

Dear Mississippi friends,

Unfortunately, we have had to postpone my schedule visit for March. Though I am sad to not be coming to visit you and celebrate shabbat together, I agree with the CBI leadership that this is the right decision and the smart way for our community to respond. I hope you know that even though I am in Atlanta, I care about you all deeply, and am praying that our entire community remains well and whole through this crisis. If you need to speak with me, please do not hesitate to reach out. It might take me a little bit to get back to you, but I will.

As Passover approaches, I am reminded that the Torah tells us that the night before the Exodus from Egypt was a “watchful night” and that all of the Israelites remained in their homes as the plague of the first born swept through killing the Egyptians. Sound familiar? Watchful and guarded? Sheltering inside? I imagine that the descendants of Jacob were terrified that night, traumatized by the uncertainty. Having lived one way for so long, they were now being thrust into a new life, with new dangers, and no guidance.

Fortunately, they had good leaders. Moses gave them dire warnings, but he also gave them specific instructions to prepare for the departure, the journey, and the battles and revelations that lay ahead. He told them to mark their doors, and remember God’s vigilant presence. They also were able to stay focused on the task at hand, leaving Egypt whole and free. While fear can be paralyzing, being “watchful” can be reassuring.

When we are overwhelmed, uncertain, even traumatized, we can thrive through the passage by giving our attention what is most immediately in front of us, one thing at a time. In our current viral crisis, it can be tempting to downplay the small victories that we all have each and every day. We can never be victorious by sheer will over uncertainty. But by valuing and focusing on the small and achievable tasks most pressing at this moment, we can gain confidence through a series of small victories. Each time we “manage” through the crisis is a victory. Each time we reject the overwhelming media fear-fest, and instead focus on today — on our family, our home, our community — it is a victory.

Don’t worry.

I will be back in Gulfport.

In the meantime, call or write, friend me on FB and send me a message, remain inside as best you can, kiss all the kiddos for me and tell them we will sing together again, soon. Mark your time with gentleness and blessings, and be watchful.

Shalom,  
Rabbi Hillel Norry