

Corona Chronicle, Week 3

Wednesday, April 1st

According to History.com no one knows exactly how the tradition of April Fools' Day started – but surely to anyone who has been the butt of any of the meaner type of practical jokes played on April 1st, it cannot be thought of without associating it with at least a whiff of cruelty. Or maybe I am just thinking of that section of T.S. Eliot's "Wasteland," which begins:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain.

Both the feeling of having a "joke" played on us, and this whiff of something cruel came to me this morning as I was listening to the radio, hearing of the soaring Covid-19 contraction and hospitalization rate in New York City, making pancakes for Lev, and then noticing that, outside our kitchen window, it was snowing!

I usually associate snow with purity. Even though it is cold, it has a way of turning a dull grey landscape into something magical, something hinting of promise (I think of the snow-scenes in "The Nutcracker," or in C.S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*). But there was so little snow this past winter that it feels as if these few, paltry flakes are merely taunting us: "No, winter is not what it used to be, and the present is like no time you have ever seen, and the future...?"

Happily, here on the Southcoast we have been spared (thus far!) the lines out the ER-waiting rooms, and the overworked, exhausted medical frontline workers. Yet to turn on the television and see medical tents being set up on Manhattan's Central Park – it feels like a scene from the Civil War. And yet this "war" is not "civil." The virus has no feelings. It does not aim to take out Red or Blue, Northerners or Southerners, full U.S. citizens or immigrants without papers. The numbers that the officials are now trying to prepare us for – 100,000 if we are lucky and follow all the proper precautions, but possibly up to 2 million if we are both unlucky and ignore these precautions – just numb our minds. Who can fathom death in such large numbers?

Of course we, the Jewish people, are familiar with death coming in staggering statistics. But it does not become real, really hit home, until it is the death of someone we know, or until we hear of the details of the individual lives that have been lost. Thus the importance of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, and many other first-person accounts of the Holocaust. We feel the sting of death not when confronted by mind-boggling numbers, but when we learn of, or at least imagine, specific details of people's lives. What of the children who lose both grandparents in quick succession, or the old dog who loses its owner and has no one familiar to take care of it? I am just making these scenarios up, but surely these very things are going on somewhere in the world now. You see how much more keenly you feel the sorrow of it when you conjure these specific scenes. We can't take in death in huge numbers, but we feel it deeply when we think of individuals.

Thursday, April 2nd

I ran out of steam last night, and couldn't finish that line of thought – which may be just as well; probably no one is craving meditations on death these days. It is strange how these days are busier than ever for us! Three mornings a week I start the day with a Zoom yoga class (so important for keeping the body healthy and maintaining inner calm), then my regular davening, then whatever task I have given myself for the day: making phone calls to congregants; writing this “chronicle”; slogging through my email; trying to keep abreast of what is going on in the world, the nation, and in the Fall River area by reading the *Herald News*, the *New York Times*, etc. not to mention listening to NPR and watching the news on TV. Lev is of course at home: his “spring break” started yesterday, so he is not doing so much school work now. I try to be present for him, and make sure we get out to take a walk every day – plus, we are preparing for Passover. This means not only cleaning, but strategizing the Passover shopping (to have to spend as little time in the stores as possible).

The days rush by. And yet we are in this strange limbo – not knowing how long this period will last, not knowing what the summer will bring. Will Lev be able to go to his tech camp? My Jewish Renewal conference (Kallah) has already been cancelled, so at least that is not up in the air. What about a family vacation? I feel so bad for the families of high school and college seniors (and the seniors themselves) who don't know if they will have earned enough credits to graduate,

or whether there will be a graduation ceremony (probably not), and, whether they are hoping to start college or graduate school or a new job, whether *anything* will be functioning normally by next September. And then there are the families of children with special needs, who can't learn at home the way they could at school, because they need a fixed routine, and their parents are not trained to educate them the way their special education teachers and paraprofessionals at school are. Not everyone can learn remotely.

This is a trying time for our nation – for pretty much the whole world in fact. In today's *NY Times* I read an article entitled "For People of Many Religions, or None, Signs of the Apocalypse," in which the author, Elizabeth Dias writes that, according to the Pew Research Center "about 40 percent of American adults believe that Jesus is definitely or probably going to return to earth by 2050, including one in five religiously unaffiliated people."

Well, obviously, we are not in that number. But what about the world succumbing to a devastating catastrophe and loss of life (not just of humans, but of many forms of earthly life) due to a cascading series of events connected to the planet's warming air, earth and oceans? This is not something we can just chalk up to the religious imagination – it is something that scientists are predicting unless we radically change our way of doing business.

It is so hard to imagine! We might think it is like worrying about our sun burning out – something that we know will happen eventually, since no star lasts forever – but in so many millions of years from now that we don't really have to think about it. But climate change is not like that. It is already happening, and we can see its impact, from much milder winters to the bleaching of coral reefs, from the melting of glaciers to the increase in mosquito- and tick-borne diseases.

I keep drifting back to doom-and-gloom; I would like to turn towards the positive before I end my chronicle for this week. We as a family, and so many others as well, have been out in the parks, on the trails, pounding the boardwalks – suddenly all the world is getting acquainted with our beautiful natural spots! Yesterday, despite the grey, gloomy sky, Lev and I headed over to the Village Park in Swansea (right behind the Swansea town hall and library). I had not been there for a couple of years. The place was bustling with walkers and mountain bikers. And what a unique place it is! The outcroppings of glacially-formed "mini-mountains" (mostly formed of the strange geological substance called "pudding-rock"), covered in patches with thick moss and ferns, make it look like a place where, if

only you knew the secret entrance, you might find an underground hall where elves or trolls lived. The trails there crisscross one another as if formed by rabbits or gerbils, but you know you are never far from civilization, and so feel no real fear of getting lost (and they even have some trail markers up now, which were not there two years ago).

While we were there the sun came out, which made the moss glow and the water in the many vernal ponds and small streams sparkle, and our spirits lifted. We must keep taking care of our bodies. We must keep doing all we can to take care of our earth, and keep encouraging one another. As we approach Passover, called by our sages *z'man cheruteinu* (“the time of our freedom”), we are reminded that “freedom” as it is taught in our tradition is not *freedom from responsibility*, but a state that is only possible by *living into the responsibilities and the potentials* that God created us for.

Wishing you all now a Shabbat Shalom, and, if I don't get a chance to write again before *Erev Pesach*, I want to wish you all as well a taste of this joy and freedom at your Seder,

Cantor Shoshana

