

From: [Rabbi Kara Tav](#)
To: [Covid Affiliate Archives](#)
Subject: Covid notes (more to come)1
Date: Thursday, September 17, 2020 5:13:24 PM

4/7

I'm possibly just too wiped out to reflect today. This might just be a list of some of the events that filled my broken heart...but please don't misunderstand - your love and virtual support of these musings are like balm on my wounds. Like water in the wilderness. Here it goes:

I went with another chaplain to about a quarter of all nursing stations today to check in and to deliver a copy of laminated cards (see below, I hope you can enlarge it). We explained the purpose of them is to honor a life when no loved one can be present and to honor the dedication of the care-giver who was present.

I walked 10,000 steps before 1pm doing that.

The young woman who lost her father yesterday, remember her? I had about 15 texts and calls with her to help her with funeral arrangements, how to retrieve, unpack and disinfect her deceased fathers belongings, claiming and identifying his body.

I brokered peace between my palliative care team's needs for my entire team to be given PPE so that we can facilitate final conversations between patients and their families and the hospital's supply guardians- we are waiting for one more sign-off and then we will be granted one, (ONE!) set of PPE each to pick up in the morning.

4/6

Every morning now we split up the list of deceased to make condolence calls to families. Everyday the Palliative team gives me certain patients whose families need a check in. Everyone is grateful for the call. Even the angry, exasperated ones. And everyone cries. Today I called the 18 year old daughter of a deceased 41 year old man. She was about to drive to Manhattan to her moms house so that she could tell sister. Her sister is 4. I talk her through how to speak of death with a 4 year old and what not to say (daddy is not sleeping). What to expect, how to keep it honest and keep it concrete (his heart doesnt pump anymore, his eyes don't see, etc.). She became the adult in the family overnight. Funerals and money and oh, that poor thing.

Call #2 A Jewish woman whose husband is in hospital. She begs me to daven for him. She has been bargaining with God, she confesses. Whatever God wants, she'll do. She's never spent a single night apart from him in 30 years. 30 YEARS!! "Such a tzadik, learned, generous..hes the manager of a nice kosher grocery. How could this be happening"?? She begged me to tell her he was doing better (I cannot) she begged me to tell her he'll be home for Pesach (I cannot). I know this illness sometimes tricks doctors. It looks like patients turn a corner, and then they suddenly die. I promise her that prayers help. I promise we'll do everything we can. Zei gezunt, I say and when I put down the phone I cry.

These two vignettes were the first half hour of my day. What if I told you it only got worse?

אשע עיני אל ההרים מעיין יבא עזרי

My eyes look up to the mountains, from where will my salvation come?

3/20

Almost home for Shabbat. Alone, save three other journeyers on my train. I'm overwhelmed by what I see, hear and feel at the hospital. I offer whatever quiet I can, whatever solace. I

pray to the God of compassion, the one who spoke with my ancestors. I am feeling so grateful to be able to do my job, so grateful. Terrifying ethical questions loom in the hospital, fear is high, but a dramatic combination of anxiety and drive to care for others is higher. I will get home and scour my skin and hair with hot water and soap, washing that clammy sticky alchofoamy feeling off. I Feel relieved to know that this Shabbat I will stroll in the sunny park, enjoy the trees, reassure my husband that I'm fine, and maybe drink a cold gin and tonic or two. Shabbat Shalom.

3/24

I just ate a whole Lindt milk chocolate rabbit. 100g of German milk chocolate comfort. Oh, and yeah, 2 glasses of chardonnay to wash it down. What pandemic?

Empty train video

Fear is in everyone's hearts and minds. Including mine. I'm not suggesting we sweep it under the rug, but I am suggesting we do our best to speak in the first person, and not repost into a fear vacuum. Please, be considerate with what you put out here. Please call out your friends who are doing this. It's bad enough.

3/25

Is anyone tired of empty train station pix? This is Barclay's station at rush hour this evening. And me wearing a new surgical mask today. My old blue one (attached) was gross, so a nurse gifted me a pretty pink pinstriped number!! Shame this post is getting my end of the day fuzzies. Today brought advocacy for the priest to be given access to C-19 patients who are alone and dying- you see, because of the shortage of PPE none of us can visit, so Catholic patients weren't just dying alone and very sick, but also afraid they wouldn't go to heaven. The Father was finally granted permission from the highest brass at 6pm. Don't ask how a rabbi got the leadership to do this.

3/27

It was a very very long week. I'm so relieved that it's going to be Shabbat. Today I spent the day caring for nurses and Social Workers, and a smattering of docs. People working on the units are spent- so tired, overwhelmed and scared. Some work in jobs unfamiliar to them, some are on the same units they've always been on, but feel disoriented and disorganized (and if you've ever met a nurse, you know that's a living hell for them).

