

We are Barry Bonds and Barry Bonds is us. "Who!?" you ask. Barry Bonds is a professional baseball player for the San Francisco Giants. Just a month ago he eclipsed the most significant record not only in baseball, but in American sporting history, Hank Aaron's career mark of 755 home runs. He did so amidst speculation (flamed by his own leaked Grand Jury testimony) of taking performance enhancing drugs to enable him to reach this accomplishment. We are Barry Bonds and Barry Bonds is us. "What?!" you say? This arrogant, cheating professional athlete is not me, is not us ... our worlds, our values, our skills could not be farther apart! We are Barry Bonds and Barry Bonds is us. "Why?!" you ask. Barry Bonds embodies what is inherent to our human condition and the way in which we humans living in the twenty-first century America respond to that nature.

In 1998 Barry Bonds was arguably the best baseball player on the planet. He hit home runs, he hit for average, he drove in runs, he played great defense, he stole plenty of bases. He played a game for a living, a game that his father played and godfather played. He made an obscene amount of money, amount that could probably feed a small town in Iowa. And yet, it was not enough. He did not hit the most home runs, he did not hit for the highest average or he did not make the most money. Barry Bonds had it all, but he did not have enough, he was not satisfied. He still craved, yearned and wanted more. So, sometime after that -- for reasons we can only speculate -- his body grew, his head size exploded and the number of home runs he hit eclipsed the numbers of anyone else hitting homeruns. He stepped across some line of propriety, ethics and morals ... because of that craving, yearning and wanting.

We are Barry Bonds and Barry Bonds is us. Like him, hate him, tolerate him ... he embodies our society. We cannot get enough. We cannot get enough house or stuff to fill it -- even though, as seen through the current mortgage lending crisis, more house and more stuff places our family's security and our nation's economy at risk. We cannot get enough attention -- reality show after reality show fills our airwaves, people line up in the thousands for the opportunity to be humiliated before millions by the likes of Simon Cowell or Paula Abdul. We cannot get enough connection -- we can text, email or speak to someone at a moment's notice or place our profiles into cyberspace seeking those whose interest may be piqued by our musical choices, political views or even suggestive or embarrassing snapshots. We may not cross ethical, moral or even legal lines to do so ... but we do cross lines of excess because in the depths of our souls we crave, we yearn we want. We cannot get enough. We are Barry Bonds and Barry Bonds is us.

We crave. We yearn. We want. Recognition. Validation. Connection. Fulfillment. Satisfaction. We have plenty of opportunities in our world it would seem, to attain such things. We make great efforts and promises to ourselves to pursue these ends. However, despite all of our efforts, despite the stuff we accumulate to fill our lives ... do we truly attain them? To paraphrase the words of philosophers Jagger and Richards: We can't get no satisfactionwe try and we try and we try and we try ... and we can't get no Satisfaction! Within us is this profound need, this aching and longing, to fill this peculiar hole within our souls.

The first among many philosophers to have written about this challenge was a mathematician, Blaise Pascal who suggested that we all try to fill what he termed a "GOD SHAPED" hole in our soul. The idea of a "God-shaped hole" in the human heart, a terrifying bottomless abyss opening up inside us that we would do anything to fill, is a metaphor for the yearning in the human soul which drives us on our spiritual quest.

Pascal writes,

"What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him..."

According to Pascal's understanding of these God-shaped holes just as we have desires to feed ourselves, protect ourselves and even multiply ourselves, we each are wired with one of these God-shaped holes. And, we will do anything, promise ourselves anything and commit to anything to even have the fleeting sensation that these holes are filled. Sometimes what we promise to and commit to are overtly and blatantly destructive and come in the form of addictions to drugs, food, alcohol and the like. Sometimes what we promise to and commit to ... like the desire for things or to be noticed are less blatantly destructive and more socially acceptable ... but equally unfulfilling.

Nu, what does successfully, genuinely and abundantly fill these God-shaped holes. Here I have nothing earth shattering to offer you. You know what these hole-fillers are. They are the truths and fundamentals to which we seek to return each High Holydays. As we will read tomorrow morning in the Torah portion:

"(it) is not too baffling for you, nor is it beyond reach. It is not in the heavens, that you should say, "Who among us can go up to the heavens and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who among

us can cross to the other side of the sea and get it for us and impart it to us, that we may observe it?" No, the thing is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart."

As well as living with these God-shaped holes within our souls, we all also know how it is that we may fill them. We all know that as we truly reflect, examine and consider we can clearly see: What wealth truly fills our homes and not our houses; what kind of attention sincerely validates our self; what kind of connection genuinely nurtures our souls. Sometimes, of all of our truths, the hardest to learn is the least complicated.

Mark was walking home from school one day when he noticed the boy ahead of him had tripped and dropped all of the books he was carrying along with two sweaters, a baseball bat, a glove, and a small tape recorder. Mark knelt down and helped the boy pick up the scattered articles. Since they were going the same way, he helped to carry the burden.

As they walked Mark discovered the boy's name was Bill, that he loved video games, baseball, and history, that he was having a lot of trouble with his other subjects and that he had just broken up with his girlfriend. They arrived at Bill's home first and Mark was invited in for a Coke and to watch some TV. The afternoon passed pleasantly with a few laughs and some shared small talk, then Mark went home.

They continued to see each other around school, had lunch together once or twice. They ended up at the same High school where they had brief contacts over the years. Finally the long awaited senior year came, and three weeks before graduation, Bill asked Mark if they could talk. Bill reminded him of the day years ago when they had first met.

"Do you ever wonder why I was carrying so many things from school that day?" asked Bill. "You see, I cleaned out my locker because I didn't want to leave a mess for anyone else. I had stored away some of my mother's pills and I was going home to commit suicide. But after we spent some time together I realized that if I had, I would have missed that time and so many others that might

follow. So you see, Mark, when you picked up my books for me that day, you did a lot more. You saved my life."

When we genuinely fill these God-shaped holes within us ... we preserve, nurture and save our own lives and the lives of those we love. It is that simple and that challenging.

The beauty and the blessing in this evening and these ten days of teshuvah is not learning some new insight that we do not already know, but it is the gift we find within the Kol Nidrei prayer we offered this evening and others we offer these ten days. These prayers absolve us from pursuing those things that unsuccessfully fill the God-shaped holes within our souls. These prayers challenge us to acknowledge, return to and cultivate those things that do. We prayed these words this evening:

All personal vows we are likely to make, all personal oaths and pledges we are likely to take between this Yom Kippur and the next Yom Kippur, we publicly renounce. Let them all be relinquished and abandoned, null and void, neither firm nor established. Let our personal vows, pledges and oaths be considered neither vows nor pledges nor oaths.

We are Barry Bonds and Barry Bonds is us. May we acknowledge these God-shaped holes within our souls ... May we recognize our cravings, yearnings and wantings ... May we accept the fact that we humans cannot help ourselves but to try and fill these holes in these limited ways ... May we earnestly and passionately pursue those ways we know to genuinely fill these God-shaped holes in our souls ... May the year be a filling and fulfilling one for all of us ... filled with home runs that matter and home runs that gloriously carry us to the greatest of accomplishments – to lives of meaning, joy and peace.