*[Sung] For the Glory of Old State*It involves a cover-up to protect a reputation.

*[Sung] For her founders strong and great.*It involves a hierarchy.

*[Sung] For the future that we wait,*

It involves propaganda.

*[Sung] Raise the song, raise the song.*

It involves hero worship.

I am using the example of Penn State, only because it is the only school to get caught… so far. Penn State was, is and will be a reputable institution of higher learning… so let us learn.

The words sung by Ilene Linzer Levin, class of 1989 were the first stanza of Penn State’s Alma Mater:

For the Glory of Old State  
For her founders strong and great.  
For the future that we wait,  
Raise the song, raise the song.

The problem is that “the future that we wait” - as suggested in that infamous email - is more concerned with the university’s reputation than children’s safety: Quoted from an email from Athletic Director Tim Curley to then-university president Graham Spanier: "After giving it more thought and talking it over with Joe yesterday, I am uncomfortable with what we agreed were the next steps.”

The next steps, per the previous email sent had been that they would speak with Jerry Sandusky, Assistant Football Coach, his Second Mile charity and the Department of Welfare after learning about the shower incident. This second email continues: “I am having trouble with going to everyone, but the person involved." (aol.sportingnews.com)

So no next steps were taken and the words of the alma mater, “for the future that we wait” turns ominous in hindsight.

2nd stanza of the alma mater:

Sing our love and loyalty,  
Sing our hopes that bright and free  
Rest, O Mother, dear with thee  
All with thee, all with thee.

When this scandal first became known, some of you talked to me, not knowing what to think of your alma mater or the school where you sent your children. Can love and loyalty be blind? Should love and loyalty be blind?

3rd stanza:

When we stood at childhood’s gate,  
Shapeless in the hands of fate,  
Thou didst mold us dear old State  
Dear Old State, dear old State.

Yes, childhood was molded – for the many many thousands of students

who received a good education and the skills to have a life of fulfillment and giving. Look at their contributions to society through research and invention,

acts of loving kindness and investment in the future. Childhood was molded for those many many athletes, whether on the football field or another field who were able to live Joe Paterno’s motto: Victory with Honor. But yes, childhood was also molded for those children who got caught up by adult hands with bad intentions and “childhood’s gate” mentioned in the alma mater became a prison.

4th stanza:

May no act of ours bring shame  
To one heart that loves thy name,  
May our lives but swell thy fame,  
Dear old State, dear old State.

Usually Penn State’s fame is swelled through its academics and contributions to the world but at this time, its fame is swelled precisely *because* its acts brought shame. Penn State’s motto: Making Life Better seems to be true only for some which is why the punishment did not stay within the coaching staff or athletic staff but reached to the highest office of the University, the Presidency. And so they were punished. Some say the punishment fit the crimes, others say it was too harsh. All are asking: what went wrong at Penn State University? But let us not kid ourselves: those who believe that this values implosion is limited to State College, Pennsylvania, are seeing the trees but not the forest.

What happened at Penn State is a breakdown of nothing other than the 2nd commandment, one of those ancient commandments that we thought we outgrew: 3 You shall have no other gods besides Me. (Ex 20) Let us remember that the 2nd commandment continues:4 You shall not make for yourself a sculptured image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I the Lord your God am an impassioned God, visiting the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations of those who reject Me, 6 but showing kindness to the thousandth generation of those who love Me and keep My commandments. (Ex 20)

Let’s deal with the difficulty of the punishment first: To the 3rd and 4th generations…? Why those generations? Per the Jewish Study Bible, “These are the descendents that the guilty are likely to see in their own lifetimes. This indicates that the punishment of the descendents is intended as a deterrent to, and punishment of, their ancestors, *not* a transfer of guilt to the descendents in their own right.” (JSB) In other words, the grandson will know what his grandfather did which will make the grandfather less likely to do it in the first place. In this interpretation, it is less a punishment than a deterrent.

Using our example… a $60 million fine to help victims of child sexual abuse to be paid at least $12 million per year comes out to 5 years… No bowl games for 4 years. 4 years of no new scholarships and the entire athletic program will be on probation for 5 years.

Like the punishment of the 2nd commandment, the prohibition will affect 4 or 5 generations of students, faculty, coaches, administration, those that the current leadership will have to see, coach, guide, teach, mentor eye to eye. Yes, it is a punishment and yes, it is a deterrent.

