

The Example of Hammerin' Hank

The year was 1934. For the first time in 25 years, the Detroit Tigers baseball team was strong enough to have an excellent chance to play in baseball's prestigious World Series.

Hank Greenberg – nicknamed Hammerin' Hank – was a key player on a team that had come to rely on his superb skills at first base and his strong batting to win games.

An important and decisive game was scheduled on the Jewish observance of Yom Kippur. Greenberg, the son of Romanian immigrants to the United States, announced that he would not don his uniform and play on this day, the holiest day of the year in Judaism.

The city of Detroit was outraged. Citizens screamed that the Day of Atonement could be celebrated any year, but this year the Tigers may go all the way to the Series. Anti-Semitic remarks were viciously hurled at him, but Hank Greenberg remained resolute.



The Detroit Tigers indeed lost that day, although the team did go on to secure the American League pennant that year, but then lost to the St. Louis Cardinals in the World Series. And Greenberg, when more rational minds prevailed, attained the respect of the community. In fact, a poem by syndicated columnist Edgar Guest honored the man who held steadfastly to his beliefs. The tribute ended with this verse:

*Come Yom Kippur – Holy fast day
World-wide among the Jews,
And Hank Greenberg to his teaching
And the old tradition true
Spent the day among his people
And he didn't come to play.
Said Murphy to Mulrooney,
"We shall lose the game today!
We shall miss him in the infield
And shall miss him at the bat,
But he's true to his religion –
And I honor him for that!"*

(more)



Greenberg still teaches us an important lesson in how to live effectively. He decided what was important to him and, regardless of pressure applied, he honored his own values. Hank Greenberg – not the team, nor the coaches, nor even emotional Detroit fans – set his agenda.

What he did required tremendous courage. He let nobody lower standards he had chosen for himself. And although the team lost that day, the city of Detroit won because it gained an important role model in a young man who courageously followed his own way.

Choosing our own way may not always be easy. But effective living occurs once we decide how we will live our lives and, regardless of outside pressure, we honor that decision.

If you are struggling with a difficult decision today, what is your inner voice leading you to do? Perhaps that is the voice that should be honored.

The integrity of the upright guides them (Proverbs 11:3 ESV).

– Beecher Hunter