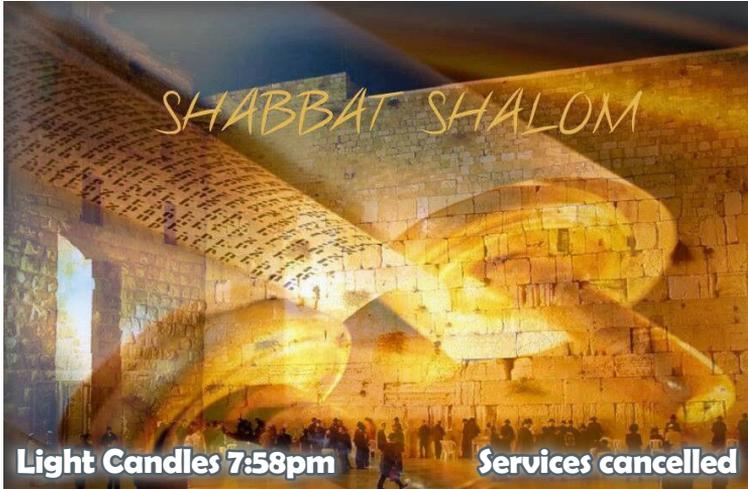




Carnegie Shul Chatter

April 29, 2020



Gaining Perspective

Last week's Chatter was a bit shorter than usual and was on the lighter side, with some jokes to help us get through the anxiety and the stuck-at-home days of the pandemic.

Today's Chatter is a bit more serious, with some thoughts gleaned from Facebook, of all places, and reaction by New York's Mayor Bill DeBlasio concerning a large turnout for the funeral of Rabbi Chaim Mertz, who died this week of the coronavirus. And finally, a triute to the State of Israel on her birthday this week.

Let's start with the Facebook commentary.

Many of us have been terribly affected by the pandemic. Some have lost loved ones, some have lost jobs. The pain and suffering many have experienced is certainly real and cannot — and should not — be minimized. But I have also seen some recent Facebooks posts that said how

Much to Celebrate

The final phrase of Rabbi Danny Schiff's message in this week's Chatter is, "we have much to celebrate this Yom Ha'Atzmaut."

How true this is.

Yes, many have died, and many are still in lock-down and have been unable to return to work. But the curve appears to have flattened. Restrictions are slowly being lifted. And many of us have used the time that we were away from work to read, learn, or pursue other interests that we might not have had the time to otherwise pursue.

Hopefully, we have been kind to one another. Hopefully, we have been patient with our spouses and our children.

Our world is certainly different than it was three months ago. Some of what has happened to us was beyond our control. But, hopefully we have found some opportunities to learn lessons and make improvements in our lives during this time of isolation.

Hopefully, we have been able to turn lemons into lemonade, and hopefully we will all remember that despite the heartbreaks we may have suffered, "we have much to celebrate this Yom Ha'Atzmaut."

horrible it is that kids in a particular Pittsburgh area school district will not be having a 6th grade graduation ceremony, and how awful it is that high school seniors at a school in central Pennsylvania have had their trip to an amusement park cancelled.

Really?

A friend of mine posted the following on Facebook, and it really puts what is going on today, as bad as it may be, into a totally different perspective. Here it is:

It's a mess out there now. Hard to discern between what's a real threat and what is just simple panic and hysteria. For a small amount of perspective at this moment, imagine you were born in 1900.

On your 14th birthday, World War I starts, and doesn't end until your 18th birthday. 22 million people perish in that war. Later in the year, a Spanish Flu epidemic hits the planet and runs until your 20th birthday. 50 million people die from it in those two years. Yes, 50 million. On your 29th birthday, the Great Depression begins. Unemployment hits 25%, the World GDP drops 27%. That runs until you are 33. Our country nearly collapses along with the world economy.



When you turn 39, World War II starts. You aren't even over the hill yet. And don't try to catch your breath. On your 41st birthday, the United States is fully pulled into WWII. Between your 39th and 45th birthday, 75 million people perish in the war. At 50, the Korean War starts. 5 million perish. At 55 the Vietnam War begins and doesn't end for 20 years. 4 million people perish in that conflict.

On your 62nd birthday you have the Cuban Missile Crisis, a tipping point in the Cold War. Life on our planet, as we know it, should have ended. Great leaders prevented that from happening. When you turn 75, the Vietnam War finally ends.

Think of everyone on the planet born in 1900. How did they survive all of that? When you were a kid in 1985 you didn't think your 85 year old grandparent understood how hard school was. And how mean that kid in your class was. Yet they survived through everything listed above. Perspective is an amazing art. Refined as time goes on, and enlightening like you wouldn't believe. Let's try to keep things in perspective.

