

## **Corona Chronicle, Week One**

Cantor Shoshana Brown

**March 19, 2020**

Well, of course we started hearing about this virus back in January and February – but then it was far away, in a land that has suffered from wars, famines, brutal dictatorships, uprisings and deadly crackdowns, throat-choking smog from the over-reliance on coal for energy, “re-education” camps for those who don’t conform to the ruling regime’s philosophy, and yes, other forms of pandemics or almost-pandemics. China: an exotic land of astonishing art, engineering (think of that Great Wall, over 13,000 miles long with parts of it over 2300 years old), eye-popping landscapes, and panda bears...and almost one and a half billion people. It is hard for our minds to take it all in, especially if we have never been there. So we couldn’t spend too much time thinking about the corona virus – unless you were a manufacturer or in construction or some other type of business that depended on goods, materials or parts from a Chinese factory that had temporarily shut down due to its workers not being able to go to work.

We did not begin to think about it too much until that Diamond Princess Cruise ship, carrying 44 Americans (and over 3,000 others) was stuck off the coast of Japan last month in quarantine with about 700 people infected with the virus (of which seven died). We might not be able to imagine life in China, but we can imagine taking a cruise – and imagining being stuck for almost a month on a huge ship full of infection, and not being able to leave your cabin – that got our attention!

That was when we began to realize that the virus could not be isolated from our shores. Our world is too interconnected for that.

Nevertheless, on Monday, March 9<sup>th</sup> we managed to celebrate a very joyful Purim at Temple Beth El – although we were conscious of trying to remember not to shake hands, hug, or kiss our friends. Some of us were likely silently comparing the danger those exiled Jews faced in the Purim story to the danger our whole nation might soon be up against, but we were able to find a temporary release from our worries in the ritual of drowning out the name of Haman with our groggers – and for the moment, that was enough.

But it becomes clearer to us each day that we are all – all of humanity – in “this boat” together. A beautiful phrase comes to my mind from my Episcopalian past

(from the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*), giving thanks to God for “this fragile earth, our island home.” It is a privilege to be here, to be alive, to have a chance to behold the beauty of the earth and to experience the joy of loving one another.

But now we have to step back from one another, except those we live with every day. And yet we want to reach out, to care for one another now more than ever. How do we do that? Thankfully, in this age of technology, we can connect to one another in so many different ways. Pick up the phone and call your friends and loved ones, especially those who live alone. Some people use email, Facebook, or other ways of connecting. Some chat on Skype or Google Chat, which enables them to see one another while chatting. Rabbi Mark and I want you to feel free to call us at any time. (You can leave a message on the temple’s voicemail and we will call you back.)

Today, as I write, is Thursday of the first week of Temple Beth El being closed. Our last service was Monday morning, March 16<sup>th</sup>. That was also Lev’s last day of school – a half-day when students at Durfee High School were given instruction from all their teachers on how to learn and do their work via Google Classroom at home. Supposedly they will return to classes on April 7<sup>th</sup> (and then Pesach begins the night of April 8<sup>th</sup>!). Luckily, our son is an extremely conscientious student, and has already settled in to a good routine of buckling down to his schoolwork every day. We are proud of him – but we know that all over this city (and all over the country, for that matter) there are families who are not so lucky. Families who do not own computers, or have several kids who have to share time on one device, who do not have the quiet or space they need in their home to work – children for whom school is their lifeline in so many ways. There are families who have to choose between staying home with their kids and forfeiting their paychecks – or going to work and leaving their children without adequate supervision (considering the circumstances of this virus, not many will be leaving their children under the care of their grandparents, unless they already live together).

It has only been three and a half days since this really began to feel serious, and it is all happening so fast! Some states are predicting that there will be no more in-school learning this academic year. So many businesses closing, so many people out of work with no idea when they will be able to return to the “life as usual” that they used to know. Washington is currently discussing how to get emergency aid quickly to all Americans so that they can pay their rents or mortgages, and still put food on the table for their families. Hurray! It seems that partisan gridlock is finally breaking up.

So there are some positive notes. Yesterday we woke up to a beautiful sunny morning, and I got out early to take a walk around part of North Watuppa Pond, our Fall River reservoir. Usually I see very few people there, but yesterday there were three cars parked near the trailhead of the Tattapanum Trail (off Wilson Road), and I saw more cars at other trail heads in the Bioreserve. It seems that others have the same idea I do – we can't congregate in coffee shops or even visit the public library, but we can get out in nature and take a walk! I was happy to see that this crisis is drawing people outdoors to appreciate what is right in Fall River's "backyard"; we are lucky to live in easy proximity to so much natural beauty.

My Sierra Club Calendar tells me that today is the Spring Equinox. Although usually the beginning of spring is a reason to rejoice, this spring brings worry and so much uncertainty. I pray that we manage to get through this period together without too much heartache, that we become more compassionate, generous people, more appreciative of simple gifts like a blue sky and the sight of crocuses in bloom.

Wishing you all good health and a Shabbat Shalom,

Cantor Shoshana

