

Among the more unusual stories from this past summer – from the world of professional Baseball.

New York Mets shortstop Wilmer Flores, a native of Venezuela who signed as a free agent with the NY Mets organization at 16 years of age, came up to bat in the middle of a late July game to thunderous applause.

Flores noticed the applause but did not know what was behind them. It was an inconsequential at-bat – Flores grounded out and returned to the dugout. Only then did he learn the reason for the ovation – Mets fans had gotten word through social media that Flores, standing there at bat, was to be traded to the Milwaukee Brewers. They were applauding him as he concluded his seven-year tenure with the Mets – unbeknownst to player himself!

Flores took his shortstop position the next inning with bright red and puffy eyes, clearly emotionally distraught. The life, employer and sports family he knew – since early in his teen years – were all about to change. His fate was out of his hands – and he knew it. But this is how things work in baseball – players are traded regularly, without much of a say in what team they wind up with. Flores was simply the latest player to be shuffled along in the continuous exchange of baseball talent.

Amazingly, the story does not end there. It turns out that the tears were unnecessary. The trade fell through and Flores remains with the Mets today. In fact, just two days later, he achieved a career-first walk-off home run against the Washington Nationals in the bottom of the 12th inning, winning the game for his team. Overall, according to *Newsday*, Flores has been “tearing up the plate” since that “good cry” he had on the field.

As Jews, what can we learn from this story? Flores – for the first time in his career – sees that his fate can truly be out of his hands. No matter how much he wanted to stay, decisions beyond his control were made him to send him to another team. This, perhaps, is the traditional Jewish approach to God and prayer, especially at this High Holiday season. You will recall the fearsome *Unetaneh Tokef* prayer – that describes us, “*Key-vnei marone*,” as a flock of sheep passing before God, our lives clearly out of our hands, not knowing if we will live or die in the coming year. Many of us have a lot of trouble with this prayer, with that depiction of God deciding our fate each year. Perhaps this is how our ancestors – and maybe even some of us – approach the Divine. Others, surely, find this approach challenging.

Look what happens after the tear-inducing baseball player trade falls through – Flores’ career rebounds. After the cancelled-trade, he accomplishes things on the field that he could not before. He saw a glimpse of his future – one he did not like – and, given the opportunity to remain a Met, is making the most of his chance to stay in NY.

None of us know if we will be “traded” in the coming year. Of course, we hope that we will not. All of us, though, can approach the High Holiday period – with its fearsome and troubling prayers – **as if** we are being given just one more opportunity to live our lives, on and off “the field,” to their fullest. Regardless of our ages, each year is a gift to grasp and to use to its greatest potential. Maybe our lives are more predictable than the lives lived by our ancestors? We do, of course, know more about medicine and other natural phenomenon – issues that vexed our ancestors. Yet, life can still be unpredictable – with

accidents, difficult diagnoses, etc. coming without warning. Therefore, “Carpe Diem,” in Latin; “Uvacharta V’Chayim,” (Choose Life) says our Torah. Make the very most of each year, each day, that we are blessed to receive.

NY Mets shortstop Wilmer Flores is living his life to the very fullest; may we each follow example in our lives. Wishes to each of you for a Happy, Healthy and Sweet 5776 – Shana Tova!