

I Declare Slump Season Over
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The Mets are in a slump. A bad one. They've been losing so much lately that I can't keep up anymore: something like 15 out of their last 20 games. Now they're seven games out of first place and might not even make the playoffs.

No team can do great every year, of course, but what makes the Mets' slump so bad is that they started off the season great. For two months, they were the best team in baseball. Then, in mid-June, everything started going wrong, and they haven't been able to get back on track.

Now, with just 35 games left to go, they're running out of time.

Jeremiah's words in the Book of Lamentations are reverberating in the hearts of Mets' fans: "They have worn away my flesh. / They have shattered my bones. / All around me they have built misery and hardship. / They have made me dwell in darkness / like those long dead." (Lam. 3:4-6, adapted, of course).

Lately, I've been feeling like I'm in a slump, too. Do you ever feel that way? Like you're just off for some reason; going out there each day but just not getting it done? We all "go through it"¹ from time to time.

The Torah talks about it in this week's parashah. Moses says to the community: "See, this day I set before you blessing and curse: blessing, if you obey the commandments of Adonai your God...and curse, if you do not obey [them], but turn away from [Adonai's] path...and follow other gods. ..." (Deut. 11:26-28)

The Torah understands that each day presents us with infinite choices. We do our best to make the right decisions, but sometimes it doesn't work out. And then we wake up one day and realize we've drifted off the path, and we just can't figure out how to get back on it.

How does that happen? The Torah says we get lured away by "other gods," which I take to mean harmful forces that distract our attention from what we should be doing.

For example, maybe we get caught up in a grudge we're holding or we're scrapping for a fight, and it saps our mental and emotional energy, and we can't focus on other things. I've been there.

But often it's more subtle than that. Sometimes, we end up "following other gods," so to speak, and losing our way because our internal spiritual GPS is off kilter.

It's like driving. Have you ever been following Siri's instructions to the tee and yet you still get completely lost, and finally you realize it's because Siri actually has no idea where she's going? If your GPS system is off center, then no matter how carefully you follow the directions, you're going to get lost.

The same is true in life. We all have an internal spiritual GPS that guides us, but from time to time the GPS gets out of whack. So, no matter how hard we try to do the right thing, we're going to go round and round in circles, and end up disoriented and dispirited.

That's what we call "being in a slump," and the only way to get out of it is by recalibrating the GPS.

Because a baseball season is 162 games and they've already played 127, the Mets are running out of time. But the good news is that, when it comes to resetting our own spiritual GPS, there is always time. As our High Holidays prayer book says, "The gates of t'shuvah are always open." No matter how lost we are, we can always return.

Monday is the first day of Elul, the month leading up to Rosh Hashanah. If we're in a slump, now is the perfect time to start recalibrating the GPS and finding our way back.

Beginning Monday, you will receive an email from me each weekday morning with a "spiritual nugget," which is a reading, a poem, or a bit of wisdom for you to contemplate. I hope you will find that they spark some insights and help you look inward. And if you like them, please forward them on to others.

It's human to go "OTD," meaning "off the derekh"—off the right path. Sometimes it happens in a big and sudden way, but most of the time it happens subtly and gradually; and before we even realize it, we're in a slump.

Tonight, I declare that slump season is over.

"Hitor'ri, hitor'ri—Wake up! Wake up! / For your light has come. / Arise and shine! / Awaken! Awaken! / Sing a song! / The glory of Adonai is upon you." ("L'cha Dodi," verse 5)

Elul is our time to get back on the derekh.

It might not come easily but, thankfully, God is there to coach us and encourage us, because unlike Major League Baseball, God is holding a place for every single one of us in the postseason.²

¹ This is a favorite phrase of Met's manager Carlos Mendoza, who says after every consecutive loss, "We're going through it right now." It's becoming tiresome.

² See M. Sanhedrin 10:1: "All Israel has a share in the World-to-Come."