

**From:** [David Kraemer](#)  
**To:** [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)  
**Subject:** FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 5.28.20  
**Date:** Wednesday, July 15, 2020 9:48:09 AM

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**From:** Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 28, 2020 9:22 AM  
**To:** MOJO210AL <MOJO210AL@aol.com>  
**Subject:** One Person's Response to Communal Fear 5.28.20

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 4 Trucks 2 Walker 1 Runner 1 Car 1 Bicyclist 1 Fisherperson  
1Dog Walker No School Busses

#### TWO QUICK PIECES TODAY

1. It is hard not to write about the unfolding scene in Minneapolis and now spreading across the country. The justifiable anger surrounding the murder of George Floyd (OBM) has sparked the potential for a summer not unlike the summer of '67. As a result of the rioting that took place during that summer, the Kerner Commission was appointed to address the fault lines in America. The report, released shortly after my Bar-Mitzvah in early 1968, described an America that was increasingly "separate and unequal". The conclusions and recommendations it made were rejected by President Johnson and Otto Kerner himself became the one of the first in a string of Illinois governors who have found themselves in prison. (For those not familiar with him—it had nothing to do with the insightful and stirring report he and his commission produced on racial inequity in America). I have no solutions to offer for the continuing divide inside this nation, the complicated relationship between power and race, the loss of any real commitment to equality and the increasingly evident racism that touches into the highest levels of government. I also know that hatred directed at Jews is not disappearing-and that just yesterday outside a local synagogue Nazi imagery and taunts were found on neighboring homes and bus benches. We are living in precarious times and I pray that leadership at every level and people at every station in life engage fully in recognizing that the social compact is breaking and that we will ultimately either all rise or fall together. For myself, and for many others reading this, tonight begins Shavuot—the festival designated as the moment that the ancient Israelites received Torah at Mt Sinai. I only pray that the words of Ben Azzai, when asked what was the most important verse in all of Torah replied —“This is the book of the generations of humanity(adam)” This teaching from an ancient sage who lived in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century of the Common Era must be the verse we carry with us into the festival of receiving Torah itself.
2. I had initially planned to write about this yesterday, but the news got in the way. But now for really 36 hours, I have been walking around with an image that I can't get out of my mind. I was invited to share in an awards ceremony for a truly great academician and a dear friend. Her teaching that night was, as usual, eloquent, insightful and delivered in an understated manner that allowed even an layperson like me grasp the depth of her words and the power of her life's research. It was truly an honor to have been invited to "attend" and once again Phyllis and I sat in awe of her scholarship and her wisdom. But that is not the only thing that I have been ruminating about. Rather it was an in the introduction of this scholar that the fullness of her life's work was captured. Here, a younger scholar was introducing her elder with a sense of gratitude and indebtedness that captured everything about who we are to be as a people in the transmission of a tradition. As if it was a perfect rejoinder to the male centered chain of transmission found in the opening to Pirke Avot—the "Ethics of the Sages" where Moses transmits Torah to Joshua who transmits it to the elders who then continue to

pass on the tradition down the line—this woman spoke about how she gained her passage into the chain of tradition and the role this scholar being honored played. She told the story of how her professor in College told her that “unless you can’t live without it—don’t pursue a PhD.” So, upon graduation she took the LSATS and prepared to go to Law School. One afternoon while looking for books in the bookstore, she came upon the book “Fighting to Become Americans-Jews, Gender and the Anxiety of Assimilation” by Riv-Ellen Prell. She told the story of how she sat down in the bookstore itself and read the book in its entirety and realized that her life would not be complete without her pursuit of a PhD. This young scholar, now teaching at Temple University in Philadelphia and about to release a serious book on the history of Jewish Philanthropy, captured in that one moment how the chain of our tradition is to be passed from one generation to the next. While captured so regularly in the pages of Talmud as a student quotes his teacher, the meta-message of both the award itself and how Prell was honored reframed that transmission in a manner that was and remains long overdue. Tonight, many of us will spend many hours engaged in serious Torah study and embracing that chain of tradition in a manner that most of us have never done—via zoom and livestreaming. For me, with all the great Torah that will be taught, my moment of sensing and holding onto the receiving of Torah took place two nights ago. Watching this person introduce a woman who has mentored so many, has given her “Torah” so freely, has fought against and taught about hatred in the academy so regularly, and who has lived with humility that each of us is to live with—gave me an early Shavuot present—and makes redundant all-night study tonight. Mazel Tov and yasher kochech Riv-Ellen for your life’s work, thank you Lila Corwin Berman for your introduction and its magnificent presentation of why a chain of tradition is only as good as the women and men who pass it on. Hag sameach and pray for peace and understanding. Morris

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