



# Amcha Update

Amcha - the Israeli Center for Psychosocial Support of Holocaust Survivors and the Second Generation

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## The Heritage of the Survivors

For decades we have heard about “the heritage of the survivors,” which we, who did not experience the Shoah, are enjoined to pass on to the generations that come after us.

As the son of Holocaust survivors and Chair of Amcha’s Board, I respect and cherish those who lived through the Shoah. Yet I am not certain that I really understand the nature of their “heritage.”

Officially, some 180,000 survivors live in Israel today, although I personally believe there are many more. Let us assume for a moment that each one of them is certain of the nature of the legacy they wish to leave for their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Do they all actually share a world view? Do they all understand the Holocaust that their people experienced, that they themselves suffered, in the same way?

I believe the answer to this question is “yes” in one area only: memory itself. I have yet to meet any survivor who wants the memory of that dreadful period to be forgotten by the younger generations. We concur on the importance of the imperative “zachor”, to remember; but this does not sum up the entire heritage. We need to extract from the Shoah the essence of that memory, its meaning for our values and our vision.

We all have our own values and hence our own national and human vision. We do, however, share a broad consensus regarding the values and vision of the State of Israel as reflected in our Declaration of Independence. The State of Israel was established and exists in order to ensure the continued physical existence of the Jewish people so that Jews who want political independence can do so in the land that is historically theirs, for the benefit of all mankind. We, loyal citizens, must try to interpret the memory of the Shoah in the spirit of these values.

We, who were not there, will try to learn from the survivors all that they are willing to teach us, in particular the secret of the Jewish people’s survival, the importance of our political independence, and how to maintain humanity despite the atrocities. We pledge to build Israeli society in this spirit for generations to come.

**Aryeh Barnea,  
Chairperson, Amcha Board of Directors**



Elias Feinzilberg (99) and granddaughter Dana. Photograph by Helena Schätzle, winner of the 2016 Alfred Fried Photography Award For “World-Best Picture on the Theme of Peace”.

## An inspiring visit

Over the past months, two hundred Holocaust survivors, members of Amcha’s Psychosocial Clubs from Netanya, Jerusalem, and Petach Tikvah, toured Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI). Our gracious hosts, senior IAI staffers, as well as Amcha Club members, shared the sense of excitement and pride that the visit inspired.

After the visit, **IAI Purchasing Director Daniel Mor** wrote, “We are grateful for the privilege of welcoming these ‘champions of the spirit’ whose presence significantly lifted our spirits. We respect and cherish the way these fighters shaped the history of the Jewish people and are proud to show them our achievements. Their visit was a clear expression of victory, vibrancy, optimism, hope, and pride.”

**Coral Henigman Barak, Amcha Petah Tikva Club Director** noted that the survivors were very interested and amazed by what they learned on the tour. They were touched by the warm hospitality and respect shown to them by their hosts. The IAI team presented Israel’s strength and spirit, highlighting IAI’s unique contribution, based on the foundations that the survivors themselves paved, overcoming the many hardships during the Holocaust and their early years in Israel.

**Simcha Sheinfeld, Amcha Club member**, concluded by saying: “Visiting you fills us with great pride. There is no doubt that our country continues to exist, strong and resilient, thanks to your remarkable efforts.”

We thank the management and team of Israel Aerospace Industry for this welcome initiative and hope that all of Amcha’s Clubs will enjoy a visit to IAI in the upcoming months.



Amcha Petach Tikva Club visiting IAI

**Amcha’s visit was a clear expression of victory, vibrancy, optimism, hope, and pride.”**

## Volunteering at Amcha – “A Kind of Calling”

“Being an Amcha volunteer is not just giving of myself – I’ve also learned a lot about life.”

