

**From:** [David Kraemer](#)  
**To:** [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)  
**Subject:** FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.4.20  
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**From:** Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, June 4, 2020 9:03 AM  
**To:** MOJO210AL <MOJO210AL@aol.com>  
**Subject:** One Person's Response to Communal Fear 6.4.20

WAGON WHEEL CENSUS 3 Cars 2 Trucks 2 Runners 2 Bicyclists 1 dog walker 1 dog runner No ISD#197 School Bus

You never know who you will meet up with when walking. As I was nearing the end of my walk today, I met an old friend, Harold Naiditch(zl) on the same path. I haven't seen or talked with Harold for a long time, although he frequently makes appearances in my memory. But today, I actually felt as if I was walking with him and I was hearing his lecture to me after Yom Kippur services in 1986 as we were leaving the auditorium of the St. Paul JCC. It was my first yontiff with this new shul and I was feeling pretty good and then Harold approached and asked if he could have a word with me. I may have met him once before, but I knew then, as I know now, if someone asks to speak with their rabbi—NOTHING takes precedence. Harold was a hemophiliac and as a result of a blood transfusion became infected with HIV/AIDS. He came up to me and said, "if I were gay, I would have left shul [this afternoon](#). How can any congregation read that Torah section (Leviticus chapter 18) during a moment when the gay community is being attacked by disease?" In his fight against the disease, he fully identified with the plight of others. From the second Yom Kippur forward until this day, that section of Leviticus has never been read on Yom Kippur and as a result, we became the first Conservative congregation that I knew of that read that passage in Leviticus in an undertone during the yearly cycle.

I was excited to be with Harold [this morning](#) for my walk and was about to laughingly remind him of the hot dish he brought to a singles lunch at our home after shul one Shabbat for which he was filled with pride. Only two days later did I learn that one of his best friends, Steve R. had made it for him. Oh Harold, there were so many stories to catch up on. But before I could talk, Harold turned to me and said- Rabbi, can I have a minute to speak with you? Like I said, when someone asks to speak with their rabbi—their time becomes your time regardless of what you might want to be doing. Harold began to speak with that quiver that defined his person. He said, you know, Morris (he always called me Morris—he liked the name) "I am sort of wondering what you think about the fact that we have never addressed the built-in bias inside our Jewish community. You know that section of the Torah where Moses is attacked by his brother and sister. You know that section—what do they attack him about—that he was married to a Black woman. If I were black and sitting in shul when that passage was read, I would get up and walk out." I stopped in my tracks. Here was the voice of Harold Naiditch(zl) speaking to me once again with the clarity of his own straightforward, no BS, identification with those who suffered. Here he was just pointing out that the seeds of bias are

sometimes planted within the sacred scrolls that shape our very search for meaning and truth.

I sort of know why Harold showed up on my walk today. Last night, I was privileged to share in a session over zoom with the Columbus, Ohio Jewish community. For 45 minutes, members of the community who are also African Americans spoke about their connection and disconnection with the Jewish community in which they live. Almost every rabbi I know from and many more I don't sat in on the session and simply listened. Story after story reminded everyone that the notion of being Black and Jewish often times made their lives lives of constant hiddenness. In the Black community people never knew they were Jewish and in the Jewish community people didn't know why they showed up in shul. They also spoke about their own congregations and how welcomed they feel and yet, not far from the surface was a sense of difference that defined their daily life. Mothers spoke about the worry of their children jogging in their neighborhood, young adults spoke about the time their parents gave them the "talk" about when (not if) you will be pulled over by the police. And through it all, each of them ended their talk with a Bible verse that spoke to them. It was a powerful gathering and credit goes to the Columbus rabbinical community for organizing the very well attended session. So, it wasn't surprising to have encountered Harold [this morning](#). He must have zoomed in from wherever he was last night as well-and was puzzled by the fact that not one of these people identified the verse that troubled him. And why would they? They also didn't select the verse from Song of Songs that celebrates the beauty of being black in its opening chapter. But for Harold there was something pressing. He was identifying with that young black Jew sitting in shul hearing Moses called out because he was married to a black woman. And being called out by his own family no less. He was worried about the impact, about the unspoken words that would never leave that young girls mouth but which would be imprinted on her very being. And Harold was imploring us all to act. Were I privileged to still serve a congregational community today, you can be sure that when we come to Chapter 12 of the Book of Numbers, that congregation would be reading that angry outburst towards Moses in an undertone as a way to announce to everyone that it remains an angry outburst sowing the seeds of racial disharmony. It, like the words of the Curses that are traditionally read in an undertone, and the verses which label gay relationships as abominable, must also be read in an undertone. We can't eradicate our past and pretend that the Torah doesn't label behavior in ways that we cannot fully comprehend. So we must read them and not skip over them as if they weren't there. And yet, Harold Naiditch, [this morning](#), reminded me that our task is not yet complete. Addressing racism in our texts is no less important. May Harold's memory only continue to be for a blessing—and I can't wait to meet up with him again on a walk and try to get a word in edgewise before he begins talking. Morris

Sent by my iPad