AN UPSIDE-DOWN WORLD
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TEMPLE SHOLOM, VANCOUVER BC
NOVEMBER 2, 2018

VIDEO AVAILABLE HERE: https://youtu.be/onPZX5Hyh7c

Josef the son of Rabbi Yehoshua was 'dead' for a short period of time and then was resuscitated, what we would now call a 'near death experience'.

When he recovered enough to hear the voice of his father by his bedside, his father asked him? "What did you see?" The young man responded with fear in his eyes and a quiver in his voice: "I saw an *olam hafuch* (an upside-down world). The *elyonim* ('high' people) were low and the *tachtonim* ('low' people) were high."

His father, rested his hand upon his son's shoulder, comforted him and said to his still shaking son, "There, there my son, rest, have no fear, you saw an *olam barur* (a clear world)! You saw things as they really are, the world really is upside-down, better you know that, then you should live in fear." (Bava Basra 10b)

Olam Hafuch – an upside-down world, *olam barur* – the world as it really is.

What is the world that we live in? Is it the world of hate and violence and mass murder, anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia. It is a world where Jews after all we have been through, after the countless times we have been scapegoated, targeted and murdered are still the eternal other? After 250 years of American Democracy, 150 years of Canadian (that sounds a bit like the exchange rate) is this best we can achieve? Security guards outside our synagogues, locking our doors, anti-Semitism on the rise, dog whistles and blood libels from elected officials. Jews murdered in synagogue. Is this really the world of 2018?

It would appear so. Eleven Jewish souls, who gave their lives, K'dush HaShem, literally for and in the midst of sanctifying God's name are evidence of that. The world may be upside down, but after Pittsburgh there is no denying what we see, we see it clearly, Olam Barur.

The Passover Haggadah admonishes us, "B'chol dor va'dor omdeem alaynu l'chalotaynu" "In every generation, they rise up against us to destroy us."

And so now we add to the long litany of names and dates going back to the days of Pharoah In Egypt and that make up the most mournful kaddish list we could ever imagine, we add 2018 Pittsburgh, PA.

Elie Wiesel was once asked what his greatest disappointment was in his remarkable life. Weisel answered, “I was convinced in 1945 that what happened must never be forgotten. One thing appeared to me then: that anti-Semitism died in Auschwitz. But now I realize that only its victims perished. Anti-Semitism is still alive and well and that hurts.”

I will confess to you that I was not surprised or shocked by the massacre at the Tree of Life Synagogue last shabbas, I have feared something like this was possible, if not probable for some time now.

Words have a purpose, their purpose is to convey, convince and compel to action. That’s how I am using them now, that’s how our tradition has used them for millennia, and when the anonymity of the internet, the setting aside of social norms allow them to be weaponized the result is so often violence and bloodshed. The target of that violence is almost always, eventually the Jews.

In the last year alone we have witnessed nearly a 60% rise in anti-Semitic attacks in the US in just the past year. Jews in Europe targeted and attacked by mobs in the streets, a synagogue in Copenhagen targeted by a gunman like that in Squirrel Hills only a few years before.

The near election of the daughter of a famed Holocaust denier and xenophobe to be Prime Minister of France. The Polish government passing a law designed to whitewash their involvement in the Holocaust. The president of the United States calling Nazis who marched through the streets of Charlottesville chanting, ‘Jews will not replace us’ – “some very fine people”. The continued prevalence of anti-Israel, anti-Zionism groups on University Campuses, the BDS movement – each claiming they are against Israel not Jews as though that is somehow more acceptable.

Olam Hafuch – an upside-down world it would appear. When the certainties of society collapse, when people are looking for some reason to explain their misfortune, when people are scared, they blame the Jews.

We are the world’s perpetual outsider, its historic scapegoat, and we are always the ones ‘they’ blame. We are .2% of the world’s population and just 2% of the population of the United States, but to the anti-Semites past and present we are 100% the cause of all the world’s problems.

To the one who sees the world clearly through this lens, they have never stopped, the world has never learned, they have just changed the medium, they’ve moved to twitter, but the hate is still there, and as last week reminded us, it will eventually lead to violence, it always leads to violence. In the words of Jean Paul Sartre, anti-Semitism is a pathology, a hysteria. Sartre writes, “If the Jew did not exist the anti-Semite would invent him.”

In May of 1941, seven months before America's entry into World War II, Rabbi Fred Isserman a Reform Rabbi serving Temple Israel of St. Louis, Missouri ascended his pulpit in a sanctuary not unlike that of Tree of Life and said to his congregation,

"In all human history, the anti-Semites have been the war-makers, never the peace makers; the foes, never the friends of religion; the apostles of tyranny; never the champions of liberty; the spokesmen of reaction; never the leaders of progress; the voices of tribalism, never the teachers of brotherhood; the destroyers and never the creators. Name an anti-Semite of any land, of any age, and you will name not merely a foe of the Jew, but a foe of the finest values in civilization - the noblest standards of human life. The enemy of the Jew has always been the enemy of humanity. What history teaches the present verifies."

Sociologists have studied anti-Semitism for generations and concluded that the measure of a society can be taken by how they treat their Jews. "The treatment of the Jew," writes Dennis Prager and Rabbi Joseph Telushkin, "has historically served as one of society's great moral barometers. Watch how a nation, religion or political movement treats Jews and you have an early and deadly accurate picture of that groups' intentions, not only toward Jews but toward all groups they consider to be other."

So I see it clearly, we all should. If the role of a rabbi is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, then rise from your complacency and naivety – they are still out to get us, Elie Wiesel was right, "Anti-Semitism is still alive and well and that hurts." Olam barur – see the world as it really is, even if it hurts.

But the prophet also declares, *Nachamu, Nachamu Ami*, Comfort, o' Comfort my people. If my words to you tonight were only to confirm your worst fears, or maybe scare you out of your false sense of security that would be I think rabbinic malpractice.

There are signs of light in the midst of the darkness.

Here is a sign – hold up Steeler's logo

Here is another, this was on the Penguin's jersey the other night – non-Jewish hockey players wearing a gold Jewish Star – as a sign of solidarity, we are all Jews tonight.

This was not a group of people that attacked the synagogue, this was one sick and angry and hate filled individual. This was not Kristallnacht when the police stood idly by or joined in the killing. No this time the police rushed in to try to save our people.

The world was not indifferent to our suffering, the world was outraged by it. My inbox has been over flowing with messages of support and solidarity, not just from Jews, in fact from Jews I get hand wringing and worry. But from all corners of this community, from clergy of every possible ideology and tradition I have received countless prayers and condolences.

From the BC Muslim Association:
"Please accept our heartfelt condolences to the Jewish community on behalf of The BC Muslim Association.

We wish to express our deepest condolences to all our friends and neighbors of the Jewish faith at this difficult time. Our community has experienced similar devastating acts of violence at our places of worship in Quebec not too long ago and we realize the heartbreak, pain and suffering it leaves behind."

From Premier Horgan:
"I want all members to stand with me — and I know they will — to express our profound disappointment that violence, hatred, bigotry and anti-Semitism continue to exist and thrive, certainly here in North America and, indeed, around the world. All of us, as political leaders, have a responsibility and an obligation to stand up and say no when we see intolerance, to stand up and speak with one voice, regardless of our partisan stripe — with one voice — about the fact that we in British Columbia are proud of our inclusion. We're proud of our diversity."

From the Budest Community:
"I will definitely remember those deceased and their family, the congregation in my prayers and loving kindness meditation. May the deceased rest in peace, may the family and congregation find strengths to continue to spread love and compassion to all dark corners in the world."

Walking on Kerrisdale on Monday, with my yarmulke on, I was stopped half a dozen times by people I have never met who offered they words of sorrow and condolence. Appearing on Radio and TV, my twitter feed lit up with words of support, so much that they drowned out the haters who normally lurk there.

And then there is this, the headline from this morning's Pittsburgh Post-Gazette. [hold up the front page of the Pittsburgh Gazette.]

If you can't see it in the back – the headline is in Aramaic with Hebrew script, it's the first line of the Mourner's Kaddish, yitgadal, v'yitkadash shemay Rabbah… On the front page of a major American newspaper.

Every network profiled the victims, told their stories as an askarah. And lastly there is this – all of you, tonight, tomorrow, and Sunday in shuls and churches and mosques across North America. We are joined by faith leaders, political leaders and Vancouverites of all stripes and faiths to stand with us as we mourn our people brutally murdered for being Jews.

Olam Barur – this too I see clearly, the world is not indifferent to the murder of Jews as they have been before. They say kaddish with us, but more than that – together we pledge to redouble our efforts to make sure that we turn the world right side up, for all of us. That we bring an end to senseless hate and violence, that there is no place in this world as we see it for such things or the careless rhetoric that leads to them.

The world may indeed be upside down, but you and I we can change the world, we can turn it rightside up, l'taken olam, b'malchut shadai, we can repair the world to the way that God intended it to be.