Per the 2nd commandment, only images made for worship are prohibited. (JSB) So what is “worship”? Ironic to ask it here in the sanctuary on Rosh HaShana morning yet we know that a lot of non God-centered worship occurs. Literally “worship” is translated as: “reverent honor and homage paid to God or a sacred personage, or to any [object](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/object) regarded as sacred.” (dictionary.reference.com) It comes from the Middle English word worshipe Meaning: worthiness, respect, reverence paid to a divine being. (marriam-webster.com)

Given that the commandment “is not a theological statement but a behavioral injunction ruling out worship of the other beings and objects known as gods” (JSB) couldn’t we honestly say that Joe Paterno’s followers worshipped him? Sadly, I believe that Joe Paterno became “sacred”, and via his coat tails, so did Jerry Sandusky. *That* was why the NCAA took away his winning record. We cannot erase time; we know that the team still won the games, but it is no longer on public record. Joe Paterno is no longer the winningest coach because he who became untouchable allowed for inappropriate touching.

Yet I believe that the response that speaks the loudest is none of the above. I believe that the self-inflicted punishment of removing the statue of Joe Paterno

symbolically speaks the loudest and symbols have a long shelf life; longer than that of idols.

This summer, ESPN reported: Shortly before dawn in State College, Pa., “…the work crew then removed the 7-foot, 900-pound bronze statue by forklift and placed it into the lower level of the stadium [for storage].” There is no longer a pilgrimage destination, no longer a place to take photos with Joe. Worship has concluded.

The Christian Science Monitor (7/23) commented: In Penn State’s case, the NCAA sanctions can be broken down into two broad categories: punitive and corrective. We already know the punitive sanctions. Here is what the Christian Science Monitor said about the corrective sanctions, which I would label an invitation to repentance: … “Imposing the death penalty does not address the cultural, systemic, and leadership failures at Penn State. Instead, our approach demands that they become an exemplary NCAA member by eradicating the mindset that led to this tragedy,” the NCAA says on a page devoted to the Penn State sanctions. The main difference between the two sets of penalties, then, is in terms of the “corrective” levies required by the NCAA on Monday. Penn State’s sanctions do not only extract their pound of flesh from the athletic program –

they take aim at the concept of the football program within the university.

In fact, the Penn State case revealed an awareness by Emmert and the NCAA

about a problem with the role of sports on college campuses in general.

“One of the grave dangers stemming from our love of sports,” he said,

“can be the sports can become too big to fail – indeed, too big to challenge.”

If sports are too big to fail, too big to challenge, they have become the object of worship. That is idolatry.

The statue came down, but the Paterno name remains on the Library…

as it should, in my opinion, for Penn State exists primarily as an institution of higher learning. Let people go to the library to pay homage to those values that Joe Paterno not only spoke, but lived.

Hero worship, winning at all cost, protecting a reputation, putting sports before the rest of the interests of the school, let alone innocent children, are acts that require repentance and renewal… not only for Penn State but for us all.

There are many sports stories that highlight the values of healthy competition,

team-building, allegiance, sportsmanship on and off the field. These examples resurrect Joe Paterno’s motto, Victory with Honor and give it more than lip service.

Think of Aly Raisman, a Jewish American gymnast who won an Olympic gold-medal floor routine to the tune of “Hava Nagila” on the 40th anniversary of the massacre of 11 Israeli athletes and coaches at the Olympics in Munich.

Think of the Jewish community and others who responded when, once again, The International Olympic Committee would not allow for a moment of silence as requested by the families of those killed in Munich despite the doctrine of the Olympic Spirit, “to build a peaceful and better world which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play."

Many knew that long-time IOC President Juan Samaranch told those families that the Olympic movement avoided political issues… though at the 1996 opening ceremony he spoke about the Bosnian war and the 2002 games opened with a minute of silence for the victims of 9/11. Many also knew that the families have also been told that a commemoration of this sort was inappropriate at the opening of such a celebratory event though at the 2010 winter games, there was a moment of silence to commemorate an athlete who died in a training accident.

Yet many of us did right by those athletes and coaches and raised our voices and remembered and mourned so that the Olympics became so much more than honoring athletic prowess: honoring humanity.

But it was not only the Jews who marked this yahrzeit. The Italian team staged a minute’s solidarity silence outside the Israeli team’s quarters. And a French swimmer, Fabien Gilot, a member of the gold medal-winning relay team raised his arm in triumph to reveal a tattoo in Hebrew reading:

*בלעדיהם כלום אני -*  I am nothing without them. He explained that it was a tribute

to his grandmother’s Jewish husband, Max Goldschmidt, an Auschwitz survivor

and a huge influence on his life.

Another athlete made a difference as reported in Newsday: Venus Williams agreed to defend her title this year in the Dubai Championships ONLY if Shahar Peer, an Israeli player who was denied a visa by United Arab Emirates authorities

last year was admitted to the Emirates! As the commentator said, “Certainly, Ms. Williams deserves far greater recognition of her compassionate and selfless act. She stood up for her principles and put her professional position on the line in order to achieve her objective.”

We watch sports. We play sports. We watch our children and grandchildren play sports. The real sports hero, whether player, coach, commentator, umpire or fan is the one who suits up by bringing our values onto the field, the arena, the diamond, the pool, the rink. Let the games begin and may victory come with honor. Amen.