

The Kid, the Couple, and the Baseball

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A serious debate is taking place in our country, threatening to tear us apart, with people lining up on both sides of the controversy. As is so often the case with matters of great import such as this, it is difficult for people to see the other side. Partisans feel passionately about their position and condemn the other party, viewing them as being abhorrent and even despicable.

Not being one to dodge or avoid controversy, I raise it today, for the matter speaks to issues of morality and insensitivity and is a mirror that reflects our basic values. So I daringly and boldly ask this morning: What would you have done? Who do you think is right? Which side do you take – the crying kid or the couple?

The couple I am referring to is Sean Leonard and his fiancée, Shannon Moore, who are scheduled to get married this weekend. They are the Texas couple who have been labeled by some in the media as, selfish, insensitive, self-absorbed and by at least one New York newspaper, “the worst couple ever.”

In case you missed it, and don’t know what they did that was so terrible to bring such vehement condemnation upon them, it all took place at a baseball park. That is right, with Bashar and Asma al-Assad slaughtering their own people, and so many others in the world doing all kinds of terrible things, this is the couple that has been blasted and vilified for their apparent callous insensitivity.

It all started when they attended their first Texas Rangers game earlier this week and had the good fortune of catching a baseball tossed to them by a Texas Rangers player on his way to the dugout. Appearing to be oblivious to the disappointed crying three year old sitting next to them, the couple smiled and took photos of themselves with the baseball.

Normally this would not have been too big a deal, but as the TV camera continued to focus on them Yankees announcer Michael Kay proclaimed, “Oh my God, they can’t give it to the kid? That’s awful.” For good measure he added, “Wow they’re actually rubbing it in the kid’s face. That’s cold.”

The initial reaction of many was to feel sympathy for the poor kid and outrage at them for denying the crying boy the ball.

But as it turns out, and as is so often the case, there is much more to the story than what meets the eye. The parents of the three year old said that the couple was very sweet and talked to their son throughout the game. Unaware of all the attention and controversy, at one point, in fact, they had even offered the ball to the child. The parents, Kyle and Crystal Shores, were not upset and are probably the most mature of all. They said they feel sorry for the couple being depicted and misrepresented as such coldhearted people.

The Shores added in an interview on the “*Today*” show that they had been trying to teach their son, Cameron, who by the way, had gotten a ball at a game he had gone to just a few weeks earlier, a lesson about sharing and not getting everything he wants. They viewed the foul ball as a teachable moment. Just because a kid is crying and throwing a tantrum doesn’t mean that the kid should be rewarded and

get what he wants. Sounds like good parenting and reasonable judgment to me. Sounds to me like the foul should be called on the announcer.

I think the episode holds a number of interesting lessons for us.

For one – we are once again reminded that we no longer live in an age of anonymity. With everyone carrying cellphones equipped with cameras and video capacity, all can be recorded. Just ask Michael Richards of Seinfeld fame, or anyone else who has been recorded doing something they regret that is exposed and revealed for all to see.

Many synagogues have words from the Talmud in front of the ark which says, “*Da lifnei mee atah omed*: Know before whom you stand.” Judaism wants us to live our lives knowing that an all-knowing God sees all. In a day and age when skeptics question the existence of God and belief in an omniscient One is questioned, we can nevertheless see that such a belief -- that all our actions are known, seen and recorded by God, and that we must make an accounting of our deeds. may prod us to be more conscious of how we act, more sensitive to how we treat and speak to others.

It is for this reason that the Torah teaches that the thief who steals during the day is actually more troubling than the one who does so at night, for the one who acts so boldly in broad daylight flaunts that there is a God who can see what he is doing.

The second lesson we learn from this story is how important it is to not jump to conclusions. It is easy to judge others, to quickly condemn them, without having the benefit of taking the time to get the whole story. Pirke Avot teaches us “*al tadun et reyecha*, do not judge another until you have been in his place.” The tragedy in Florida where Trayvon Martin was shot and killed appears to be in part, the result of someone jumping to a conclusion, of making a terrible assumption about a young black man wearing a hoodie. But on the other hand, there is also a possibility that once all the facts come out, there may be more to George Zimmerman and the story than what we hear in the headlines.

The third lesson we can all learn is the importance of recognizing when one is wrong. The Texas couple has asked for an apology from the announcer, and as of the time I last checked, before Shabbat, he had not done so. Saying sorry can go a long way to assuaging the hurt feelings.

In many respects these three insights are good advice for how to live our lives, in general, including married couples as well.

Always be conscious of the implications of your actions. Act toward the other as if life were one big jumbotron, where everything you do is seen by all. Let that motivate you to show and express kindness, gentleness and goodness. As the medieval Jewish philosopher Bahya ibn Pakuda wrote, “Your days are scrolls. Write on them that which you wish to have remembered.”

Second, do not jump to conclusions, especially when it comes to making assumptions about the motives of your partner. Give him or her the benefit of the doubt.

And finally, let go of anger quickly and easily. Be willing to admit a mistake, and be quick to apologize.

Just two weeks ago the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic was marked. We are still fascinated by this story and it captures our attention long after the victims of the tragedy are gone. One

especially beautiful story is of Isidor and Ida Straus, a Jewish couple who were in first class and who could have been saved.

Isidor and his brother Nathan had rented space in a Manhattan department store in the 1880's to sell crockery and glassware. Eventually in 1896 they bought the whole store. They kept the name and the symbol of the store – which was a red star since the original owner was a whaling captain who had a star tattooed on his hand. And eventually they turned Rowland Macy's store into the largest in the world.

Generous contributors to Jewish and secular causes, Isidor and Ida, who were married when he was 26 and she was 22, were deeply devoted to each other. They wrote to each other daily, whenever they were apart. Crew members urged Isidor to go onto one of the life boats. But Isidor refused, saying instead that women and children should be saved. His devoted wife Ida decided to stay with him rather than accept a seat as well.

Writing about the story in The New York Jewish Week, Susan J. Gordon wrote, "isn't it what most of us wish for... to have the kind of marriage or relationship with someone with whom we would rather die than live without?" And she appropriately adds a verse from the Song of Songs, "Many waters cannot quench love, and no flood can sweep it away."

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