

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.2.20
Date: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 9:48:34 AM

From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 2, 2020 9:25 AM
To: mojo210al@gmail.com
Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.2.20

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 6 Trucks 6 Cars 4 Walkers 2 Dog Walkers 2 Bicyclists 1 Dog Runner 1 ISD#197 School Bus #1916

The first Twin Cities communal event our new shul building hosted was the 50th Commemoration of Kristallnacht. In November 1988, having just moved into our newly completed synagogue facility in August 1988, we joined together to remember the "Nights of Broken Glass" November 9-10, 1938. Henry Oertelt(zl), was a teenager in 1938 and spoke about witnessing the Nazi government's support for the rampage and violent destruction of Jewish owned businesses and synagogues and the burning of books both sacred and not. For the years that I was privileged to have known him before his death, Henry would always tell me that every November came in with a certain amount of sadness and fear for him. The images he saw of the destruction of his community's buildings, his neighbors stores and the life he thought he was going to live served both as a constant reminder of the unspeakable hatred he experienced and the responsibility he took on to still give witness to hope and purpose.

I have been thinking a great deal about Henry these past many days. Henry use to always say that anytime he passed a building that had been destroyed by fire, he immediately found himself feeling like a 14-year old helpless teenager all over again. Driving on Sunday and seeing only a few buildings of the many that were destroyed, Henry was riding with us in the car. There are some who condone the actions of a few individuals who are hell-bent on expressing their frustration through the torching of police stations or the burning of a person's small business. For the vast majority of people, the distinction between the right of peaceful protest and the wrong of violent actions is clear and needs no further defense. Pepper spraying those who are peacefully gathering to give voice to their anger and frustration around the systemic racism in our country must be also condemned. Indeed, the images of Governor Walz joining to hear the speeches in front of his Governors Mansion in St. Paul yesterday afternoon and hearing the pain of those peacefully gathered in order to help rebuild civil society, stands in stark contrast to the images of the President who sought to further inflame and heighten tension with his own actions and words later that same afternoon in DC. But what really made me think about Henry these past few days are the actions that most synagogues had to take in the moments after the completion of Shavuot [on Saturday night](#).

Many synagogues, which have essentially stood empty for months as a result of our dealing with

Covid-19 and our move to “telereigion”, still housed the sacred scrolls inside the ark. Even though we were not gathering inside to pray when we walked by or drove by, we knew those facilities still housed our Sifre Torah- our many scrolls. And in the moments immediately after the conclusion of the festival that celebrates the Revelation at Sinai itself, Jews in the Twin Cities were forced to remove these precious scrolls from their homes. Today, driving past any synagogue in the Twin Cities, one cannot be sure if the Torahs are still in place or scattered among Jewish families in safekeeping. The reason for their removal was that there were credible threats of potential destruction of places of worship. And while most of those places were most probably urban churches, the MN. Commissioner of Public Safety, John Harrington, advised all places of worship to remove their valuable items. And so, from Minnetonka to Mendota Heights, Minneapolis to St Paul synagogues removed their Sifre Torah. Quietly and in the darkness of night, synagogues in our midst were denuded of their sacred status. Henry, in his prime, was filled with joy when we moved those Torah scrolls into our new Congregation in August 1988 for the first time and carried one himself in our dedication ceremony. The picture I have in an album of his smile said all you ever need to know about redemption, hope and promise.

I cannot imagine what Henry Oertelt(zl) would have thought about the news [Saturday night](#) or the marginal voices, tragically some even on the margins of the Jewish community, that gave support to such violence. No, Henry would have cried real tears. He would have never imagined that in his beloved new land that he would see a time when synagogues were once again a (potential) focus of hatred and animus. We have a great deal of work to do inside this country, not one of us is exempt from the task. Each of us needs to find a path to undertake their work on righting the wrongs inside our country and our shared destiny. There are going to be many opportunities for each of us to engage in the healing that needs to take place—violence is not now or ever a path to seek out. Ignoring our own narrative and dismissing the lessons it contains is also not a path to embrace. Melding our story with its message of hope and its paths of peace demands that we spurn calls to violence from wherever they emanate from—be it the street or the White House. We owe it to the memory of the Henry Oertelt’s of this world who were eyewitness to governmental violence directed at a particular people and who chose to live lives of hope in spite of their personal pain. We owe it to the memory of all those who were themselves victims of such violence, of terror, of wanton disregard for their rights to pursue a life. Perhaps we should not really return those sacred scrolls to their rightful homes until we are all able to recommit to the lessons they teach—the dignity of each person, a society built upon justice, peace and truth. Their experiences are completely different, and the societies are not the same at all, but from this day forward when remembering Henry Oertelt(zl), it will be nearly impossible not to remember George Floyd(zl) as well. They both are now calling out for us to act. Morris

Sent by my iPad