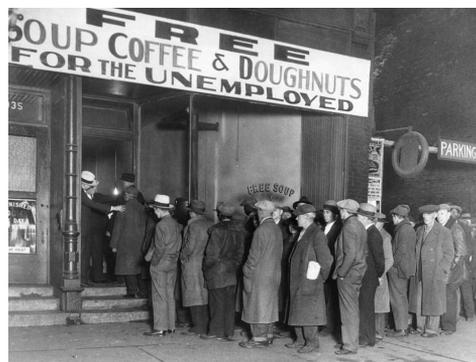
And here are a couple of responses I received from friends, the point being that life can be tough, life has been tough, but the human spirit is strong and we can and will get through this pandemic:

My grandmother was 18 and died of the 1918 Spanish flu that took so many lives. My mom was 6 months old and raised by her father and some step mothers that came and went out of that household. Mom told us so many stories about those times, many that would break someone mentally and physically. Mom married dad and they spent many years facing trying times as he served in the Army for 30 years. Started out in the Cavalry in South Park

barracks, fought in WW2, Vietnam and served in Korea. We lived in Italy after the war and I spent some fascinating time learning the language, people and culture. This epidemic can't compare to some of the sights I have seen of bombed out buildings in Europe or the disheartening displacement of humanity after the war. The loss of so many human souls in the gas chambers of Auschwitz ranks among the most horrific crimes anyone can fathom. The destruction of so many cities and history in our lifetime, in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East is sad. Today, social protesters cry foul about some ridiculous, self indulgent, created problem that we of the older generation don't understand, nor do we want to. Like our ancestors, we have lived and survived the past and just pray our youth continue on a path to keep our nation alive and well.

And:

My Dad was born in 1915 in Alvito, Italy. Immigrated (LEGALLY!) to the U.S. in 1930, right smack dab into the Great Depression. Toughed it out and grew to love this country. On December 7, 1941, he was furious! Took a month to clean up his affairs. Enlisted in the Army and spent nearly three years in the South Pacific fighting an enemy who would rather die than surrender. Upon his return in 1945, he and others in his unit kissed the ground when they left the troop ship in San Francisco. Returned to Pittsburgh and married my Mom. Uneducated, he worked heavy construction to keep a decent roof over our heads and good food on the table. He was the toughest guy I have ever known.



Not All Jews

Mayor Bill DeBlasio this week singled out the Jewish community concerning a large turnout for the funeral of Rabbi Chaim Mertz, who died this week of the coronavirus. Previously, in Israel, the Israeli government was strongly critical of the Haredi (ultra-religious) community for violating social distancing and stay-at-home directives, resulting in a disproportionately high incidence of coronavirus among the Haredim.

The problem in New York, however, was that most Jews are obeying government guidelines and the Mayor's criticism of "the Jewish Community" could very well lead to anti-Semitic backlash. Here is an article from the Jerusalem Post concerning the Mayor's comments:

Mayor Bill de Blasio to NY Jews: 'Time for warnings has passed'

*By Philissa Cramer/JTA
April 29, 2020 17:09*

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio drew fierce criticism late Tuesday after he singled out "the Jewish community" in a trio of tweets announcing that he had instructed his police department to fine or even arrest social distancing violators.

De Blasio was responding to a funeral that had drawn hundreds of Orthodox Jews to the streets of Williamsburg, Brooklyn, to mourn a rabbi who died of the coronavirus.



Pictures of the funeral procession, first shared by Reuven Blau, a reporter for The CITY, showed streets densely packed with mourners who were later dispersed by city police officers. The synagogue of the rabbi who died, Chaim Mertz, later released a statement saying it had expected mourners to follow social distancing rules and regretted that they had not.

“Something absolutely unacceptable happened in Williamsburg tonite: a large funeral gathering in the middle of this pandemic,” de Blasio tweeted. “When I heard, I went there myself to ensure the crowd was dispersed. And what I saw WILL NOT be tolerated so long as we are fighting the Coronavirus.”

A second tweet followed immediately afterward: “My message to the Jewish community, and all communities, is this simple: the time for warnings has passed. I have instructed the NYPD to proceed immediately to summons or even arrest those who gather in large groups. This is about stopping this disease and saving lives. Period.”

The second message drew swift criticism from Jews and others who said de Blasio had unfairly targeted New York Jews, the majority of whom are following distancing rules. Critics said de Blasio ran the risk of inflaming antisemitism just months after a spate of violent attacks on Jews in the city and at a time when the Orthodox community is mourning many of its own losses from the coronavirus pandemic.

“Mr. Mayor, your words are unacceptable,” tweeted Kalman Yeger, an Orthodox Jewish member of the New York City Council. “To condemn our entire community over one group of people is something you would not do to any other ethnic group, and I know you long enough to know that you know this.”

