

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.23.20
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
Sent: Tuesday, June 23, 2020 9:22 AM
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Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.23.20

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 6.23.20 4 Cars 2 Trucks 2 Runners 2 People fishing 1 Dog Walker

On the First of Tammuz, when I was a pulpit rabbi, I use to worry about the fact that I only had about 6 weeks left before Tisha B'av and I had to start worrying about what I would say on the High Holydays. Having a responsibility again for a congregation this year, this time in Ohio, I woke up [this morning](#) and began thinking that I only had 6 weeks to worry about the fact that Tisha B'av was about 6 weeks away. Oh well, somethings never change.

I often wonder where we learn how to be empathic. Or more to the point, how are we instructed to become empathetic human beings. I spent a lot of time thinking about that [this morning](#) on my walk and realized that the first time I remember being taught about empathy was an incident that happened when I was 4 or 5 and spending the day with my Grandma Allen(zl). We lived in Denver at the time as did she. I still recall her address and her home 2966 Dahlia. She remained in her home despite the white flight that occurred as the demographic changes took place in her neighborhood. The 1960's were not kind to her. It was a decade that began with the untimely death of her middle son, my Uncle Dave(zl) in his 40's. It ended with the death of her oldest grandchild, my cousin Zicky(zl) and in-between my father(zl) had to tell his mom that we would be leaving her and moving to Nebraska. To the end of his life some 50 years later and would say that was one of the worst conversations he ever had to have. But I digress...

I used to spend many days with my grandma before I began school. I am not sure if it was for my benefit or due to my mom's need for a break from me, but I loved those days. My grandma Allen was one tough cookie. She was fiercely independent and had really cut herself off from her family of origin. She came from a family that always prized education and she herself had finished the Gymnasium in Marijampole before she left Poland. She married my grandfather for whom I am named, but at some point, had to become the sole responsible adult in the family. Shrewd and smart, she invested in two small properties in Denver. And those days that I spent with her were all about her daily tasks involved with managing those properties. My mom would drop me off, I would crush crackers in a mortar and pestle set Grandma Allen had and then we would go out for the day. Taking the bus, we would go over to her "west side apartment" and she would go door to door collecting the rent. With her little pad, she would note the cleanliness of the facility and then meet with her resident manager. When that was completed, we would get back on the bus, go to downtown Denver where she walked into "her bank" and asked to speak to her banker. The it was

lunch at the May Company before getting back on the bus to go to her 14 and Vine street apartment where her tenant manager Polly must have feared the arrival of this 5-foot 3-inch woman each time she made her visits. It was while waiting for a bus to the Vine street apartment one day that I first remember learning about empathy- or at least being instructed by a person who might never have been voted the “most empathic” at Marijampole High-but who left an enduring vision of its importance inside my soul. On the street, as we waited for a bus, a littler person walked up to the bus stop and waited as well. As a 4 or 5 year-old, I was amused. I had never seen an adult who was my size or maybe smaller and began to laugh. I am sure I also said something like look there is a “m” (a pejorative word beginning with the letter “m”). My grandma Allen was not amused and immediately began apologizing to this individual. But she wasn’t done with me. When the bus came, she found two seats and we sat down. Me by the window. And then she got up and gave the seat to this man and said, “Morris, apologize to this person for hurting his feelings”. Apologies by that time were something I had learned quite well, but still what was I apologizing for? But you didn’t want to cross my Grandma Allen. And so, I apologized and for a few minutes the two of us shared a moment of human connection. I do remember that he was very kind and said something that made me feel better. My grandma Allen succeeded in teaching me that day that other people’s feelings were impacted by our behavior. And in the world in which we are living today, not only are their feelings impacted by our behavior—but so too are potentially their lives.

Consider these statistics from the year of Covid-19. While many people know that Black Americans are twice as likely to die of Covid-19, Black Americans between the ages of 35-44 are NINE(9) times more likely to die of Covid-19 as white people. These numbers are also true for Latinx and indigenous populations as well (5-8 times more likely to die). And if you have autism or a developmental disability you are more likely to get Covid and if you get it, more likely to die from it. (Thank you to Andy Slavitt for bringing forth the research—and for my being tasked to work on health equity issues for my boss). And so, here is the quick but necessary upshot to all of this. As people start thinking that the disease is not about them, their lack of empathy will infect and potentially kill others. As we start thinking about opening our communities, starting live services in our sacred spaces, thinking that the “worst is over” we need to do so with just one variable firmly in place—the ethic of empathy. Only if our actions are framed by such an ethic will we live up to the best of who we are to be. Indeed, if I had but one sermon to give this year, this would be it. Research is not the only key to ending this disease—the embrace of empathy is right there as well. No actions should be undertaken unless empathy is our guide and our responsibility. My grandma Allen would ask no less of me—or of you. Morris

(For first time readers, these are written quickly after my morning walk and are neither edited or reread prior to being sent)

Sent by my iPad