

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 4.30.20
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
Sent: Thursday, April 30, 2020 9:19 AM
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Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 4.30.20

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I had to make a condolence call yesterday. I have gotten to know this individual as a result of my work in CD2 and called to offer my words of support following the death of his father. When I first met this individual in January 2019, the first thing he said to me was “your boss is gonna be a one-termer.” I explained that I had little to do with her political side, my only role is working on several policy issues as well as serving as her liaison inside some particular communities—one of which was his. Over the ensuing 16 months, we have been together at monthly meetings and numerous local events that find us both being present. Thus, when I called yesterday, the tone was quite different than that initial conversation. We haven't spoken electoral politics in months, rather we have talked about issues that impact his business and the general climate for it, community dynamics that are inhibiting its growth, a shared belief in getting more state and federal aid for smaller communities, and of course our respective families and life in general. So in listening to him speak about his dad, a prominent politician on the state GOP level and a successful business man in his own right, we focused mostly in on the loss of his father and the sadness of its timing. At the end of the conversation, I said my usual words of comfort— “may his memory only be for a blessing.” It is a phrase that rolls off my tongue after 33 years of pulpit life. It was a little disarming when he said, “that is a beautiful phrase—explain it to me.”

In truth, the phrase is quite ambiguous. It depends on who we think is the receiver of the blessing and who is the transmitter of the blessing. And as a result, one gleans a little more understanding into our own beliefs about life after death. There are many people who will argue that when we have a memory of our deceased and respond by doing something that brings honor to their name, the blessing accrues to the deceased. How so? In those circles, people believe that the soul which returns to the Divine after death is on an “Aliyah” a journey upward towards nearness with the divine entity itself. Our memory of our beloved, followed by our intentional act of goodness as a result, provides blessing to that soul on its journey and propels it toward union with the Divine. It is a compelling understanding for many. It suggests that our responsibility for the deceased does not end with their physical passing from this earth. Rather, the relationship sustains itself and our actions continue to matter. The goodness of a person's name remains our responsibility after their death. How we behave is a reflection from where we came. It is good theology for some, and neurosis making for others.

An alternative reading of this phrase is that when we have a moment in which we remember our beloved, that memory is a blessing in and of itself and touches our soul with a sense of presence and purpose. In that regard, pictures that we see, gifts that they gave us, comments that reflect upon them—all sorts of things that bring a flood of memories to us—also bring back the blessings that they gave us and the blessings that they are still giving us. In this regard, the focus of the blessing is us and the deceased is only a memory. And yet, the relationship endures. And perhaps that is the ultimate beauty of this English translation of the blessing itself. It provides for us to sustain and nurture a relationship even after the physical presence of a loved one is no longer real.

The beauty of this fact should not be lost on anyone of us. All too many people poo-poo the possibility of the afterlife. There are even some Jews who believe that Judaism has no belief at all in the afterlife. It is understandable. Its focus centers on the life we do live in this world and the modern skepticism towards many religious constructs fit neatly into people's ability to dismiss belief in or concerns with any type of "afterlife" thinking. And yet, even the most skeptical, is caught in a bind as a result of the ambiguous nature of this phrase. For some, our actions continue to impact the soul's journey of our loved one. For others, the deceased continue to impact our own life and touch our own soul. In either case, the relationship endures, and death does not end it. Perhaps the greatest meaning of this English phrase is to allow a population that sees itself as thoroughly modern and science based thinkers(except when it comes for some in listening to the science around Covid-19) to find a way to embrace what I believe to be a necessary link to our past and indeed to our future. And when it is all said and done, that is a purpose of religious pursuits in whatever form they take and in which whatever "brand" they are framed.

At the end of the day, it matters little if a condolence call comes from a pulpit rabbi or a policy wonk—what really matters is that the call is made. And when that call takes place, which side of the aisle you are on or what your theology is about the meaning behind your phrases takes a back seat to the human act of kindness. And in your ending the conversation with a reminder that their deceased loved one's "memory will be for a blessing" allows each mourner to see themselves on a path to sustaining a relationship that may otherwise feel severed. Morris

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