

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.3.20
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
Sent: Wednesday, June 3, 2020 9:27 AM
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Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.3.20

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS (different route for part of walk) 2 Cars 5 Trucks 2 Runners No school bus #1916

Sunday will mark the end of 13 weeks since I began this process of reclaiming my life after not being able to walk around Lake Nokomis one time. It will mark the end, for at least a week, of these daily reflections that have become part of my life in a way that I never imagined when I first began sitting down and writing. Sunday will also mark the moment when I loosen the social distancing that has become a serious daily part of my life. A long-planned family vacation (see earlier post on travel insurance) has been replaced with a somewhat crazy drive out to New York and back [between Sunday and Friday](#). We will drive out with the newest Doctor in our family in her car and rent a car to drive back on Thursday and be home before Shabbat. And so, dear friends—whether it would have been as a result of sitting on the Outer Banks in North Carolina or now as a result of a drive to and from New York—it will be a time for a pause and a change of my morning rituals for a week.

As I was walking [this morning](#), I kept thinking about a halachic (Jewish legal construct) principle called “techum Shabbat”. It literally means the “boundary of Shabbat” and is the distance one could **walk** on Shabbat without violating the Sabbath itself. Almost from the start of its rabbinic promulgation until the present, the Jewish mind has been fascinated by figuring out ways to extend the boundary itself. It is not worth your time or mine to give a detailed description of the attempts, but rather to embrace for the moment how these past 13 weeks have been a certain type of physical fulfillment of this notion writ large. I have barely left my neighborhood over these weeks—save for a few trips to State Parks on Sundays—and have lived with certain boundaries defining my world. Indeed, each morning on my walk, I have defined those limits and while it is now not unusual for me to walk 6 or 7 miles a day between the two walks I take, I never leave Mendota Heights.

Like many, I now spend hours in front of the computer zooming in for meetings, “traveling” to Wabasha or Hastings, South St Paul or Cannon Falls—and never leave my couch or chair. These sessions are often quick and provide an opportunity to reflect on the enormous contribution that technology has provided us all in addressing this pandemic and allowing us to continue to perform “the people’s business” without missing a step. We break the physical limits with which we are living over via screen. And if such is the case for our work world, it certainly has become the case for our social life. Last night, 6 of us spent a wonderful hour in conversation and were physically situated in

Manhattan, St. Louis Park and Mendota Heights. This has become our life. And that of course is what drew me [this morning](#) to the concept of techum Shabbat. For me, not driving on Shabbat was a way to recapture control over my life. The ubiquitous nature of travel during the working week, made Shabbat a time when I lived within boundaries that created a place and community for me to fully experience. I had a boundary and lived within it. Not because of any “rule” that defined where I could travel but rather as a way of celebrating the wonder of being freed from the larger societal demands that all of us face the other 6 days of the week. It was a day of rest in many ways.

Seventy years after the Conservative movement permitted driving on Shabbat, we were faced with a dilemma no less demanding. How to sustain community in the face of a shutdown. If the car was a response to the growing suburbanization of American life, the computer became the response to the imposed isolation of American life. And it was inevitable that a halachic means would be found break that isolation. And yet like refusing to become dependent upon a car every day of the week, I have found becoming dependent on a computer for my religious life to be equally unappealing. There is nothing that can replace the energy inside a sanctuary filled with folks who are there for any number of reasons but through their collective presence create a sense of the sacred. There is nothing that can replace the smiles of an individual as they gaze upon a young child carrying a crown on Shabbat during the Torah processional or a mourner tearing up in the presence of her community as she recites Kaddish. A screen doesn't capture it, a living room doesn't replace a sanctuary and a computer filled with faces doesn't create a congregation—for me. It is not surprising that such is the case. I personally rejected driving on Shabbat in search of community and today if don't find screens very fulfilling in the search for the divine. Of course, I spent my life wanting an overflowing parking lot each and every Shabbat and never tried to dissuade folks from coming to shul if they had to drive. And I would never try to dissuade people from zooming into minyan with their cup of coffee in hand as they sat on their couch in sacred isolation. Indeed, this year on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur when I will be privileged to probably lead a congregation in Ohio in their observance of the New Year and day of Atonement, I will most likely be zooming into a home near you. I ponder what it will be like to break the bonds of physical place this [coming Sunday](#) as we head out to New York. My “techum Shabbat” will indeed be violated. I wonder if along I-94 or I-80, there won't be a moment where I come to see what these 70 years of technological advance have given to us all in our own search for meaning and purpose and in understanding the search we share in finding community. Morris

Sent by my iPad