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Honoring the victims of the Virginia Tech shootings
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Thanksgiving Square, Dallas, TX

According to Jewish tradition, the destroying of one life is equivalent to the destruction of an entire world. Thirty-two lives were shot down this past Monday at Virginia Tech. Thirty-two worlds which include within their orbits grief-stricken parents, children and siblings, boyfriends and girlfriends, spouses and friends. Thirty-two worlds, whose paths should have stretched far off into futures full of family, love, college degrees and good work in the world. Thirty-two worlds are no longer revolving because of bullets shot from a gun in the hands of a deeply disturbed young man who should never have been able to acquire a firearm in the first place.

Today we mourn the destruction of these thirty-two worlds, AND we include in our grief the tens of thousands of worlds that are shattered every year in our country because of gun violence. That AND is really important – we remember in anger and dismay and sadness those thirty-two who died for no good reason on Monday. AND we also honor with our rage and our tears ALL victims of gun violence in our nation.

We're paying attention right now – the world and our nation are paying attention to this tragic event, because of its magnitude - because it is just beyond belief that something like this could ever happen. But we're also paying attention right now because this incident of gun violence occurred on a college campus. We are shocked because gun violence isn't supposed to touch the worlds that so many of us dwell in – the familiar clean, safe, secure worlds of suburbia and of privilege and of university campuses.

But several days or weeks from now when the Virginia Tech headlines start to peter out, the issue of gun violence will fall down to the bottom of our priority list. Because most of the time, people with guns are out there taking the lives of people who live in neighborhoods and walk on streets that seem far, far away from our neighborhoods and our streets. An incident like Virginia Tech reminds us that it can happen to us, but most of the time the issue doesn't seem to touch us personally. Gun violence is something that happens in a parallel universe.

We need to start to caring about and speaking out against gun violence no matter where it happens, no matter who the victims are. Consider the fact that in 2004, nearly eight young people aged 19 and under were killed each day by a firearm in the United States. Each day!! There are neighborhoods and streets and families that suffer from gun violence on a daily basis. Their stories do not make national television. But their worlds are just as valuable and just as worthy. When those worlds are destroyed by guns, the tears are just as painful, and our outrage should be just as deafening as it is today.

Let us not become complacent! We can speak out all we want when a horrible tragedy like Virginia Tech happens, but we actually need to do something about it. Guns are all too present and all too easy to get in our society. We need to keep up the pressure on our elected officials to further limit and restrict access to firearms.

When a life is destroyed, it is as if an entire world has been destroyed. But the tradition also says that when one life is preserved it is as if we have preserved an entire world.

Let's truly do honor to ALL victims of gun violence, at Virginia Tech and in every neighborhood in our country, by turning from the business of destroying worlds towards the work of preserving them.