OH WHAT A DISASTER
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Temple Sholom, Vancouver BC Canada
Kol Nidrei 5781

This sermon was pre-recorded and produced like an extended television news segment, including on camera interviews and archival footage. The script is below but it was really written for the screen. That video is here: https://youtu.be/szinMrdzNDU

PICTURES	WORDS	NOTES
RDM	There is a hotel in Jerusalem called The Dan Panorama, I usually stay there when I visit Jerusalem.	
Video of hotel	In mid-March, when the Corona Virus emerged around the globe and Israel went into a severe lockdown the hotel was used to house COVID-19 positive patients who didn't need hospitalization but still needed to be isolated from their families to prevent further transmission of the virus.	
RDM	The hotel was given a new name by its 180 residents who came from many walks of life — Israeli Jews, Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel, Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, religious, secular, all forced to live together until they were no longer infectious.	
Image of people jumping on roof with caption	They called it Hotel Corona.	
RDM	Something unimaginable happened at Hotel Corona; something no one expected, not the Israeli army that was enforcing the quarantine, not the politicians and religious leaders who objected to such groups being in forced confinement together, not the skeletal hotel staff that saw all the ways this could go horribly wrong and certainly not the residents who were far from family, in an unfamiliar place,	

	facing a deadly disease.	
RDM	In the midst of a pandemic they built a social paradise.	
Video from of the zumba, yoga and piano singing	Zumba classes in the lobby, Yoga on the roof, multi-cultural sing-a-longs around the piano.	
Seder video	During passover the residents actually removed the wall separating the orthodox and secular seder meals so that they could eat as one group. Muslims and Christians joined in the meal as well.	
	In the most contested piece of land, amongst arguably the most divided people, the Hotel Corona became a model of how we can not only live together, but thrive together. Noam Shuster-Eliassi was one of the residents of Hotel Corona	
CNN Corona Hotel Video 1:13-1:37	*the power dynamics and the students activities that exist outside, I was shocked that they didn't apply to the hotel. We had the ultra Orthodox people in secular before we had the Palestinians and Israelis, different fragments of society. And suddenly we all have a thing in common. We're all got sick and we're all stuck in this hotel. It almost seemed like we were in a little bit of like a bubble utopia.*	
“How does a horrible crisis equip us to create a better society?”	How does a horrible crisis equip us to create a better society? That's the subject of tonight’s sermon.	
Imagines flash on screen	Faced with a litany of seemingly biblical plagues: COVID, Climate Change, Economic crisis, rampant inequality,	

	Racism, Terrorism, Extremism and Political strife	
	Some might think that “the end is nigh”	
	Many no longer believe that a better world, as opposed to a better life, is possible, and the quest for private well-being supersedes the public good. If you watch the news, follow social media, if you listen to the destructive and demeaning political rhetoric that attempts to pass for reasoned debate today you would not be wrong to conclude that people are self-serving and self-interested, that our base instinct is to take advantage of each other; that were it not for the thin veneer of civil society we would tear each other to pieces.	
	Writer Rebecca Solnit has spent time studying disasters and the human response to what appears to be the end of the world.	
Rebecca Solnit 11:18-12:11	*When you see those stupid disaster movies, those movies that tell us that we're sheep, that we're selfish, that we're fearful. You see people panicking, stampeding like sheep running for the exit trampling each other. That is not what happens. Actually. We converge on a disaster.* *Part of why they had blocked off everything below 14th street*	

	in New York, after 9/11, is that so many people wanted to help that you would have had massive traffic jams everywhere. And nevertheless, people gave billions of dollars. *They gave enough blood to fill half an Olympic swimming pool. They gave food, they gave clothing. They gave medical skills.*	
	The same was of course true here in Canada, in Gander where they opened their homes to those stuck on planes and elsewhere. People rushed to help each other. Rather than fall apart, people pulled together.	
	Crises are extraordinarily generative, and through crisis our better selves emerge. Crisis and disaster, a pandemic; they have a leveling effect. Like what happened in the Hotel Corona; the worst of times can bring out the best in people. It can make a paradise out of hell.	
Definition: Emergency	The word emergency comes from emerge, to rise out of. An emergency is a separation from the familiar, a sudden emergence into a new atmosphere, one that often demands we rise to the occasion.	
To be kind, be calm, be safe.	Our response to a disaster or emergency gives us a glimpse of who else we could be and what else our society could become if we were unconstrained by the pressure to keep doing things as we always do them; and if necessity demanded that we work together to survive. When we strip those constraints away, when a pandemic demands that we stay home for weeks at a time, that we wear a mask to protect others from the virus, that we revalue	

