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To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 4.23.20
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
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Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 4.23.20

When I told my parents that I was pretty sure I wanted to be a rabbi, my father asked me two questions. The first was “do you love the Jewish people more than you love Judaism?”, and “do you have the right disposition to be a leader?”. By the first question he meant the following. He knew I loved my practice of Judaism and that after 5 or 6 years at seminary it would only deepen. He knew I, like every clergy, would leave seminary with the idealized image of what it meant for one to live a “real” Jewish life. And he knew that the folks that filled the pews would disappoint me week after week, day after day. Unless I loved them more than I loved the idealized vision I held onto; it could never work. The second question revolved around the fact that growing up as the youngest in my family, my father saw diffidence at every turn. I was blessed with a few close friends, but not a very large social circle. New situations caused me to sweat and to figure out reasons why I needn't really be in them. If I were to become a pulpit rabbi, I was going to have to address that personality quirk head on. In retrospect, the answer to the first question is evident in my 33-year tenure in a congregation. I think I learned how to narrow the gap, and shortened the distance, as much as possible between the ideal vision I believed in and the real lives of the people I was privileged to serve. It was the second question that remains to this day the more intriguing.

I am by nature shy and every day I still need to overcome it. As it related to my pulpit career, it meant the following. I went to synagogue every Shabbat(sabbath) an hour before services started to just be able to sit in solitude in my office. First and foremost, I had to steel myself for walking out and being the leader that the congregation needed me to be. And in order to do that, I had to remind myself whose birthday it was that week, whose aunt Tilly in Pittsburgh had surgery, what college was Jimmy going to go to, a memory about the folks on the *yahrzeit*(remember anniversary of death) list, who I met with during the week to follow up with a private question—the list was endless but the process was perfect for me. Being prepared enabled me to face the congregational world each and every service-be it daily, weekly or for the festivals. Another time I might share with you how I use that technique now in my new line of work.

I tell you all of that because for most of us these weeks have been quite strange. Social distancing has led to social isolation and being with people has become a virtual activity, scheduled most often a head of time for a drink or cake over zoom. I will say that our grandson now eagerly awaits Phyllis reading him books and me “stealing his nose.” The latter was a favorite game my father always played with me. My work life is totally different. Everything I do is now on a computer or a phone. I

spend hours with people (still needing to steel myself for the call or virtual visit) but I haven't been with a group of people since March 13 at a Dakota County Regional Chamber event at the Radisson at the Mall of America. Save for that one visit to a Costco at early morning senior hour, I haven't been in a setting with people since then (save for current household residents:). I realized that this stay at home order has had a calming effect on me. I am much more comfortable sharing things about myself in the absence of being with each of you who might be reading this, than I ever was when we met face to face. But it struck me last night, particularly after Gov. Walz demonstrated that leadership and responsibility matter by announcing the "Minnesota Moon Shot" of testing capability, that this isolation would come to an end—perhaps sooner than later.

It led to me to wonder what it would mean for all of us who have found comfort amidst the discomfoting reality in which we are living. We will have to return to what are ultimately much healthier and much more real encounters that involve actual presence in a room with others. Office interaction will be constant and not simply reserved for a "staff meeting" on Microsoft Teams. Scheduling a bank of meeting back to back to back won't be happening—because we will have to travel from place to place to place. Shabbat dinner invitations will need to happen again and the reflective nature of our familial shabbat table will be replaced once again with the hustle and bustle of conversation and intense discussions over issues that none of us will ever be able to resolve. The quiet streets that now are filled, at best, with walkers or brave ducks willing to sit on them, will once again become lanes filled with speeding cars and seemingly very busy people needing to get to somewhere 5 minutes ago. And while I do hope that maybe baseball returns at some point, I will miss the serenity of these past many weeks of not needing to check scores, reading box scores, yelling at the TV, disagreeing over and over again with the shift (a shortstop needs to be on the left side of the infield) and longing for a pitcher that throws more than 100 pitches a game. And what I fear most of all is the loss of this newfound joy. Having the freedom of walking outside every morning and then coming home and being responsible for my own davening(praying), of having time to write and then getting to work while still being at home. It seems to me that if we begin to identify what have been gifts to us during this isolation and let go of the anger for being wise and living differently while it has unfolded, that our world will indeed be a healthier one when it returns to the new normal. We will cherish much more what matters the most in the world we return to and hold onto the things that have given us comfort in the midst of this shut down. As I write these words, I realize the privilege from which they emerge. For all too many people, perhaps really all of us, our lives will never again be the same. Retirement planning that was done so carefully for years never included such a situation in the Monte Carlos runs. People living paycheck to paycheck never imagined weeks on end without one and UI not being available to them. So there can be no real romanticizing about this shutdown without such recognition. And yet, at the end of the day, if we can take with us some of the gifts we have secured as a result of these past 6 weeks whenever we return to that new normal—I think we will. Morris

(For new readers, these daily reflections are part of my response to being home bound. I walk for 45 minutes in the morning and then sit down and just write. No editing or redrafting.)

Sent by my iPad