

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 5.13.20
Date: Wednesday, July 15, 2020 9:46:53 AM

From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
Sent: Wednesday, May 13, 2020 9:30 AM
To: MOJO210AL <MOJO210AL@aol.com>
Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 5.13.20

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 3 Cars 3 Trucks 2 ISD#197 School Busses #1916 and #1914 and 2 Runners (one of who I know and like!) Seems people are trying hard to get counted in the DWW Census

Yesterday, I discovered that there is at least one person who reads this column to the end each day. After reading what I wrote, they sent me an email and asked, "isn't there anything positive you can say about the Presidential Coronavirus Taskforce?" I guess my comment that I would trust Fauci over Pence and Kushner put them over the top. I thought about the question and [this morning](#) realized that I could. I will never be able to tell one of my favorite jokes again. You know the joke, if you have been in my shul or spent time with me, it is one of my go to jokes. You know about the woman sitting at the Presidential Inaugural of her daughter. She leans over to her neighbor as her daughter waxes eloquently during her Inaugural Address and taps the person on the shoulder and says, "you see that woman up there speaking—her sister is a doctor!" (Genders changed to protect the innocent). That joke—either written by a physician or at least disgruntled sibling always drew a laugh. Growing up when we did, there were moms all over the neighborhood who only wanted their child to grow up to be a doctor. Mine, knowing my science aptitude, said "maybe try to marry one."

I thought of that joke today because this pandemic has been anything but a laughing matter. I am not interested in addressing issues of leadership today and who bears responsibility. No, for me my mind is already focused on the Fall and the start of a new Jewish year. For those readers who are not Jewish, our High Holydays are for rabbis what it would be like for a Minister or Priest to have Christmas and Easter ten days apart or for an Imam or who would have to experience two months of Ramadan fasting back to back. In other words, it is intense. For one year after being retired, I had the pleasure of sitting in shul in a colleague's congregation and experiencing the days unfold in ways I hadn't my entire adult life. But as they say, you can take the rabbi off the pulpit—but you can't take the pulpit off the rabbi. Last year I had a marvelous time in Lexington, KY and even had friends from here join us for Rosh Hashana. This year, I am delighted to be going to Columbus, Ohio and to serve for three days as a rabbi for a congregation going through a transition. When I accepted their offer, I had assumed that sometime in August, I would sit down and knock out sermons, work with their Cantor and service leaders and together we would provide an excellent three days, filled with meaning, purpose and vision for the unfolding Jewish year. Well, the joke is on me. While not yet the loneliest of the three pilgrimage festivals—Shavuot—most of my friends and colleagues that I

keep in touch with are already full into High Holyday planning. One friend and colleague in California met with two Hollywood producers and screenwriters to ensure that his shul's live-streaming service was produced in a manner that has great lighting and good script writing to maintain connection throughout the services. For me, even with a short-term rabbinic role with this congregation, we are already knee deep into the planning. Guidelines have already been developed as to how to make the call as to whether there would be "in-person" or only streaming services on-line. I imagine that a hybrid approach will become the norm there and most probably everywhere. [This morning](#), one of the journalists that grew up in our shul just had a piece in the FORWARD about 14 other rabbis and their planning for Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur. As one colleague said to me this past week, "more important than anything we say at shul this year, is the understanding of the necessity for great planning and even better audio-visual technologies from our sanctuaries." He may be right—but [this morning](#) I did think of what I might need to say as well. (Never in my life have I thought of Rosh Hashana sermons or Yom Kippur talks in May—but the times they are a changing.)

And yet here is what I decided I need to say this year. (For those of you in Columbus, it could well change by the time we are together). What I need to say and what I think we need to hear is that more than Jews have sustained laughter, laughter has sustained the Jews. It is always a weird text that is read on the days of the New Year, the birth of and then the near sacrifice of Isaac—the first child born into the covenant between us and God. One might have thought that the creation story marking the start of the world itself should be chanted from the scriptures—in some congregations they do so—but the traditional texts center around Isaac. He is a transitional figure in his own right. His life is filled with difficulty and he gets rather short coverage in the unfolding narrative of the Jewish people. But his name endures and indeed it that name that matters. According to scripture, he is named because his elderly mother laughed when she found out she was going to have a child. "An impossibility she must have said, not possible given my current biological reality." She laughed, she scoffed, and she also reproduced. And with his birth, was born laughter in our midst. At an age when most people are not interested in changing diapers, the first Matriarch and Patriarch are knee deep in poop. The joke is on us. If we want to keep the story going, we must live with the crap that comes with it. And if there was ever a lesson learned from Isaac's life it was this. And if there was ever really a reason that he was named Isaac, it wasn't only because his mother laughed—it was because we are still laughing or able to laugh. In a world that has seen us suffer the worst indignities ever perpetrated on another human being, as a people who has endured the blood libel and now is witness to and experiencing an unprecedented rise in anti-Semitism post WW2, we still have never lost the gift of laughter. Of being able to laugh at ourselves, with ourselves and for ourselves. In the heyday of American Jewish comedy, the borscht-belt produced the best humorists American has ever known. This was during a time when Jews couldn't get into the "best colleges" or attend many medical schools and certainly couldn't practice medicine at many hospitals. During those dark days, we somehow made it through, and I imagine it was because we found the humor to help us transcend the darkness. Covid-19 is no laughing matter. It has devastated our economy, laid bare our inequities, and killed and sickened way too many people. But for us to survive, we can never let go of Sarah and her laugh and the joy which ultimately came with it. It is the balm that provides for life's continuing meaning ng even in the midst of doubt. (BTW, my brother is a doctor)
Morris

Sent by my iPad

Sent by my iPad

Sent by my iPad