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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

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One Last Piece of High Holiday Advice

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Today is *Hoshana Rabbah*, the special name for this seventh day of *Sukkot*. This name is connected to the lengthy series of *Hoshanot*, processions around the synagogue with our Lulavs and Etrogs that take place on this day. On the six previous days of *Sukkot*, there was one such procession. Today, there are seven, hence *Hoshana Rabbah*, literally "The Great Hoshana."

Yet there is another significant tradition associated with this day. Our Rabbi's understood this last day of *Sukkot* as the final day of the High Holiday period. The 12th century *Sefer Hamanhig* teaches "On Hoshana Rabbah, the closing of the books that were opened on Rosh Hashanah, and sealed on Yom Kippur, takes place." In the imagination of the Rabbis, the High Holiday season, while technically ending on Yom Kippur, "unofficially" ends today. So, in these final few hours of the High Holiday season, I would like to share with you one last piece of High Holiday advice. We must always remember that our mistakes, however unintentional, however regrettable, will often have ramifications in the lives of others. That awareness must guide our behavior.

Earlier this week, a story from the world of sports reminded me of this important truth. At this year's [Asian Games](#), South Korea's Jung Cheol-won was part of a 3-man team taking part in the men's 3000 meter speed skating relay final. He had an ever so slight lead over Taiwan's Huang Yu-Lin. Thinking that he had the gold medal sealed (no High Holiday pun intended), Jung chose to raise his hands in celebration instead

of leaning his arms forward to propel him over the finish line. This momentary lapse in judgement (or to be fair, concentration, but more likely judgement -- you can see the [video](#) here and make your own determination) allowed Huang of Taiwan to stretch his leg forward and actually beat Jung by 0.01 seconds.

The world of sports is filled with such lapses in judgement. Just google "celebrating too early in sports" to see amusing, awkward and downright painful examples of what happens when you [celebrate](#) too early, and your opponent's pass you by and win. Sadly, this episode will be added to that painful collection, a cautionary tale for future athletes and others who make this all too human mistake.

Jung understood the magnitude of his mistake. Interviewed by the press after this shocking and embarrassing defeat, he said, "I made a rather big mistake. I did not come at full speed to the finish line. I let my guard down too early. I am very sorry." He should be lauded for taking responsibility. His mistake had ramifications not only for himself, but the two other members of the relay team who received the silver medal instead of the gold.

Now, I know what you are thinking. What is so unique about this situation that it has received so much attention? I thought that too when I first learned about this. But then it got interesting.

In South Korea, every able-bodied man between the ages of 18 and 28 serves a period of mandatory military service of approximately 18-24 months. This is a serious national obligation. Earlier this year, the conscription of several members of BTS - the Korean boy band that is one of the top grossing acts in music today - made the headlines in newspapers throughout the world. But there is an exemption for South Korea's premier athletes. A gold medal at a prestigious international competition would generally merit such an exemption. So, this mistake not only all but guarantees that Jung will serve, but will also obligate his teammates on the relay team to serve as well.

As you might imagine, they are not happy.

Jung made a simple human mistake, but his mistake will affect the lives of others. And so it is with us. So let us remember on this unique day in the Jewish calendar, that our own actions will determine not only our place in the book of life, but potentially determine the place of others in that book as well.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner