

SERMON - April 17, 2020 24 Nissan, 5780

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This time we are living in has come to be called “The Great Pause.” It reminds me of times I’ve been at yoga or meditation retreats and was asked to pay attention to the space between inhaling and exhaling, the rest, the time between what was and what will be.

It is not like America to pause, or the global economy to pause, and we’ve already noticed some interesting things.

First of all, we’ve found out that **we can actually stop**. That is profound in itself.

We’ve seen the canals in Venice turn clear, and the skies over China clear. The “Great Pause,” as writer **Julio Vincent Gambuto** calls it, is producing the following: *“A carless Los Angeles has clear blue skies as pollution has simply stopped. In a quiet New York, you can hear the birds chirp in the middle of Madison Avenue. Coyotes have been spotted on the Golden Gate Bridge. These are the postcard images of what the world might be like if we could find a way to have a less deadly daily effect on the planet.”*

We’ve come to realize in a new way that the abstract concept of ‘an **economy**’ is powerfully real and profoundly interwoven.

We’ve always known that there is a growing and disturbing gap between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ in our economy, but this pause has made the differences between those classes much more existential and pressing. And it has created new fault lines that aren’t about class but about work and who can work from home and who can’t.

It has also made very real how different our home lives are depending on whether we live alone or with a partner, or with friends, and whether we have children, what state we live in. **While around the world we are sharing an experience, we are also having profoundly personal experiences that vary widely among our community, among our friends and family.**

This Pause acts as sort of mirror on our lives. Some of us are discovering that we really like our lives at home, that our homes suit us, that we actually do feel at home when we’re home.

Others are discovering that they like the calm, the solitude, the pause.

But I think many people are having to come face to face with parts of their lives at home that are painful.

Maybe you are alone by choice or not by choice, and the sense of loneliness now is growing profound.

Maybe you are finding out that you don’t much like your kids, or at least that being home with them all the time keeps you feeling like your home is actually yours.

Maybe you are finding out that the fault lines in your primary relationship are more serious that you had wanted to admit or face, but now there is no way to avoid it.

But I also think many are going through a spiritual crisis. Maybe you are finding that having been busy, busy, busy all the time was a way of covering up a sense of emptiness. It is a great gift to have lots of friends and an active community, but I believe that for many of us, the constant going from work to work, from concert to dinner to movie to services, our busy-ness can be a way of avoiding sitting with yourself. Needing to acquire the right house, the right car, the right clothes, the right technology can also be a way of avoiding facing a nagging sense of meaningless or boredom. ***It is a paradox of the human condition that we be incredibly busy and active and still be profoundly bored.***

I think it is very tough for many if not most of just to sit still, just to BE home, to be present and to be content. This is a spiritual opportunity for growth. For stopping the focus on what we can't do, and finding ways to be more content doing nothing, or doing simple things with those with us.

This GREAT PAUSE can be like an unscheduled Elul and High Holy Days, a time for reflection, for assessing if we are on the path we are meant for, for healing relationships that can be healed.

It is also a time to spend more time in prayer or meditation, which at this point have become like the antidote to ZOOM meetings. While we are in this space between inhale and exhale, between what has been and what comes next, it is a particularly wise time to ground yourself, reconnect with God and with the image of God within you, so that when whatever comes after this is upon us, we will be as centered and grounded and connected to what is divine as we can be. No matter what happens, we will be best able to navigate it if we are in a place of spirit, of connection, equanimity, and hope.

Shabbat Shalom.