

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Daily Response to Communal Fear 4.8.20
Date: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 9:44:15 AM

From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
Sent: Wednesday, April 8, 2020 9:34 AM
To: mojo210@aol.com
Cc: mojo210al@gmail.com
Subject: One Person's Daily Response to Communal Fear 4.8.20

DAILY CENSUS 4.8.20 Wagon Wheel Walk 6 cars 2 school busses 1 runner 1 bicyclist

I spent the school year 1979-1980 serving as the Interim Hillel Director at the University Of Illinois-Chicago Circle Campus. I took a year off Rabbinical School because Phyllis and I were married in August 1979, and she was starting her second year of Med School in Chicago. We didn't have a plan for years 3 and 4 in place yet, but if you ever need a figure-it-outer—talk to Phyllis. As you can tell, her figure-it-outer skills worked, and the rest is history. But I digress...

In any event, fast forward-while looking backward-to Passover 1980. Since many of the students I worked with were commuter students from the Orthodox community in West Rogers Park, where Phyllis and I lived that year, I got to know them well. One enduring family friendship from those days continues. In preparation for Passover, the students requested that one of the events we take on was the delivery of food packages for Passover to those in need. The ARK, which was a social service agency for elderly and economically challenged Jews living in Chicago, organized a massive Ma'ot Chittim project that delivered food to literally thousands of Jews in need of kosher for Passover food. It was collected all in the gymnasium of a local synagogue and delivered by volunteers. It was, and remains, one of the most vivid memories of Passover preparation with which I live. Now I had a mixed relationship with this tradition up until that point. The monies collected to purchase the food was a result of a donation that people made when selling their Chametz—a technical innovation of the ancient rabbis to ensure that we didn't "possess" the leavened food products during the festival. My dad, when we were growing up, always refused to do this symbolic sale—and I can still hear him say—the "rabbi takes the donations and buys food for himself or uses it for other purposes." Now to be clear, my parents were very philanthropic, so this response of my dad must have been based on some relic of his own memory while growing up in BMH Synagogue in Denver in the 30's and 40's. In any event, seeing what those donations could do for those in need became a counter to the voice of my otherwise giving father who refused to sell his chametz and make even a nominal donation in the process.

Fast forward to my first Passover in Minnesota. When it came time for the congregation to sell its Chametz and I was the agent, I heard my father's voice and I saw the goodness of the Chicago Jewish

community. That first Passover, when we were still meeting in the St. Paul JCC, I delivered kosher for Passover food to probably 20 members of the shul community and others. There were the Jews living in the Cleveland Hi-Rise—like Sarah and Beyla and Gregory and Annette and Zelda-- all of blessed memory. There were the Jews in the Montreal Hi-Rise like Sid, and Hymie and Dina. And there were folks living where they always lived in dusty smelling homes or apartments around town. There were characters like Betty on Snelling, who loved to dance on the street and Solly and Maxie on Hague who lived with gates on their windows and carried on one of the largest bookie schemes in the Twin Cities. (For background on the latter check out this article that appeared in the ATLANTIC in 2001-<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2001/05/one-smart-bookie/302201/>) In any event, this tradition of delivering food to those in need became a constant part of my rabbinate and served for many years as the introduction to our Seder—never disclosing names at the time so that my kids wouldn't know the people that I delivered to. (although one year I took Avi with me when we went to Maxie and Solly's house and they gave him a wind up car that they must have had for years) I did this as a way to make sure that I lived up to my father's standards of what he thought should be done with the funds collected and as a tribute to the Ark and those students from UICC Hillel who introduced me to the reality of it being done. I started our Seder with speaking about delivering food as a way to ensure that our guests understood what privilege we all had that the figure-it-outer in chief was going to be able to serve 25 plus people a delicious meal in a few hours after we completed the first half of the Haggadah-the telling of the story. For 30 plus years, my privilege was to serve as an agent of those who trusted me with their funds and in the process reminded me of the real diversity of our community and the real needs that for the other 51 weeks of the year often went unmet. In recent years, I no longer have that privilege and trust that others are taking it with such reverence. The need still exists. But there is another reason I tell you this story. Life in the face of COVID-19. It is brutal.

Our office and particularly our constituent service team—but truly every one of us—has been dealing with the same story over and over again. We pick up the phone and hear on the other end something like this: “I have no income coming in, I lived paycheck to paycheck, I can't pay my rent, I cant afford groceries and the bailout system is not functioning as we were promised. My business that I built over 30 years is falling apart, it will not survive another week being closed...” The comments go on and on in a similar fashion. And what is true in our office is no different than what is happening in 534 other Congressional and Senatorial offices around this country. And we will sit down tonight, albeit with a small Seder table, and tell the story once again.

Here is the message: The Seder begins with these words: “This is the Bread of Poverty (Matzah) that our ancestors ate in the Land of Egypt. **Let** All who are hungry come and eat, **let** All who are in need come and Share the Passover Meal”. The doubling of the phrases beginning with LET All are the key. The first phrase is a universalistic phrase-reminding us that we have a responsibility to ensure that all who are hungry—Jew or Gentile can find food to eat. The second phrase is particular, reminding us that no Jew should be without food for Passover. Was For most years, my job was focused on the second “Let”. This year, watching my colleagues work their tails off and knowing the fewer, but no less demanding phone calls I have handled, and the help that we have provided or are trying to provide or are sadly unable to provide—is a reminder that the first “let” has been a preoccupation of mine leading up to the start of this Passover Seder and is being fulfilled as best that we can by the folks that I am privileged to work with and our colleagues in offices around this

country. So tonight, when we begin our Seder and say these ancient words—I hope and pray that once again I demonstrate at least to my father of blessed memory that the children he raised took the value lesson he taught and turned it on its head. And I am grateful to those students in Chicago, and the Ark organization, for showing me a way to not only redeem my father’s fears but to also live with an enduring commitment to those in need.

(THIS WILL BE THE LAST POSTING UNTIL THE INTERMEDIATE DAYS OF PASSOVER—so for anyone reading this—Hag Kasher v’sameach or Happy Easter or simply enjoy the weekend. No judgments on any of these). MORRIS

(For new readers, this has become a daily ritual for me after my first walk of the day. I sit and just write. No editing and just sending it out)

Sent by my iPad