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In Memoriam

Did we listen to them?

As tears flowed freely from their eyes,

Did we listen?

The Jewish people,

They who lived in the land for so many years

Uncountable,

They built cities, religion, a home.

Blamed for that murder that they did not commit.

And when they reached out to us, pleading for help,

Did we not turn away?

Did we listen to them?

When their livelihoods were stolen and years of work were taken away,

Did we listen?

Those same Jewish people,

They who lived in the land for so many years

Uncountable,

They had built away from the Promised Land a new home.

Shunned to the outskirts of the city, again they were outcasts.

And when they reached out to us, pleading for help,

Did we not turn away?

Did we listen to them?

When six million voices were crying as one,

Did we listen?

Again they were victims,

They who lived in the land for so many years
Uncountable,
They thought "Yes, this is finally home".
But once more they were blamed, and fell to the senseless violence.
And when they reached out to us, pleading for help,
Did we not turn away?

Did we listen to them?
When they were called "the world's least wanted", and killed for that fact,
Did we listen?
The Rohingya people,
They who lived in the land for so many years
Uncountable,
They had stayed with their faith, their people, their home.
But for that they were hated, and hunted, and chased away.
And when they reached out to us, pleading for help,
Did we not turn away?

Do you listen to us?
When "Big Brother" tells us that we don't exist,
Do you listen?
The Ukrainian people,
We who lived in the land for so many years
Uncountable,
We have our culture, our language, our homes.
But still we are killed, and the enemy's "Appeased", bartering land for our grain.
And when we reach out to you, pleading for help,
Do not turn away.

Throughout history, their stories were meant to teach us,
And yet did we listen?

We, humanity, did we open our ears to those
Who spoke of the horrors unending that came from our fellow earthlings?
Why did we not learn from those who came before us,
And suffered?
How much death will it take for us to listen,
And finally learn?

Take the hand that reaches to you,
Listen to the voice that speaks to you,
Make not the same mistakes again,
Hear their words and stop the pain.

Most have left us now,
But their stories must live on
Through us, must reside in us,
Must live on, so that we never forget.

I am a witness now:
I hold the light of knowledge,
And today I pass it to you,
So you are a witness too.
We shall not trust those
Who try to deceive us!
So we must let their stories
Teach us.

We have been so caught up in our lives,
That we have not seen what is happening just outside.
Time to open our eyes.
Listen to them!
Learn from them!

Shy not away from them,
Hear what they have to say,
And let them live on!

Additional Notes:

I chose to write this in the form of a poem to honour my grandfather, who passed almost 2 years ago, and had written beautiful poetry as a hobby for many, many decades. His poetry inspired me to try the art form for myself, to connect to him and honour his memory. In addition, I used elements of Abba Kovner's Pronouncement, directly referencing it in the second to last stanza, since it really inspired me with the style and emotion behind it. In the fifth stanza, I refer to Ukraine, since it is my homeland, and the horrors of the Russian invasion that has been ongoing since February of last year. I felt that it was necessary to show that history is not a static thing, but always ongoing, which makes it all the more important to learn from past mistakes. Overall, I felt a very strong connection to this topic, so I felt compelled to write this poem to acknowledge that. When studying the Holocaust in my History class, I connected often to the texts we read, for example an excerpt from the diary of Dawid Sierakowiak, a 17 year old young man who lived in the Lodz ghetto, which reminded me a lot of the war going on in Ukraine, and how we all try to keep our spirits up, similarly to how Dawid did – through humour and song.