugs (PEDs) that were prolific in the late 90s and early 2000s when he was setting records. Bonds has never admitted to using them, but the evidence is incontrovertible, scientifically certain, and corroborated by the surrounding facts and circumstances. He was not the

only one, a US government led investigation found 85 active players were or were likely using PEDs during that period.

So, the question, and now really, we are getting to Torah, Talmud, and the broader application of this case study is cheating, of any kind always a sin? Is unrepentant cheating unforgiveable?

The Torah teaches that one should always be honest in one's dealings and not seek to deceive others. The rabbis of the Talmud and beyond state that our yes should mean yes and our no should mean no.

The rabbis tell us that dishonesty extends even to messing around with a person to get them to think something for a joke.

The term for this is geneivat da'at – in English deception, or literally stealing their understanding. This is derived from Jacob's deception of Laban, and Absalom his father David.

The origin of the term is attributed to the Talmudic sage Samuel, who lived in Nehardea, who states in the Talmud (Chullin 94a): "It is forbidden to mislead people, even a non-Jew."

Rabbi Zvi Solomons of the Jewish community of Berkshires whose 2016 essay on this question greatly informed my teaching tonight points out that the Talmudic "even" is notable. Deception of anyone is prohibited. Indeed, in business situations the rabbis give examples of how straightforward we must be, to the extent that if we buy an item and discover another more

valuable item to be concealed within it, we must return the more valuable item to its rightful owner.

Among ourselves, we are only allowed to make a profit of one sixth over the cost of an item.

Of course, cheating in exams falls under this prohibition, because you are lying about your qualifications.

But what about something as relatively insignificant as sports, and in particular spectator sports, which while a business for sure exist purely for entertainment? Can you lie when the moral stakes appear to be insignificant?

The implications of cheating in sport are very serious, as the drugs may well seriously alter the result of the event, and this has bearing on the whole business of sport and on the practice of betting on the results. So from one

view cheating in sports falls under the category of cheating in business which by sum readings is considered the greatest ethical sin in Judaism.

In fact, according to tradition when a person dies and they go before God as the divine judge and arbiter of whether one lived. A life worthy of merit and blessing the question asked of the deceased before the heavenly court in not did you keep kosher, did you observe shabbat, even did you give tzedakah? The divine judge will ask, were you honest in business? Which is to say, when you had the opportunity to deceive people for your own gain or profit, did you have the moral integrity not to?

The greatest damage, though, of Bonds and his fellow PED using athletes in baseball and in all sports, let's not forget Lance Armstrong in cycling is perhaps to athletics

and sport in general. A worthy consideration as we find ourselves a week removed from the Winter Olympics.

The role that sport has played in not only entertaining but elevating society. Our ability to project the values of hard work, perseverance, courage, fortitude, mastery of the human body and its G-d given potential on to the playing field, when we struggle at times to find those same values present in day to day life has made sport at times a model of the idea, an aspiration for how the world should be, could be – if we all tried that hard, worked that hard, worked together like teams, faced adversity with such resilience and resolve. But alas the suspicions raised against all athletes during the PED era which has extended to the Olympics, amateur athletics and most painfully youth sports are all reasons why this dishonesty is utterly prohibited in the view of Jewish law and values.

So on a micro level, by Jewish moral standards Barry Bonds does not deserve to be in the Baseball Hall of Fame; and the fact that others who are already in that illustrious hall may have also cheated in their own way and era is no excuse for turning a blind eye to his behaviour.

On the larger, macro level the greater lesson of Bonds and the sin of *geneivat da'at* – the sin of stealing another's understanding is that it's a red line that in the view of Jewish law and tradition we must not only not cross, but stay far away from so as not to be associated with even the perception that we have intentionally deceived another for our own fame, gain or fortune.

Now maybe a seron about baseball is indeed irrelevant to many of us, but a reminder of that fundamental

Jewish value and ethic – that is relevant and necessary every day.