



Memory in the Time of Corona

This past year, it has been easy to become a bit more forgetful. Sometimes days blur one into the other. Sitting in front of zoom. Watching Netflix. Waiting for “something” to happen so we feel safe venturing out again. Remembering what happened yesterday or last week seems increasingly hard to do as one day seems similar to another.

And yet, we Jews are the masters of remembrance. The holiday of Passover we just observed is a 3,000-year-old tradition in which we recall what happened to us in Egypt servitude and how we ventured into freedom to become a holy people.

Wednesday night marks another moment of remembrance for Jews throughout the world, Yom Hashoah, the Holocaust Remembrance Day. With each passing year, as our survivor community diminishes, it becomes increasingly important that we remember this sad chapter of our history. Not just because “if we forget history, we are doomed to repeat it.” And not just because, “in remembrance we ensure that these unfinished lives live on”. These two reasons alone would be “*dayeinu*”.

I think there are so many incredible lessons for our people and humanity to be learned in studying the Holocaust that none of us dare ignore or forget this chapter in history. Too often we find the “Holocaust” or “nazis” used for political purposes. False comparisons of individuals we seek to berate or isolate or diminish. This serves little purpose except to deflect or divert attention to our history and important lessons that need to be learned again and again.

So, tonight, April 7th, we remember. Not only these unfinished lives, but the strength and resiliency of our people. And we continue to embrace the values of our heritage lest we lose our people through assimilation.

I will never forget the words of Professor Emil Fackenheim who called upon Jews to embrace the 614th commandment of remembrance and observance. His words written decades ago, are even more relevant today:

The 614th Commandment: Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories. They are commanded to survive as Jews lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair of man and his world, and to escape either into cynicism or otherworldliness... Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish... In ancient times, the unthinkable Jewish sin was idolatry. Today, it is to respond to Hitler by doing his work.

One thing is certain; as Jews we never have had the luxury of forgetting.
Zachor.