

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 7.1.20
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
Sent: Wednesday, July 1, 2020 10:30 AM
To: MOJO210AL <MOJO210AL@aol.com>
Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 7.1.20

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 10 cars 5 Trucks 4 Walkers 2 Runners 1 Bicyclist 1 Dog Walker

I have an out of the house—hard to believe—appointment at 8 Am this morning in Bloomington—not even in CD2. I may not have time to get this out this morning. I am writing this now [at 7:05 Am](#) just so you know I at least started.

The other night, I convened a group of parents from the congregation which I will be serving as the rabbi for the High Holidays. I wanted to hear from them what these past 4 plus months have been like for them and if there have been any insights, they as a family, have gained from the home rhythms of Jewish life. It was a fascinating discussion, o much so that at the end of the scheduled hour, I offered to continue the discussion past this single meeting. There were two points that I wish to share and which I have been reflecting on. The first was made by a mom of a 13-year old who said that her daughter came to her the other day and said, “mom, I feel like I have nothing to look forward to in my life.” The other came from two parents who are regular shabbat observers and who said, “shabbat has lost some of its specialness in distinguishing it from the rest of the week. When it used to be the only real time we could spend as a family lingering over the table, it is no longer the case. And constancy of presence takes away the beauty of a special shabbat day together.”

When I was 13, I discovered two things that gave me something to look forward to—summer camp and quadrennial elections. For this 13-year-old, the loss of her summer camp has taken away a crucial element of her life. And I get that. But there is something deeper going on as well. In the world she is beginning to inherit, the scenes all around her are not ones that are filled with hope. The realization that our country has so far yet to travel to live up to its aspirational vision can be paralyzing for a teenager— for it is certainly paralyzing at times for us as adults. The voices of hate—against the “other” are arrayed across the political spectrum even as much of it emanates from the whitest of houses in this country. Tweets that denigrate, bullying that substitutes for policy, all of it contributes to a certain amount of hopelessness for all of us. But to be 13 and to see nothing to look forward to captures the dystopian moment that we find ourselves in. And of course, that is the challenge for every preacher this coming Rosh Hashana – to counter the voices of despair that are found inside and outside of us all. But to do so with a sense that does not dismiss nor deny the presence of those voices but offers a vision to counter them. My task, in part, for three days this year is to return to the world of the pulpit which I left willingly and with a new purpose for moving forward, and to speak to the piece of each of us that knows that sense of being 13 and finding the

message of comfort and of hope, of vision and resolve. Each of us has a piece of our soul that needs to hear such a reframing message—even if the moment when we were 13 the opponents were named Humphrey and Nixon.

That other comment—that one about the rhythm of family life impacting the rhythm of religious life should be a signal to every clergy of every religion to reassess their assumptions about what the future holds and what their congregants, parishioners or followers need as we move forward. Again, for me, this has become avocational and my interests extend to a lovely community in another state going through the pains of self-reflection. And yet, I spent so many years engaged in religious community building inside a particular community that it is hard to dismiss the reality in any congregation in any community. The distinction between the mundane and the sacred is at the root of every religious experience. For us as Jews, 6 days we are to work and the 7th is to be a day of sacred retreat. What does it mean when the boundaries are so porous? What happens to religious behavior when the boundaries between the domains is violated on a daily basis? We see evidence all around us of the permeability of daily life, where one domain merges effortlessly into the next. For some that creates little concern and their acts of making the mundane sacred are no less vibrant. But for many, where boundaries define purpose—where meat and milk and Tuesday and Shabbat are separate categories, the loss of a rhythm of the week within a community of fellow travelers has been significant. On this call, people shared that the loss of their “shabbat friends”—folks that they may not socialize with (or have chosen to zoom with these past 4 months) has really impacted their lives in negative ways. For many of us, we only talk to some people inside a building we frequent once or twice or more a month. But those connections, like the family shabbat dinner, have been upended. What is the message that needs to be heard in every religious community in the coming months? Have the patterns that clergy in so many religious settings worked hard to create for years been forever altered as a result of 4 or 5 months of a very different, but highly intense, change of behavior. I don’t know—but on my walk today, I began to hear the challenges and am grateful to a group of parents in Ohio who took the time to provide me a glimpse of what it was that used to occupy my time—and take my mind off for 45 minutes from the daily work that engages my energies in ensuring that pragmatic progressive thinking continues to be evident inside my little congressional district—just 1 of 435. Morris

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