

From: [David Kraemer](#)
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Subject: Fwd: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 7.17.20
Date: Friday, July 17, 2020 9:21:16 AM

Begin forwarded message:

From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 7.17.20
Date: July 17, 2020 at 9:12:52 AM EDT
To: MOJO210AL <MOJO210AL@aol.com>

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 6 Cars 2 Bicyclists 2 Walkers 1 Dog Walker 1 Runner

Gordon Wisby was a kid I went to Junior High with and probably High School as well. By the time we left Pound Jr. High and entered Lincoln Southeast, our interactions ceased. In fact, I can really only remember Gordon on one day of school—but it is an enduring memory. During the fall and spring in football crazed Nebraska, we had lunch flag football games for the second half of lunch period. Every person who wanted to be on a team was assigned to a team. Gordon and I were on the same team. He rarely showed up to play but one day we were going to be shorthanded and so some teammates and I approached Gordon and said, “are you going to play in the game today?” His response, “probably but I doubt it.” To this day, wherever he might be, I think of Gordon Wisby for delivering, with a sincerity that you had to see to understand it, the classic double bind communication (DBC). DBC is where one piece of information delivered stands in stark contrast with the other piece of the communication leaving the receiver of the information paralyzed and unable to know what is up or what is down. It is true that all of us need clear and unambiguous communication in order to live at our best. Knowing what is and what isn't true—for example—is actually important. Proclaiming the importance of masks but eschewing wearing in public them is no less a double bind than was Gordon's 8th grade lunchtime response. Unambiguous communication enables us to fully function and to know what is expected of us and how it is we are expected to respond. We may fail to succeed in our response to a clear and precise request—but then the onus is on us—not the messenger.

No where is clarity of vision evident in my life than in liturgy that defines a significant piece of who I am. Prayer in its classic form relies on unambiguous language. It seeks to paint a picture of a clear line between faith, observance and behavior leading to true communion with the Divine. And no where is that liturgical desire more evident than in many of the classic prayers connected to the High Holydays—Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. In a couple of months, we will welcome in a New Year (5781) encountering religious sentiments, liturgical poetry and statements of faith that would

make Gordon Wisby's head spin. One such piyyut (classic liturgical poetry) captures this religious imprint. Sometime in the 5th or 6th century of the Common Era, a poet named Yannai composed a double acrostic piece entitled "**V'chol Ma'aminim**" (And All Believe"). It is one of the classic pieces that finds its way into the High Holyday liturgy and has accompanied the experience of generations of people for 15 centuries each High Holyday season. And what I really wonder is how many say it and believe it? I often wonder if Yannai wrote this linguistically beautiful poem as an aspirational desire that he sought for his own life, or whether he had such deep faith and belief in the absolute statements which he makes over and over again. The framers of the service found this poem so beautiful that it is found not only on Rosh Hashanah but also on the Day of Atonement. On these days when our hearts are filled with a sentiment of being inscribed into the book of life for another year, we recite these words either a statement of faith or a vehicle to impress the Divine of our sincerity.

And as I have aged over the years, I have found the absolute nature of this poem harder and harder to recite—not because I don't want it to be true—but because I find it hard to see its truth in the world in which we are living. These absolute statements of God's absolute power, love and drive for justice just seems to be at odds with the world in which we are living. If the past 4 months have taught us anything, it is that ambiguity and doubt about tomorrow are evident each day and in most encounters we now have. And the imposition of absolute belief in the curative powers of a Divine one or that God is Absolutely Just may not be reflective in our day to day understanding of how these past months have unfolded. And here is where I think Gordon Wisby was on to something. Not the double bind he placed his teammates in—but in the ability to express doubt with no less assuredness than he expressed belief. I worry when people impose religious or political orthodoxies and expect others to simply say yes. When I recite **V'chol Ma'aminim** each and every year, I hear the wisdom of both my mom and the crazy making nature of Gordon Wisby inside every verse of this poem. It was my mom who said to me every night when I went to bed and said to her, "see you in the morning" and she would respond— "I hope so," and it was Gordon who taught us that "probably but I doubt it" is a sentence we will need to spend our lives unpacking. And maybe, just maybe, that is what Yannai intended for us 15 centuries ago. Maybe he understood the human response so well that in writing in absolutes he was inviting us to actually voice our doubts. Be wary of any orthodoxy that imposes absolutes upon our lives and revel in the ambiguity that is sometimes necessary to embrace. Shabbat Shalom Morris

(FOR NEW READERS—THESE ARE DAILY MUSINGS THAT FOLLOW MY MORNING WALK. THEY ARE UNEDITED AND THE RULE IS THAT I HAVE TO FINISH IT IN THE SAME AMOUNT OF TIME THAT I SPENT WALKING—TODAY THAT WAS 55 MINUTES)

Sent by my iPad