At first glance, they look like a father and son sitting in a cafe, talking and laughing: you can feel the bond. But no – this is a meeting between **Dr. Joseph, a Holocaust survivor** from Yugoslavia, and **Amitai Solomon, an Amcha volunteer**. Amitai has been with Amcha Jerusalem for 23 years. “My father,” he says, “was a Holocaust survivor. When he died, I wanted to do something in his memory. Being an Amcha volunteer is not just giving of myself – I’ve also learned a lot about life, like how to make lemonade from lemons. I’ve met fascinating people, and so I keep on volunteering.”

Amcha has nearly 1,000 volunteers. Some have a direct connection to the Holocaust – child-survivors or children of survivors. Others are drawn by curiosity and an interest in the life stories of Shoah survivors. All share a generosity of spirit and a genuine desire to connect to those who confront memories of the past while coping with complex challenges of the present. The volunteers undergo screening, training, and supervision. Most of the volunteering involves home visits to survivors, providing support and companionship. Others share knowledge and skills within the framework of Amcha’s Psychosocial Club – the “*Moadon*” – teaching languages, computers, and more. Especially moving are activities facilitated by the survivors themselves, often in the framework of the *Moadon*, where they lecture, lead current affairs groups, and prepare activities for their peers.



Volunteer Richard Hirschhorn, child-survivor, visits Eliyaho Cohen



Volunteer Ruthie Rossing, facilitates Amcha Jerusalem Yiddish Group

For Second Generation **Ruthie Rossing, Amcha Volunteer**, born shortly after her parents left a Displaced Persons camp in Germany, beginning to facilitate a Yiddish group at Amcha Jerusalem 12 years ago was only natural: Yiddish was her first language. “It’s like being with my parents again,” she says, although she calls the participants her *kinderlach* (children). Any visitor to the group will immediately feel the strong bond that has been formed – they love Yiddish and love Ruthie too. “Yiddish provides a great opportunity to have fun, yet it is bittersweet; a connection to the participants’ lost homes, families and childhood memories. The meetings are social gatherings, as well as intellectual stimulation.

The group is a powerful support system where we share both the good and bad in life, learn how others cope with difficulties, and gain perspective. When there is a *simcha*, a joyous event, such as a birth of a great-grandchild, we eat cakes and sweets. When someone is ill, we offer support- calls and visits. We have gone through a lot together. I know they all look forward to Tuesday mornings, and so do I. The members are simply inspiring.”

Several Amcha centers have organized volunteer groups through schools, army units, social organizations, and businesses, including SanDisk, Orbotech, Teva, and Clalit HMO.

The Shechakim High School in Nahariya has been awarded a prize for community service for its joint program with Amcha. **Nirit Sofer, School Coordinator**, says: “We wanted to create opportunities for personal connections between teens and survivors, exploring the past and the meaning of the Holocaust for the future. We wanted to reach the youngsters’ curiosity and encourage them to learn about the Shoah while we could still do so directly from survivors. The meetings were built around teaching computer skills, which proved mutually gratifying, and over time expanded to marking holiday and memorial occasions together.”

**Daniel Abitbol, a student-volunteer** for two years: “We’re the generation that will have to pass the memory on. If I don’t listen and share what I hear, what’ll be left? For me, volunteering with Amcha is a kind of calling. I see greater significance for my upcoming trip to Poland and my military service. I’ve gained insights about life from a wise person, and I feel privileged to hear first-hand from Yossi. Sometimes Yossi and I just have fun together – the survivors didn’t have many opportunities for that – and it’s a true friendship.” **Yossi Markovitz of Amcha Nahariya** concurs: “I’m excited each time we meet. The important thing is the connection. Daniel makes me feel good. There are no words to say thank you.”

**Leah Aderet, Amcha volunteer**, child of survivors, has been volunteering at Amcha Haifa for over 13 years. “I used to hear my father talk about the Holocaust, and as a member of the Second Generation, I felt I needed to be there for other survivors. I had a deep connection with the couple I volunteered with, for 9 years – it was a great love, and I was glad to have been with them through the very difficult times.” Remarking on the importance of the volunteer coordinator, Leah adds: “I update her on every change, which has been vital because at times the situations are complicated. I know I can ask her anything at the supervision sessions, which are enriching and provide us with solutions and new ideas.” **Hadas Elul, Amcha Haifa’s Volunteer Coordinator**, adds: “Our volunteers are wonderful people, deeply dedicated and caring. They give of themselves and the survivors benefit from genuinely meaningful relationships.”



Lecture by Halina Ashkenazy- Engelhard, Amcha Tel Aviv Club Member

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**“The mediator of the inexpressible is the work of art”**

**Goethe**

The lights dim, the music begins, and thirteen actors take their places on stage. They perform for nearly an hour, helping each other change costumes or whispering a missed cue to a fellow actor. When the play ends the audience responds with a standing ovation. This could almost describe any professional theater performance in Israel – but only almost, says **Orly Tarchitzky, Director of Amcha Rishon Lezion**, and **Tammy Hayut, Director of Amcha Rehovot’s Psychosocial Club**, who jointly facilitate the “Theater Games Group” with assistance from **Esti Brick, staff member**. The actors are Holocaust survivors and Second Generation members, aged 65 to 97, who come together at Amcha Rehovot.

Rehovot’s “Theater Games Group” has been meeting for over four years and has performed in many settings, including schools, cultural centers and even a prison. **Group member Sarah Weinstein** says: “I never spoke, but through the group I was transformed; I can’t believe I can act, sing, and simply enjoy myself.

Enjoyment was off limits for me!”

**Group member Rachel Versano** has been battling an illness but makes every effort to attend rehearsals and performances: “This is the best medicine. I come here to enjoy myself. With the group, I feel free of pain. It gives me the strength to stay alive.” **Michal Melnik, 97**, the oldest member, adds: “Back then we were busy surviving, worrying about food. Who knew what it meant to play or act? Here, we shamelessly become children.”



Amcha Rehovot “Theater Games Group”

**Art is a powerful means of expression for unspoken emotions and memories**

**Orly and Tammy** explain: “We aim to create opportunities for fun and play, which many survivors were deprived of as children. We use creative tools to connect them to their ‘lost childhood.’” **Amcha Rehovot Director Tammy Feldman-Kahanov** adds: “Our Theater Group exemplifies what is uniquely beautiful about Amcha – a powerful combination of clinic and club, therapy and enrichment, pain and laughter, past and present.”

**Amcha Tel Aviv Therapist Miriam Drucks** explains: “The use of music enables us to provide survivors with emotional, psychological, and rehabilitative treatment. Making music allows many voices to be expressed at the same time; relaxation and arousal, control and freedom. It can elicit significant changes and improvements in quality of life.”

**Rina Stadler, Therapist at Amcha Netanya**, adds: “Music is a language that enables communication and internal work from a non-threatening place, which we might not otherwise reach – a place without words”. Rina works individually and in groups, using music to share and document the survivor’s pasts. Each survivor creates a personal soundtrack, their own roadmap. She also directs the choir, which released a disc called “Nostalgia and Melodies.” Rina says: “Working with music encourages empowerment and joy, and when it is performed in groups, creates a meaningful support network and powerful sharing.”

Amcha Beersheba offers a phototherapy group, led by **Yael Rachlin, Club Director, and Psychotherapist Zvika Kalush**. Zvika explains: “Photography allows the survivors to find and examine their life stories and their deeper meaning. The camera lens enables profound self-observation and encourages exploring new angles and perspectives to one’s original thinking. A photograph freezes a moment in time, and can generate positive change. Group sessions intensify the possibilities of observation, and provide space for acceptance, recognition, and learning.”

Recently, the Amcha Beersheba group presented an exhibition. **Holocaust survivor Chava Minberg, 88**, born in Poland, was among the exhibitors, with a photo she titled: “*There is Life Behind the Fence*.” She photographed a landscape of the Negev, shot from behind a fence, and explained: “The fence is speaking. We were enclosed by the fence and through the fence we saw the view. This is my life. As a child I was enclosed by a fence, and now, the fence is behind me. There is life behind the fence.”

