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Opinion: Phils' Loss: How to Overcome Disappointment and Persevere

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Rabbi Shmuel Jablon

Bad news spreads quickly. Even though it happened on Erev Yom Kippur, the holiest night of the year, word spread rapidly that the Philadelphia Phillies, the overwhelming favorite to win the World Series, had failed to advance past the Divisional Series.

Despite a franchise record of 102 victories and a starting pitching rotation of aces, the Phillies were finished for the year. Upon hearing the news, I knew that disappointment would surely reign in the City of Brotherly Love.

What can we learn from such a disappointment?

One easy lesson: The fact that this happened on Yom Kippur, when we are supposed to be focused on matters far holier than baseball, serves as a reminder that we should not make secondary items, like our hobbies, the focus of our lives. Baseball is an entertaining and relaxing hobby that can help us "recharge our batteries" to face the challenges of real life. But baseball, like all hobbies and pastimes, must never overtake our lives and become the center of our existence. The Phillies are fun, but not our essence. Service of Hashem and His Torah, as represented by Yom Kippur, is what is at the core of our souls.

But there is an additional lesson we can learn from a disappointing end to the baseball season: Disappointments happen in life. What makes us strong is our ability to get over these disappointments and continue to work with all of our efforts to achieving our goals.

This is not a new lesson. Many of the great heroes of the Torah persevered despite disappointments. Yitzchak and Rivkah were wonderful parents. But in addition to Yaakov, they had Esav. Yaakov dealt with the sadness of the presumed loss of his son, Yosef. And then when he had the great joy of learning he was alive, he was forced to leave the beloved Land of Israel to live out his days in Egypt. And Moshe, at the end of the Torah, fell short of his ultimate goal -- leading the Jewish people into the Land of Israel.

It is interesting to note that even though Moshe knew before the end of his life he would not achieve his goal, he continued his mission of teaching the Jewish people with every bit of strength he possessed. The entire book of Devarim is his final lesson. Our sages (in *Gemara Makkoṯ*) note that he even set up the Cities of Refuge across the Jordan River, though they would not be active until his successor, Yehoshua, would establish the others in the Land of Israel. Moshe did not want to miss the chance to participate in fulfilling even one commandment. Though he was disappointed, he was surely neither deterred nor depressed.

The ability to overcome disappointments and persevere is an area of great importance for children, as well. Many have noted, for example, the negative effects of "grade inflation" and the presumption that hard work from nice children should always result in an "A." Sometimes, the greatest gift a teacher can give a child is a "C," or even a "D," or even a nice note saying, "This isn't the best you can do. Please re-do it and I'll give you a grade."



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And sometimes the greatest gift parents can give a child is to support the teacher and help their child to overcome their disappointment and work even harder.

It is OK to be disappointed. You truly cannot win them all. But the real test is our ability to overcome our disappointments and redouble our efforts to achieve all that we can. This is a critical lesson that is necessary for success -- spiritual, academic and professional -- in life.

The Phillies will likely pass this test as they prepare for next year. More important still will be if all of us can pass the test of getting beyond our own disappointments in our new year of 5772.

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