

Sometimes You Gotta “Be a Big Dog”: On Hanukkah and the New York Mets

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It's been a hard week to be a New York Mets fan.

First Edwin Díaz, then Pete Alonso. Two players who felt essential to this team are suddenly gone. And that's after our beloved left-fielder Brandon Nimmo was traded a few weeks ago.

At the center of it all is David Stearns, the general manager, holding fast to his philosophy: Value players rationally, don't overpay, don't let emotion or fan pressure dictate your decisions.

Mets analyst Steve Gelbs pointed out that by letting two proven, fan-favorite players walk, Stearns has put immense pressure on himself.

These were high stakes moves. If his plan fails, it fails publicly and spectacularly—and he owns it.

This brings us to the real question: Is Stearns being stubborn by clinging to his system and missing the bigger picture? Or is he acting boldly by being willing to absorb anger and disappointment now to bring about a future most of us can't yet see?

I'll be honest: Like a lot of Mets fans, I'm frustrated and disappointed right now. But, at the same time, I'm trying to have faith that Stearns knows exactly how much pressure he's created—and that he's acting courageously to deliver for the team. Time will tell.

That tension—between safety and courage, between comfort and conviction—is at the heart of Hanukkah.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik taught that the miracle of Hanukkah did not begin with the oil. It began with a decision—decision to go all in and take immense risk in order to win.¹

The Maccabees were a small band of brothers facing the overwhelming power of Antiochus's army. From any practical perspective, the safe choice would have been accommodation: Stay quiet, avoid confrontation, and survive.

But Rav Soloveitchik teaches that had they chosen caution and prudence, there would have been no miracle. Playing it safe would have guaranteed defeat.

Only by taking an enormous risk did they create the possibility of stopping Antiochus's plan to destroy Judaism for good.

There was so much at stake in their decision to fight. The Maccabees were risking not only their own lives and prestige, but the safety and future of the entire Jewish people. This was a do-or-die battle—not only for physical survival, but for spiritual survival, as well.

The French Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas teaches that the spiritual life is about transcendence—going beyond the limits of our instincts, fears, and self-righteousness so we can become more than we are. Judaism constantly pushes us to exceed what feels natural or manageable.

But here's the paradox Levinas insists on: We cannot transcend ourselves by ourselves. True transcendence requires relationship—reaching toward God and toward other people for wisdom, strength, challenge, and support.

Unless we're willing to do that, we will never be able to exceed our own limits, and we will never grow.

That's the essence of Hanukkah: acting when the risks are real; moving forward without guarantees; trusting that when we take a courageous step, God—and other people—will meet us there and help us break through.

Mets podcaster Joe DeMayo captured this truth when he said, "Sometimes you need to scale back yourself and go be a big dog." He was talking about baseball, of course, but he was also teaching a spiritual principle.

Sometimes leadership means taking responsibility so fully that there's nowhere left to hide.

The Maccabees stepped into that responsibility. They carried the weight of Judaism's future on their shoulders.

Hanukkah calls on us to look honestly at our own lives. When we face tough decisions about our values, our communities, and our future, are we choosing what feels safe—or what requires courage? Are we doing what comes naturally and easily, or what is necessary and hard?

Miracles don't come from certainty.

Right now, all we Mets fans can do is sit with the discomfort, the anger, and the perplexity—and try to have a little faith. Faith that taking a risk, even one that hurts, might open the door to something better than we can imagine right now.

In baseball and in life, may we find the faith of the Maccabees—to choose boldness over safety, and courage over convenience, when it matters most.

1 As related by Rabbi Baruch Simon, Imrei Baruch, Vayeshev #4