

Delivered by Rabbi Krupnick 6/13/15  
Shelach Lecha 2015

This has been a great week for Jews in sports. As many, or most of you know, last Shabbos, American Pharoah won the Triple Crown. And as many of you know, the horses' owner, Ahmed Zayat is an observant Jew whose family comes from Egypt. Yes, the horse ran on Shabbat, but the Zayat family walked to Belmont Park in New York to watch the race so that they did not have to violate Shabbat. Whenever the horse raced on Shabbat the family either stayed at hotels that were walking distance from the track, or in RV's on the track grounds equipped with kosher food. And I don't know about you, but I think that's pretty cool. I think it's a proud moment for me as a Jew.

We've had other proud Jewish sports moments this week as well. The Cleveland Cavaliers are a storybook team. They may well win the NBA championship, and they are coached by a Jewish guy, David Blatt. (Afterward: OK, but they came close...) David Blatt is from Framingham, Mass. He played college ball at Princeton where he was the captain of the team. After college he made Aliyah and served in the Israel Defense Forces while playing professional basketball in Israel. He played in the Israeli pro leagues for 9 years. He then went on to be a coach in Israel, and married an Israeli woman named Kinneret. They have four children and they too served in the IDF. When he left as head coach of Maccabi Tel-Aviv last year, he did so as their winningest coach ever with 225 wins and only 55 losses. No wonder the Cavs were excited to sign him! So now a Jewish guy who served in the IDF may be the head coach of the NBA Champions. And I don't know about you, but that makes me proud to be a Jew.

When I was a kid all of us boys got this book (or one just like it) as a birthday present. It's called "The Jew in American Sports." Mine is inscribed, "To Aaron, on his 12th Birthday from Mommy and Daddy." Do 12 year olds still get books like this? I couldn't find this one on Google or Amazon. But when I was a kid I loved this book, and so did my buddies. We took such pride in knowing which athletes were Jewish. We were proud of being Jewish. To us, being Jewish was cool.

As I look around the room here today, with many of my own students and congregants here, I believe that a great many of you are proud of being Jewish, but it wasn't always that way. In our Torah portion this week, Moses appoints 12 spies to go into Canaan to check it out. As you know, 10 of them came back with a negative report. Here's what they said, "The country we travelled...is full of giants - and we looked like grasshoppers to ourselves - and that is how we must have looked to them." These were not people proud of being Jewish. But, their problem wasn't simply that the land was full of giants. That would have made for a tough fight, OK. But when they said, "we looked like bugs ourselves and that's what we must have looked like to them" - that's when the wheels fell off the cart! First of all, they are spies, so who was looking at them in the first place?! But, more importantly, how could they possibly know what the Canaanites were thinking? They couldn't! But we know what they, as JEWS were thinking. They were thinking, "How could these people possibly respect us - we're Jews?" Everything Gd had

done for them, all of the successes they had in leaving Egypt had built them up for this moment! They had every right to be proud of themselves, but they couldn't do it. And that's a sin.

Unlike these ancient ancestors, we not only do we have a right, we have an obligation to be proud of ourselves as a People. I think one of the most important obligations that we have as Jewish people- Jewish parents, Jewish grandparents - Jewish kids - it to CREATE MOMENTS OF JEWISH PRIDE. That sense of pride draws us closer to one another; it builds a sense of community and shared purpose. We are part of a team, and we take pride in one another. But creating moments of Jewish pride not only bonds us together with each other, it makes our lives meaning on an individual, personal level as well.

So when do we feel that sense of Jewish pride? Part of it comes when Jewish people do extraordinary things, like Jews in sports. Part of the pride comes when Israel thrives and the world takes note. We also get a sense of Jewish pride in the special moments we create, like guiding a son or daughter to the Torah for his or her bar or bat mitzvah. We take pride in seeing our children under the Chuppah, or even at the many graduation ceremonies they have from Hebrew School or Kellman Brown Academy this time of year. We need to celebrate these moments, not just a milestones in our lives, but as moments of JEWISH pride; to note, acknowledge and talk about the fact that were it not for the GIFT of being Jewish we would not have these moments, and these emotions, and these milestones in our lives.

But let me take it one final step forward. We owe it to ourselves and to our People to recognize moments of Jewish pride in the less obvious moments as well. Judaism is a religion that trains us to sanctify the ordinary - to bless the world around us and to find blessing in it. We need to take pride in the fact that being Jewish sensitizes us and helps us to appreciate life on a deeper level. When we make a beracha we can take pride in being Jewish. We are part of a system that elevates the ordinary. When we come into shul and we put on our tallis (or we take one off the rack) and say the blessing, we should take pride in that very moment for being part of a special people. When we just throw it on, or don't even wear a tallis (men, and women who'd like to do so) we are missing an opportunity to create a moment of Jewish pride simply by not paying attention. When you have your own tallis - one that you are proud of - and you put it on, you not only can, you should be proud of the symbolism it carries with it. You are part of a sacred people with a cherished relationship with Gd. YOU may not see yourself that way; but take it from me, lots of non-Jews do. They think that these ancient rituals that connect us to each other, to our history, and to our Creator are pretty cool!

Judaism encourages us to recognize the small victories achieve on a regular basis. Our spiritual lives are nothing more than the accumulation of the small spiritual moments that we create, recognize, savor and recall. In a world that is suffused with cynicism, Jewish pride helps us to

create moments of hope, purpose and meaning. And the more we appreciate life, the more we will enjoy living it.