

## **Why the Cubs will win the World Series.... It's not what you think**

### Jewish theologian ascends to Heaven to plead case before the Divine Throne

*By Irvin Ungar*

Nine years ago Jewish scholar and theologian, Rabbi Byron Sherwin of Chicago wrote a novel: *The Cubs and the Kabbalist: How a Kabbalah-Master Helped the Chicago Cubs Win Their First World Series Since 1908*. On May 22 of this year, with the baseball season about seven weeks underway, and the Cubbies standing with a respectable 23-18 record, Rabbi Sherwin died. One picture Judaism has of Heaven is that of the Blessed Holy One sitting around a table studying Torah, the Bible, and religious texts with the scholars of Jewish tradition. Were the invitation extended to a select few to attend one of those study sessions with the Divine, surely Rabbi Sherwin would be among them. And it is quite clear, that after 40 years of marriage to his wife Judith, who over that time has been an obsessive Cubs fan, Rabbi Sherwin would surely ask a favor of the One who Sits on High, to redeem his Chicago Cubs *now* and endow them with a World Series trophy.

Rabbi Byron Sherwin was my friend, my mentor, and a collaborator in my work with the Polish-Jewish artist Arthur Szyk. He was a profound scholar who made the most complex Hebrew texts and Jewish ideas accessible to the layman. He was clear, precise, and insightful. He was a thinking man's thinker. He was a theologian, he was an ethicist, and he was an educator. He was the Distinguished Service Professor and Director of Doctoral Studies at Chicago's Spertus Institute where he was on the faculty since 1970. And yes, he was an expert in the field of Kabbalah, Jewish mysticism, in the United States.

Author of more than two dozen books and more than 150 articles on Jewish ethics, theology, history, and how to craft our souls, he wrote only one novel—on the Chicago Cubs. There Sherwin's Rabbi Jay Loeb performs ritual Kabbalistic magic in Wrigley Field removing the curse which plagued the Cubs for over 100 years, by revitalizing the strength and spirit of its ball players and lifting them to the heavenly and global heights of a World Series victory.

To assist the Cubs, Loeb breathes life into a golem, an artificial human being—Sandy Greenberg (named after two of the most famous Jewish members of the Hall of Fame, Sandy Koufax and Hank Greenberg)—who powers and inspires the team, but unlike golems of the past, he possesses a soul, which plays into Sherwin's concept of the elevating of faith.

One paragraph in *The Cubs and the Kabbalist* provides insight into how Sherwin infuses his philosophy of life into his novel. The setting is the High Holy Day service of Rosh Hashanah, and as his fictional Rabbi Loeb prepares to begin the ritual worship he sees all of the Cubs players and staff members sitting among the congregation. When it comes time for the sermon, Sherwin describes Rabbi Loeb telling a story about Yogi Berra: "Yogi, was once asked, 'What time is it?' The Yankees catcher looked at his watch and replied, 'It's now.'

Loeb explained that Yogi had it right. *Now* is all we really have. He then told of a Hasidic master who was once asked by his disciple, ‘What is the most important thing a person can do?’ The disciple expected the master to say something like giving charity, observing the Sabbath, studying the Torah. But instead, the master said, ‘The most important thing a person can do, is whatever he happens to be doing at the moment—because *now* is all we have for sure. Each moment is an opportunity that we might never have again.’”

The Cubs will win this World Series *now* against its American League opponent because Rabbi Sherwin has the ear of the One who sits behind the plate of all of us, recording the balls and strikes of our own standing in the Game of Life.

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