

## Corona Chronicle, Week Seven

Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup> – *Yom HaZikaron*

Day 19 of *sefirat ha-Omer*; today is also the 4<sup>th</sup> day of the Hebrew month of *Iyyar*. Last Friday and also on Shabbat we marked *Rosh Chodesh*, the New Moon of *Iyyar* – and this past Thursday the Muslim month-long observance of Ramadan commenced. Just as we Jews had to celebrate Passover in strange circumstances, without the ability to gather with dispersed friends and family members, or with our local faith community, so now it is the Muslims' turn. My colleague Martin Bentz, from the Southeastern Massachusetts Islamic Society had sent our family and community at Temple Beth El a lovely greeting at the beginning of Passover, and so I made sure to reciprocate with a Ramadan greeting last week. Martin responded that he sees a silver lining in all this – in that Muslims will be able to better concentrate on the soul-searching that the daylight-long fasts of Ramadan are intended to make space for, instead of spending lots of time and effort running around preparing fancy feasts for many people for the evening meals that break the fast at sunset every day during this month.

And surely in Israel, it must be painful for the Jewish public to mark *Yom HaZikaron* (Israel's Memorial Day) without the usual ceremony at Har Herzl in Jerusalem. It is such a sad, solemn day there, the day on which all Jewish Israeli citizens (and some non-Jewish ones as well) remember the sacrifice that their sons and daughters, or if not their own, then their neighbor's sons and daughters, have made to the nation, laying down their lives to defend their small country through wars and terrorist attacks. In 1986, the first academic year I was living in Israel (having spent two academic years there), I was so moved by the late afternoon *Yom HaZikaron* ceremony on Har Herzl. (I was not there in person, but watched it on Israeli TV). This ceremony comes just one week after *Yom HaShoah* (Holocaust Remembrance Day), and at the close of the late afternoon ceremony, which ends as the sky darkens into night, jubilant celebrations of *Yom HaAtzma'ut*, Israeli Independence Day, break out. I will never forget the first time I watched that ceremony, with the soldiers marching in formation before the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, and I thought, "what a miracle – that after only a few decades, this people, who had been turned into skeletons, almost wraiths, in European concentration camps, now had such a strong, proud army, second to none in the Middle East!" Growing up in the sixties and seventies, a time when young Americans typically chanted "make love, not war," and living in an area of the country filled with military bases, I had never been gung-ho for military pomp and

circumstance. This was the first time that I had ever been moved, brought to tears by such a ceremony. The State of Israel was only 38 that year. Now, as I type these words, it is already Independence Day in Israel, and the nation is 72 – almost twice that age. It was a remarkable thing for the American young person I was then (only 26 at that time) to be mourning, and celebrating, with such a young nation.

Our governor here in Massachusetts, Charlie Baker, has put off the “opening up” of our state until May 18<sup>th</sup>. Lev and I traveled earlier today over to Dartmouth to hike at one of the DNRT properties, Slocums River Reserve, and as we were returning to our car in the small parking area, a man we said hello to asked us, “Did you hear...?” I told him it didn’t make much difference to the way we were living in any case, since we already know that kids will not return to study together in the classroom until next fall, and since I “work from home.” I did not bother to explain that I am a member of the clergy and that even if the governor declared the state “open” today, it would be a much longer time before we as a Jewish community in Fall River could feel safe to come back together to pray and study and commune with one another under one physical roof. Especially since we are almost exclusively a senior community, we can’t take that chance until there are some very loud “all clear” whistles blown, and we just don’t know when that will be.

The internet and email are our windows on and also our tools for connecting with the “outside world” now. You can just feel so weighed down by the crisis, by the great need and injustice out there – and so inadequate to respond to it! Some days I need a break – both from dealing psychologically with this burden of inadequacy, and also from reading too many articles on a screen that glows...there is too much to read, too much to feel responsible for! And then of course I feel guilty for being such a “weakling” when so many others are putting themselves in danger every day to respond to the needs of this era – be it in ER’s or ICU’s, or at the cash registers of our grocery stores.

But Tuesday is usually my day off in any case – though what is a “day off” in this period? For me, today, it meant starting the day with an hour and a half of Zoom yoga, then doing my Jewish morning prayers, cursorily glancing through my email and a few articles online, plus a little of the *New York Times* in a traditional paper format, and having an early lunch with Lev so that we could take advantage of the fact that it was finally *not raining*, and go over to Dartmouth for our hike. I let Lev practice his driving on the way home. We went by way of Horseneck Road on the Westport-Dartmouth line, and as we came down the slight hill towards East Beach,

right before the Bayside Restaurant the visibility was so clear over the bay – not only could we see the Elizabeth Islands (not uncommon) but all the way to the bay-side of Cape Cod – so clearly! I had never seen that before. People are ailing and the economy is in a freefall...but the air is clear.

Thursday, April 29<sup>th</sup>

Day 21 of *sefirat ha-Omer*. Yesterday was Israel's Independence Day. We had originally planned to have a "celebrate Israel" Friday night service, a kind of *Yom HaAtzma'ut* seder, which would have been tomorrow night, something we have done every year since Mark and I came to Temple Beth El. But nothing stays the same in this era of coronavirus.

We have to have compassion for ourselves during this time of a silent and invisible enemy. For most of us (at least in Fall River), we have not yet felt the personal effects of the illness, or worse, been confronted with death or bereavement. We still have enough food to eat; we can still secure the medications we need; and for most of us in our Temple community which is overwhelmingly comprised of retirees, the threat of losing a paycheck due to the pandemic is something we are mostly insulated from. But that does not mean that it is not taking its toll on us in less obvious ways: anxiety, depression, loneliness, worry about others, disappointment over events or trips we had been looking forward to, feelings of guilt (over the sacrifices of those on the front line, or over the relative comfort we have while the poor and disadvantaged are so much more profoundly impacted). We feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the situation and helpless as private citizens to do anything about it. We may be experiencing physical maladies such as headaches or GI-discomfort and not know why. Chances are, it is due to the less-than-obvious toll of stress that this pandemic is exacting upon us without our realizing it. Our bodies, however, will likely tell us what our conscious minds will not: it is a difficult time, and we need to both take care of and be gentle with ourselves.

Yesterday Lev and I walked down to Battleship Cove, then followed the boardwalk and pedestrian pathway along the Taunton River to Fall River's Bicentennial Park. Just as you near the latter (with its impressive replica of Arlington Cemetery's Iwo Jima Memorial statue), you pass a large, grassy fenced-in area where National Grid keeps the public safely away from its electrical transformers. Last spring I was lucky enough to have seen a family of red foxes who had taken up residence in this area (a kind of "gated community" for foxes!). I was hoping we might see them

again yesterday, and we did – or at least we saw one small fox, so that means others are nearby.

I close with the lyrics running through my head from a song made popular by the Carpenters in 1971 (which I remember from having sung in junior high school chorus), “Bless the Beasts and the Children”:

*Bless the beasts and the children  
For in this world they have no voice – they have no choice.  
Bless the beasts and the children  
Give them shelter from the storm –  
Keep them safe; keep them warm.*

(To hear the angelic voice of Karen Carpenter singing it, use this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhR36gV6vW4>).

I send these wishes out not just to beasts and children, but to all of you, and to all the world. Keep safe, keep warm – and, to paraphrase Karen Carpenter, may God light your way when the darkness surrounds you – may you know love, may it shine all around you.



*Blossoming fruit tree on a farm at the edge of DNRT's Slocum River Reserve*