Amcha centers across the country offer programs including drama, music, photography, writing and more. For many survivors, this is their first experience of the arts. It is a powerful means of expression for hidden or unspoken emotions and memories, as well as an exciting opportunity to learn, develop skills, be creative, and expand horizons.



Amcha Netanya Choir Recording – “Nostalgia and Melodies”



Amcha Beersheba Photography Group – “There is Life Behind the Fence”

**“Back then we were busy surviving, worrying about food. Who knew what it meant to play or act? Here, we shamelessly become children.”**

## Amcha News... Amcha News....

On January 27 – International Holocaust Remembrance Day – a unique photography exhibit opened in Berlin. Collaboration between Amcha and German artist Helena Schatzle, with the assistance of the German Foreign Ministry and the EVZ Foundation - Memory Responsibility and Future, led to the creation of the exhibit which displayed Schatzle's photographs and interviews with Holocaust survivors living in Israel. The opening event was attended by hundreds of guests, including some of the photographed survivors, who were specially invited to come from Israel, as well as government officials, diplomats, journalists, historians, and therapists. State Minister Prof. Dr. Maria Boehmer was one of the speakers. Schatzle's photo that appears on our Newsletter's front page recently won the prestigious Alfred Fried Peace Photography Award, for the best picture on the theme of peace for 2016, from over 16,000 submissions. More: <http://www.friedaward.com>. A short film about the photographer and her work with Amcha, produced by Israel's Channel 1 TV, can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ml5PP7OIH-k&feature=youtu.be>.



- ▶ **Amcha's newest center was opened this year in Ashdod**, with the generous assistance of the Claims Conference and UJA - Federation of New York. Mr. Gal Talias is the director.
- ▶ **Amcha Ashkelon is moving to a new location where we will be able to better serve the growing needs of local Holocaust survivors.** This too was made possible with the generous assistance of UJA - Federation of New York.
- ▶ **Amcha Netanya has been recognized by the Psychologists Board of the Ministry of Health** for purposes of clinical psychology internships.
- ▶ **Amcha centers throughout Israel are in great need of expansions, renovations and adaptations** to become handicap accessible and improve the services offered to elderly Holocaust survivors. Additional resources to complete this critical and timely effort are urgently needed.

## Elie Wiesel - Farewell to the Man Who Was "There" and Could Tell the World

By Elisheva  
Flamm-Oren  
(as published on  
Ynet Opinions,  
July 4, 2016)

The world has lost a precious man. It is a loss to all humanity because Elie Wiesel's voice came out strongly in favor of human rights and against hatred and racism. Elie Wiesel skillfully distilled from his traumatic experiences during the Holocaust a clear universal message of morality and respect for others.

It is a loss to the Jewish people because of his deep commitment and contribution to our rich culture and intellectual creativity. He was one of the most prominent thinkers and scholars of the last century.

For all of us at **Amcha - the Israeli Center for Psychosocial Support of Holocaust Survivors and the Second Generation** it is a tremendous loss of a dear friend. More than anyone else, Elie Wiesel shaped and preserved the memory of the Holocaust. With extraordinary eloquence, he found words where none remained. He articulated the voices of those who survived the atrocities. In his books and public addresses all over the world, in many languages, Elie Wiesel was able to make manifest the survivors, their pain, and their legacy, significantly enhancing public awareness and recognition of their suffering.

Studies have indicated the critical importance of providing recognition to trauma victims so they can process their experiences, cope with them, and grow from them. For many survivors, Elie Wiesel's work has had a healing effect. For many, the power of his words and the way the world accepted them opened their hearts and helped them find the words to tell us what they had experienced and what they hoped we would learn from this. We at Amcha are immeasurably grateful for this, and profoundly saddened by this loss.



Elie Wiesel

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