

From: [David Kraemer](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: FW: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 5.1.20
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From: Morris Allen <mojo210al@icloud.com>
Sent: Friday, May 1, 2020 9:29 AM
To: MOJO210AL <MOJO210AL@aol.com>
Subject: One Person's Response to Communal Fear 5.1.20

NO WAGON WHEEL CENSUS---went on the "Reverse Fishman Loop" today. Am sure that ISD#197 Bus 1916 though made his daily trip down Wagon Wheel

As a younger person, one of my goals I set for myself was to "leyn/chant" the entire Torah. For a few years after my Bar Mitzvah, I kept track of every Aliyah or Torah portion which I chanted in shul. While the task seemed daunting, it was not an unrealistic goal at the time. Indeed, coming from a shul where youth regularly read Torah and going to a summer camp where full aliyot were chanted, I felt I had a pretty good chance to accomplish this goal by the time I reached my 20's. Like many youthful pursuits, it turned out to be much more aspirational than real and as life got in the way of this signature pursuit, it fell by the wayside as did many other aspirational pursuits I once imagined happening—one day I'll tell you about "Allen '96". I deferred to Bill by the time it was '96. At my senior sermon at JTS in 1984, my friend Avi Havivi was there and demonstrated that while I may have failed at this pursuit, it was one that could be accomplished. His ability to walk up and leyn a double portion that Shabbat morning was a result of his early discipline to achieve the goal that to this day eludes me.

I tell you this because tomorrow a dear friend will complete the penultimate portion before she too will have accomplished her goal of leyning the entire Torah. With her Aliyah that she is reading tomorrow, Elaine D. will accomplish something I once dreamt about but long ago had to let go of. What makes her accomplishment so tremendous is that she had no youthful dream of such an accomplishment. In fact, in her youth in Oklahoma, I doubt she even knew what leyning was or Shabbat could look like. Her story is a story that could only be told in our generation. Her ability to complete this amazing feat is something that could be a result of living in this spectacular moment in Jewish history. One can search all the stories of our past, rabbinic tales and biblical texts, but they would come up empty with a figure like Elaine. Here are two salient elements that make this accomplishment only possible today—the ability of our tradition to continue its evolution towards full inclusion of women in Jewish ritual life and to see egalitarianism as a God desired principle and the acceptance and full inclusion of those who seek to enter into our community as to live their life as Jews no differently than were one born into the people. The cultural DNA that is evident in Elaine's whole being is evident of that possibility.

Accomplishing this task is no simple matter. There are 54 individual portions, 187 chapters, over 5800 verses, and nearly 80,000 Hebrew words in the Five Books of Moses. The text as many of you know is unvocalized and the need to learn the notes that accompany each word is a task in and of

itself. So simply getting this far is already an indication of her dedication, her commitment and her drive—not to say anything of her abilities. It has meant that she has had to figure out ways to complete portions in places not at her home congregation. She has been on trips to Israel with our community and we have arranged for her to read at the Egalitarian section of the Kotel, Sinai Congregation in Tel Aviv and Moreshet Yisroel in Jerusalem. She has figured out ways to get in verses she was missing in ways that underscore her desire to make this happen. But perhaps the greatest indication of her belief in the importance of finishing this task, was that life has not been easy these last few years. Her health has been challenging and for many people, getting 2/3's, or maybe a little more done would have been understandable and also a truly fine accomplishment. Covid-19, though, has been more of a challenge. With shuls closed, and minyanim not happening, Elaine has had to accept a compromise. Not ideal, but life isn't ideal. Elaine has understood that from its start. When her final verses are to be chanted, in early July, I am sure that there will be a way to celebrate her accomplishment with the full joy it deserves.

I share this story today, not to embarrass Elaine, but to also share with you a truth that we often overlook. We extol people's accomplishments at the wrong time. All too often we wait too long to celebrate each other's lives. What this pandemic has taught us is that we have no time to wait. I have been in touch this week with a family whose 36-year old nephew succumbed to Covid-19 and whose life story has now been featured on New York TV and in People magazine. Poignant and powerful, but too late for this man to see the outpouring of love that he has generated as a result of the life he led. So today, don't wait to tell a person about the accomplishment they have achieved or the importance of their presence in your life-- (even if you are simply referred to as 'the roommate' when she is in contact with Phyllis) It's never the wrong time to be on the right side of sharing appreciation and joy and praise. And in this case—AWE. Yasher Kochech Elaine! Shabbat Shalom Morris

(For first time recipients, I now walk every morning for 40-50 minutes and just come home and write a piece before I start my work day. No editing and no rereading and sometimes it shows.)

Sent by my iPad