I went to several units to offer a moment of strength. We can't do the traditional Blessing of the Hands, cause we can't touch anyone. Pivot, improvise, be flexible, I think. So I ask them to raise their hands high enough for their colleagues to see them. I praise God, the God of our ancestors, for the wisdom, strength and tenderness of the hands we see. I beseech God to protect and nurture the people we see. I thank God for the feeling of comfort we have when we stand, work and support one another side by side through these never ending days and when we get home at the end of them. I encourage them to remember the gift of this quiet moment allow ourselves at least that.

This week-as-long-as-a-year is finally wrapping up. I am ready. Sweet Shabbat can't come soon enough...enjoy one another, eat something wonderful, have a drink. Like this weeks Torah reading models - create some order in the chaos of your wilderness.

3/26

Do your days feel as long as months? I cant believe I'm sending an end of day message!
Todays cursory thoughts are about what it means to die alone. We have this idea that "no one should die alone", but I'm not sure what that means. Death is the most singular thing we do. No one can die with you. You can imagine dying in pain, in fear, in shock, at peace...but alone? The isolating of patients leading up to their deaths or even just in their illness is the loneliest thing I can imagine. Sorry to be so heavy, but loneliness is what's on my mind tonight. Not loneliness in death, but in life.

Today I received a gift - this mask, with a pocket in which to insert a filter. My dear, creative, thoughtful, sensitive friend Sarah Kayla Jacobs made me a practical protective device that is washable, fashionable and perfect in every way. Mitzvot come in many shapes and sizes. Thank you, Sarah!

May you be privileged from your many mitzvot! תזכי למצות

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4/1

Today the palliative care team came to my office. They are in full ppe, looking overheated and tired. Its 9:45 am. They told me not to round with them, that the units are too dangerous and too chaotic. Okay, I reply, how then can I best serve? Please make calls, they said. All the patients are intubated and there are no visitors. The families are home, worried and alone (theres that word again). Call them. Tell them we're doing our best. Tell them you'll pray. And then, please pray. 2 self professed atheists told me to pray.

And so, my team of chaplains and I divided the list of 21 patients on the palliative roster, and began to call. Sometimes with the translation service, and sometimes in English. We called, we listened, we wrote notes. We texted doctors. We prayed. It was a day.

This is a photo of me this evening in my "duck bill" N95. Fetching, dont you think?

3/31

I just didn't have it in me today. I stayed at my desk, finished what I could paperwork-wise, and nursed a throbbing not-enough-sleep headache all day. I even ate my lunch!

3/30

Trains are running less predictably after a fire on the 2 line. I suspect more violence is to come. I mean outward violence, not the cruelty of this virus. I mean abuse and arson and murder. Cynical? Perhaps, but probably right on the money.

Its empty train time again..with a promise of scotch at the other end. Today, Monday, I entered another new world. My day began after a night of restless tossing and turning. There are things I can't unsee that are scaring my sleep away. I guess my demons prefer the dark. So I wake tired and unmotivated. My new world is faceless. 90% covid+ patients, visiting drawing

to a close. Made devastating phone call to a daughter whose father has protected her through so much (like hunger in Moldova in the 90s...) that her dad isn't going to survive this virus, he might not make it through the week. Dismissing our best eucharistic minister for giving people the host bear handed. Setting up an amazing muslim nurse with a call between a dying man's family, the priest and the patient propped up so that Fr. can see him from the doorway...tears of sadness, tears of frustration, tears of admiration.

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3/25

Just returned from PalliCare rounds. Dr. Bael wants us to do consults with families by phone since they aren't at bedside. She feels it's unsafe to be on units. Developing telechaplancy scripts. Want to cry. Loneliness is overwhelming...nurses, patients..anxious docs. Many DO NOT WANTER signs. Feel scared. A little self loathing that I'm so comfortable hiding in my office....

Tonight's facebook post:

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3/22 6pm

Oh God. So much for a nap. I fell asleep about 4:30, and had a vivid, terrifying nightmare. I dreamed that I had been placed on a ventilator but it didn't work. I think it was too big and I was gasping and thrashing. Dr. Dimant, the ethics guy I love (the one who really didn't want you to go to Iceland), was arguing with another doctor about me. Dimant was arguing to keep me on the respirator because he said it was his fault that I got sick and the doc said it was against protocol, even if I was Dimants friend because I was over 50, and I was arching my back and trying to get them to remove the thing from my throat because it was choking me. I was scared to open my eyes after I woke. I was so scared and disoriented, I was afraid I still couldn't breathe.

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