	the true essential workers in our society, teachers, healthcare providers, food chain workers; when old assumptions and behaviours must be abandoned because they have proven deadly, then we can rewrite the way society operates and we can take as our new model the way human beings respond in crisis. We have felt this, sometimes viscerally, as we have clung to Provincial Health Officer Dr. Bonnie Henry's now iconic instructions to us: To be kind, be calm, be safe. From this place of simple caring we strive to live as well as we can under terrible circumstances, and perhaps remembering that it is indeed human nature to come together in such times will be a comfort to us.	
Interview with Rebecca Solnit 1:00-1:45	*Most people in fact in disasters are altruistic, generous, brave, improvisational, deeply communitarian. And not only do they behave really well, but they sometimes find in a disaster, even though it's terrible, even though there's been loss of life and everything's been disrupted, they find a sense of community and purpose and agency.*	A Paradise Built in Hell - The extraordinary communities that arise in a disaster.
	That's what I have seen in this community and this congregation these past 6 months. Hundreds of our members have donated time and resources to help those hard hit by the multilayered impacts of this crisis. Led by our Tikkun Olam GoGos, members of the Jewish community have made thousands of masks. Temple Sholom members volunteered to call each family in the congregation to reach out and check in. Those calls led to new relationships and breaking down of the rampant social	Can I slip Bonnie Henry's words in here somehow?

	isolation that existed long before this virus demanded we socially distance. Neighborhoods bonded together to create scavenger hunts and sidewalk chalk mazes for kids stuck at home and limited to walks around the block. Some neighbors combined their bubbles to help with childcare and homeschooling.	
	If there is one picture that I will always cherish from this still unfolding crisis it's this one of Temple Sholom member Chris Freidrichs having seder on his sidewalk with all of his neighbors. Though the pandemic kept us inside our homes we opened our doors, our minds and our hearts; and found creative ways to stay connected to each other.	
	Individuals in this community delivered meals, picked up groceries, mowed lawns, led exercise classes and discussion groups online. Children made cards and pictures for isolated seniors they would never meet; teens helped someone else' Bubbie learn how to use Facetime or Zoom. Things we never had time for or maybe even the inclination for before the Great Pause became everyday occurrences and now have become ‘the new normal’. I have a zoom call with my extended family every Sunday. I'm home for dinner most nights. I'm baking bread and driving my car only once or twice a week.	

	The world is sick, but in some ways each of us and our planet is getting healthier. We are paying more attention to the areas that need more attention, like mental health, living wages and good government. Over these past 6 months I have so often seen humanity, I have seen you, so many of you at your best and kindest.	
	We have shown that when the world seems to be falling apart, human beings hold each other up, hold each other together and build community.	
	Tomorrow afternoon we will read from Leviticus 19:2, The Holiness Code: "You shall be holy because I the Eternal your God am holy," This obligation is followed by 36 verses that explain in concrete terms what it means to be holy. Holiness in the marketplace means to use honest weights and measures. Holiness in social relationships is not putting a stumbling block before the blind or cursing the deaf. Honoring one's parents is an act of holiness, providing for the widow the orphan and the stranger, Loving your neighbor as yourself are acts of holiness. The verses do not explicitly state what holiness in a pandemic looks like; but I think we have a pretty good idea. Holiness in a pandemic looks like each of you striving to not give in to despair, working to keep yourself and everyone you come in contact with healthy and safe.	

	Holiness in a pandemic is realizing what has always been true: We are in this together, we are all connected, what affects one of us, impacts all of us. The High Holy Days exist to remind us that we don't need a crisis. We can and should act this way every day. That's why mitzvot exist - that's why Judaism is a religion based on action; It shouldn't take a pandemic to teach us to care about and for each other; but if that is the lesson that we learn from this life changing event, then let it change our lives and how we live them for the better. What will this year be – how will we emerge? We, Jews, are not into New Year's resolutions – but perhaps we make an exception this year. Perhaps we will resolve to emerge kinder, or gentler, or a better parent. Perhaps we'll focus on becoming a more generous employer. Or to rededicating ourselves to our faith. History reminds us, and these past six months have shown us, that human beings are inherently good and that we have amazing resolve. In the words of Torah, we are *k'dai,* we are worthy of being extensions of God's holiness in the world. If ever there was a time to set our minds to a task of truly repairing society, repairing the world…now is the time… The questions who shall live and who shall die are as much spiritual as they are physical – tonight, we must ask ourselves, how will we live a life that emerges from our current truths? How will we use the emergence of this crisis to remake our community with holiness? How will we take the temporary paradises we have built in crisis and make them	

	lasting experiences of heaven on earth for generations to come? In 1938, at the onset of the Final Solution a German Jew approached Rabbi Leo Baeck and asked him: how do we get through this? To which Rabbi Baeck answered: we Jews have old eyes. In this New Year, I pray we see this present crisis with “Old eyes”, see past it, see through it, so that we might emerge in a paradise built from a pandemic, better and stronger than before. We have known for years that we cannot continue treating our planet, our social safety net and each other the way we have been and continue to survive let alone thrive. Put on your old eyes as we enter this New Year! Look what this crisis has already enabled us to accomplish between us; we are repairing the world; not as it was but as it should and needs to be.	