



# Baseball, Cricket and our National Responsibility

In England, where I live, everyone is talking about soccer at the moment. But the summer sports I love and follow are cricket and baseball.

Cricket was my first love, but living in America when I first got married introduced me to baseball, and as the closest thing to cricket I could find, I began following.

The similarities between the two sports are obvious. There is a bowler/pitcher and a batter/batter. For this idea I want to focus on the bowler and the pitcher.

How do we know who the best bowlers and pitchers are? It is based on their ratio of runs to wickets/outs.

However, there is a subtle difference between baseball and cricket which can shed light on a fascinating Jewish philosophical question.

In cricket, it is very simple: your bowling average is worked out as the number of runs conceded per number of wickets taken. In baseball, a pitcher doesn't have a run average (runs conceded/outs). He has an ERA (Earned Run Average), i.e., earned runs conceded/outs).

*(I know strictly ERA is  $ER/[Innings\ pitched/9]$  but for this example I have made it easier!)*

What is an Earned Run Average and how does it differ from cricket?

In baseball, if a batter hits the ball and the fielder makes an error - for example, he drops the ball so an out is not recorded - then, if that batter ends up scoring, it is not a run against the pitcher. It was not the pitcher's fault they scored a run. It was just the fielder

who made the mistake, so the pitcher is not penalised.

However, in cricket, if a similar thing happens, it doesn't matter. If runs are scored against a bowler, they all count, whether fielders make mistakes or not.

And now to our own lives. When it comes to our performance in front of G-d, are we judged like cricket bowlers or like baseball pitchers? Are we held responsible for other people's mistakes?

When it comes to personal judgement, it's like baseball. We are not held accountable for other people's mistakes. It is our own thoughts, speech and actions that matter. That is the essence of Yom Kippur - the paradigm of personal *teshuva*. We pass before G-d *kivnei maron*, like a flock of sheep, each one of us judged for our deeds. The spotlight is on each of us individually.

But that is just our personal journey. Our national experience is like cricket. *Kol Yisrael areivim zeh bazeh* - we are all responsible for each other.



On Tisha B'Av, we mourn as a nation. It is never okay to simply look at oneself and say, 'I am doing fine, I don't care about the wider Jewish world.' If others make mistakes, if others are drifting from Judaism, we as a nation are held responsible for the collective. Not just the earned runs - all the runs are our responsibility.



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Tisha B'Av is a national day of mourning. We take a journey through history and we realise that as a nation we rise and as a nation we fall. We cannot stand by and watch as our people drift into assimilation. On the most tragic day of the year, we must realise that the challenge of the 21st century is not the persecutions, exiles and pogroms of yesteryear. Our challenge is a spiritual one. Yes, there is a rise in antisemitism and anti-Israel rhetoric. But the true battle will always be for the soul of our people.

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