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EIGHTH DAY OF PASSOVER  
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"Israel's total population surpassed eight million over Passover," reports Ynet. With six million Jews – a number that has haunting overtones – Israel has become the world's largest Jewish center – with the United States in second place at about 5.5 million Jews. Professor Sergio Della Pergola of the Hebrew University, an expert on Jewish demography, notes that in the world today there are 13,800,000 Jews.

Numbers matter. At the Yizkor hour, each loss that we have experienced looms large and distinct. Each loved one whom we remember today had a unique role and influence in our lives. Then, magnify what is ours on an individual, personal and family level by the losses sustained by us, the Jewish people on an infinitely larger scale.

In 1938, exactly 75 years ago, there were 17 million Jews in the world – with 9.5 million living in Europe. By the end of World War II, 2 out of every 3 Jews in Europe would be dead – and now, decades later, the total number of Jews in our world still falls far short of that pre-World War II figure.

The images of an unseasonably cold April morning in Washington 20 years ago are still very vivid for me – and, I suspect, for some others from our B'nai Israel community. We had gathered on the Mall for the official dedication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

I can still hear the words of Elie Wiesel, as he spoke to the assembled that day. He referred to a young Jewish woman in the Carpathian Mountains in Hungary, who in 1943, read in a newspaper about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. "Astonished, dismayed, she wondered aloud: 'why are our Jewish brothers doing that? Why are they fighting? Couldn't they wait quietly – until the end of the war? Treblinka, Ponar, Belzec, Chelmno, Birkenau'" – Wiesel continued – "she had never heard of these places. One year later, together with her entire family, she was already in a cattle car traveling to the black hole in time, the black hole in history, named Auschwitz."

Elie Wiesel reminded all of us that morning 20 years ago that the price of indifference to human suffering can be catastrophic. He noted that "by April 1943, nearly 4 million Jews had already vanished, had already perished. The Pentagon knew, the State Department knew, the White House knew, most governments knew. Only the (potential) victims did not know. Thus, the painful, disturbing questions – why weren't Hungarian Jews in 1944 – they were the last remnant of Eastern European Jewry – why were they not even warned of the impending doom? For one year later, in 1944, three weeks before D-Day, that young woman and her husband, all of them already turned into ashes. Jews from everywhere – old and young, beggars and industrialists, sages and workmen, military men, diplomats, professors, students, children, children! – they were all entering the shadow of flames."

Then referring to the Museum itself, Elie Wiesel challenged us: "So as you walk through (it), so magnificently conceived and built by James Freed . . . as you walk through these exhibits, looking into the eyes of the killers and their victims, ask yourselves: "How could murderers do what they did – and go on living? Why was Berlin encouraged in its belief that it could decree with

impunity the humiliation, persecution, extermination of an entire people? Why weren't the railways leading to Birkenau bombed by the Allies? And why was there no public outcry of indignation and outrage?"

And – as he reached the end of his remarks – almost in a whisper, Elie Wiesel touched every heart in that dedication ceremony assemblage, when he said: “The woman in the Carpathian Mountains of whom I spoke to you, that woman disappeared – and she was my mother.”

Fast forward, 20 years: We know that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has been visited by more than 30 million people – the overwhelming majority not Jewish – and many of them school children. 88 heads of state and thousands of foreign officials from over 132 countries have passed through its doors. The Museum has become not only a witness to the barbarism that overwhelmed our people during the Holocaust but a beacon for education – promoting human dignity, confronting hatred and leveraging its influence to prevent further genocides.

Out of curiosity, I went on Trip Advisor to view the comments that visitors to the Holocaust Museum have made on the web site – just in recent weeks. Among the sampling:

From New Orleans:

“So moving, emotional, educational and disturbing – all at once. We were privileged to meet a Holocaust survivor, who happened to be there that day. Never forget!”

From Evansville, Indiana:

“This is a **MUST SEE** for young and old . . . It is hard to hear the voices recount their memories and to see the historic documents and artifacts and not be moved to tears . . . This is truly one of the finest museums in DC.”

And from Belo Horizonte, Brazil:

“This was the place that marked my trip in Washington. The visit will shock your reality and make you think about how you see things in the world.”

We cannot change the tragedies of the past . . . but as Jews, ours is the mandate to remember – our own personal losses, as we do at Yizkor – and also the losses of our Jewish people, which have forever changed both our destiny and our demography.

This Sunday afternoon, April 7, at 5 pm, our Washington Jewish community will convene at our neighboring congregation, Har Shalom, in Potomac, for our annual Yom HaShoah – Holocaust Memorial Day – observance. I urge you to carve out the time to be with us . . . it is not just for survivors and their families.

Through the commitment of our B'nai Israel Men's Club, each of our members has received the yellow Yom HaShoah candle. I urge you to light it on Sunday evening – and as you do so – to reflect on the privilege which is ours, as American Jews to live in freedom – and to ponder the fate that could have been ours.

On the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising – an expression of supreme heroism during Passover of 1943 against overwhelming Nazi brutality – and on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – surely, each of us must continue to remember – yes with sorrow – but also with conviction and with love.