The head of the Anti-Defamation League sounded a similar note. “Hey @NYCMayor, there are 1mil+ Jewish people in #NYC,” CEO Jonathan Greenblatt tweeted. “The few who don’t social distance should be called out — but generalizing against the whole population is outrageous especially when so many are scapegoating Jews. This erodes the very unity our city needs now more than ever.”

Some noted that the mayor had not responded similarly earlier Tuesday when New Yorkers gathered in parks to watch military planes fly over the city in a show of support for city workers. Others pointed to the mayor’s own habit of walking in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park, where crowds sometimes gather on sunny days in spite of social distancing guidelines.

“The Blue Angels flyover in NY City today was beautiful, but I didn’t see any outrage over the lack of social distancing. That reaction is reserved for Jewish weddings & funerals,” tweeted Joel Petlin, who runs the school district in Kiryas Joel, a Hasidic town north of the city. “Two wrongs don’t make a right, but only one wrong makes the news and the condemnation of politicians.”

And some of de Blasio's detractors on the political right used the tweet as an opportunity to score points against him. Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and FOX News commentator Laura Ingraham were among the national figures who criticized the progressive mayor's message.

The episode comes as New York City's Orthodox population reels from the coronavirus, which has ricocheted through Hasidic neighborhoods in Williamsburg, Crown Heights and Borough Park. Those neighborhoods have had high rates of infection and at-home deaths, and some prominent community leaders have fallen victim to the virus.

The synagogue of the rabbi being mourned, Kahal Tolath Yakov, issued a statement overnight saying that it regretted both what had happened at the funeral and afterwards, according to a Twitter account that distributes news about Hasidic Williamsburg.

"We understand Mayor Bill de Blasio's frustration and his speaking out about the gathering," said the synagogue's secretary. "We thought that the procession will be in accordance with the rules, and we apologize that it turned out otherwise. It also hurts that this led to singling out the Jewish community, and for that we apologize to all Jewish people."

Six minutes after the tweet that ignited the firestorm, de Blasio posted a final message about the night's events, this one addressing social distancing violators broadly and explicitly not singling any population out.

"We have lost so many these last two months + I understand the instinct to gather to mourn. But large gatherings will only lead to more deaths + more families in mourning," he wrote. "We will not allow this. I have instructed the NYPD to have one standard for this whole city: zero tolerance."

As angry responses to the previous tweet continued to flow in, that message drew few reactions.

Happy Birthday Israel

Israel's Independence Day, Yom Ha'Atzmaut, is being celebrated differently this year as Israel is slowly reopening after its own lockdown due to the coronavirus. Rabbi Danny Schiff, the Jewish Federation's Foundation Scholar, provides some very interesting insights into Yom Ha'Atzmaut 2020 in his emailed Reflections this week:

Yom Ha'atzmaut 2020

A few days ago, a new official count was released of the number of Jews in the world: 14.7 million. That's not exactly "sand on the seashore" levels.

Seventy five years have passed since the end of the Shoah, and still we have not returned to our 1939 high of 16.6 million. In three generations, we have replaced little more than half the tally of those who went up in smoke.

The Nazis did not only deprive humanity of additional Jews. Given the staggering Jewish



contributions to civilization, there can be no doubt that vast potential creativity was also obliterated. Who can tell? Could it be that the grandparents of the individual who might have been the one to conquer coronavirus were murdered at Dachau? We will never know. This much is certain: we can barely comprehend the extent of our losses. How right the Mishna was to teach that the destruction of one life represents the destruction of a whole world of possibility.



There is, however, a second story hidden in the numbers. It is a story not of the Jewish past, but of the Jewish future.

It's this: the statistics reveal that the overwhelming majority of Jews live either in Israel or the U.S., with 6.7 million in Israel and 5.7 million in the U.S. Take another look at those numbers. That's right: Today – on Yom Ha'Atzmaut 2020 – Israel is now home to one million more Jews than live in the US. It is probably the first time in history that one million more Jews reside in the homeland of the Jewish people than in the next biggest Jewish community.

And here's what comes next: current trends show that U.S. Jewish numbers are declining, while Jewish numbers in Israel are growing. In approximately five years, we will arrive at the extraordinary milestone where fifty percent of the world's Jews will live in Israel. Barring unforeseen circumstances, the percentage of the world's Jews who live in Israel will continue to rise steadily as the century progresses.

What does this all mean? It means that – though few in number – we have defied all those who have sought to destroy us, and we have taken our future into our own hands. It means that whereas the twentieth century was the American Jewish century, the twenty first century will be the Israeli Jewish century. It means that for the first time since the days of the Bible, the Jewish majority will soon live in the land of Israel. It means that Zionism has been a monumental success – it has brought the Jewish people home to take its place among the nations once again. It means that we are experiencing an extraordinary period in Jewish history. And it means that, wherever we might dwell, we have much to celebrate this Yom Ha'Atzmaut.