

Take Me Out to the Ballgame

Rabbi Aaron Starr

Our focus lately is rightly on the rise of antisemitism in the world around us, including the antisemitism thinly veiled as “simply” anti-Zionism. However, while we pay attention to negative trends and work to combat Jew hatred, it is important to remember how blessed we are as Jews living in America in the 21st century.

This past Wednesday night, we joined close friends at Comerica Park for the Tigers game. The Tigers lost – badly, I might add – to the Boston Red Sox.

Getting ready for the game, I put on my Detroit Tigers polo shirt and then debated which baseball hat I would wear. Because of my “hair style,” I wear a baseball hat often and therefore own many from which to choose. My general default lately is to wear my new, very bright, yellow U-M hat; I am also wearing quite a bit lately the Basketball Hall of Fame hat that I purchased on our camping trip this past June.

When in Rome, do as the Romans, and when at Comerica Park, wear your Tigers hat. Therefore, sure enough, just before leaving for the game, I secured upon my *keppy* my one and only Detroit Tigers baseball hat: the one with the Israeli flag on the side that I received a few years ago by attending one of the Jewish pride games sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Metro Detroit.

Sadly, I wore the hat with some hesitation, trepidation, and anxiety. After all, it’s the summer of 2021. While I love the State of Israel as you all know, sometimes it’s nice just to go to a ball game without opening yourself up to antisemitism or anti-Zionism. Though I love to talk politics, too, sometimes it’s nice just to sit and enjoy a ball game.

Well, would you know? Not five minutes away from my truck, as I walked from my parking spot in Detroit to Comerica Park, someone bolted directly toward me and pointed at the side of my hat on which I displayed the Israeli flag. Not five minutes and the Israeli flag Detroit Tigers hat is already drawing attention! “Oh no, here we go,” I thought. My body tightened and I prepared for an altercation. What was this young man charging at me going to say?

“Nice hat!” he called out to me from not a foot away. “Gotta keep it strong!” Then he put out his fist for a fist-bump. I gave him the bump; he walked on ahead to the game; and I exhaled.

Our Torah portion this week, Parashat Re’eh, begins with the word *re’eh*: “look, behold, see.” Our Torah begins this week with the instruction to open our eyes.

Indeed, our eyes must be open to the antisemitism around us. Our eyes must be open as well to the reality that America today is perhaps the greatest diaspora experience in Jewish history. Our non-Jewish neighbors seek Jews out for marriage. We celebrate Jewish culture and Jewish traditions on television (notwithstanding some of the terrible Netflix shows appearing in recent times) and in the movies. Jews are present at every level of government. Jews are succeeding in every aspect of life ... even on the baseball diamond.

Despite the obstacles and the challenges of which there are many, America is still today good to the Jews. Perhaps, even with my profound love for Israel, I might argue that America is good *for* the Jews as well.

This Shabbat as we are commanded *re’eh* –look, see, glance, and gander – may we open our eyes to the blessings that surround us. May we open our eyes with gratitude and with joy for the privilege of living as American Jews in the 21st century.

Then may our hearts and our souls join our eyes in being open so that we together we might pray: May God bless us this Shabbat and this week with gratitude, with hope, with health, and with joy. May God bless Israel, and may God bless these United States of America.

From my family to yours, Shabbat shalom!