



Amcha Update

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We Are Here, Seventy Years Later

Historically speaking, 70 years is nothing, less than a lifetime for most people today. But in our lifetime, two momentous events took place. Future generations will admit that our 70-plus years are easily comparable to 700 years in other historical periods: The generation of the Holocaust is also the generation of our revival.

The Holocaust did not only entail personal and national loss; it also exposed us to facets of human nature that we had not known. The Holocaust is unique from our perspective because it happened to us, and we are, naturally enough, most concerned with ourselves. But more than that, it revealed that Western niceties, scientific progress and technology, and artistic achievement are no guarantee for human decency. Impeccably dressed doctors using erudite language can still engage in genocide. In this sense the world is worse than we thought.

Yet in another sense it is better than we thought: Who could have imagined it possible for people to survive Auschwitz, retain their sanity and then go on to establish new families, join the work force, contribute to society, and maintain their faith in humanity. We discovered that people are capable of enduring overwhelming suffering, far beyond what could be humanly expected. We discovered that some of them, from many ethnic backgrounds, could exhibit courage and bravery under circumstances that they could never have imagined beforehand.

Whenever I visit a branch of Amcha, I am inspired at the sight of the aging survivors we are fortunate to still have with us, people whose life experiences exceed anything that we, the younger generations, could possibly comprehend. From the survivors I learn what human love is, and I hope that the third and fourth generations will also be privileged to do so.

Amcha assumed the task of providing emotional and social support for Holocaust survivors. Bread is more important than a social club; but as the Chinese saying goes, a man needs bread to live – and a flower to live for. The emotional therapy, the social club programs, professional care for the homebound and the visits of the Amcha volunteers are the flower, and for some of our survivors, even the bread itself.

Amcha has expanded its activities and offers its expertise to additional groups of people in need, while retaining and maintaining its first priority, the reason for its establishment and existence: its obligation to the survivors of the Holocaust who are so deserving of our respect, our care and our love.

On behalf of all of those who were not there, I want to extend heartfelt thanks to the Holocaust survivors, the parents and grandparents of all of us, for the powerful wisdom of their lives which they have tried to pass on to us, for the legacy that will accompany us and the coming generations like a pillar of fire. To the survivors, to our staff, and to all of Amcha's friends – Happy New Year!

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

Dr. Giselle Cycowicz, Holocaust Survivor, Living Witness, and Senior Psychologist at Amcha

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It was silent at the Jerusalem International Convention Center when **Dr. Giselle Cycowicz, PhD, a Holocaust survivor, living witness, and senior psychologist at Amcha** spoke. She shared her personal experiences from the Shoah and her insights with the audience of more than a 1200 participants at the 2015 Israel Conference of Medicine.

Dr. Cycowicz was a teenager during the Holocaust and survived Auschwitz-Birkenau. After the war, she raised a beautiful family and following her Aliyah from the U.S.A. to Israel twenty years ago, she joined Amcha and provides psychological care to Holocaust survivors. In addition, she serves as a living witness at Yad Vashem and accompanies students and soldiers to Poland. She said: "Dr. Frankl wrote a lot about the need for meaning. During the war, in the toughest times, when death was everywhere, we kept our spirit. We all had a goal - to survive, to live. At the end of the war, after Liberation, the concept of freedom caused great anxiety and uncertainty. Cycowicz, then only 18 years old, recalled the terrible losses and her thoughts: "Where will I go? Who is waiting for me? What will I do? We wandered. We could not create new meaning. It took some time before returning to life and being able to rebuild our lives". Her words left the audience shaken.

She noted that these days, the survivors are very old. They are again experiencing anxiety and uncertainty. They are again faced with great losses and loneliness that trigger their traumatic memories of the Holocaust. She stressed that "Especially now, it is very important, and also very beneficial, to provide professional care and support to elderly survivors and their families, as they deal with their pasts and face their current challenges". And this is exactly what she herself does, in the framework of Amcha.



Dr. Giselle Cycowicz, Johanna Gottesfeld and Dr. Elisheva Van Der Hal, from left to right, Senior Staff from Amcha Jerusalem, in Auschwitz, at ceremony to mark seventy years after liberation

To Care, To Teach, To Lead

"We have a strong desire to share this knowledge, to teach and to enrich the professional community in Israel and all over the world"

▶ "We care deeply about the survivors that we treat every day and feel privileged to be doing this work. Over the years, we have developed great expertise and innovative approaches to care for survivors, seniors, and trauma victims. Therefore, we have a strong desire to share this knowledge, to teach and to enrich the professional community in Israel and all over the world," says Tali Rasner, director of the Amcha Tel Aviv and Dan Area, which includes centers in Tel Aviv, Holon, Petach Tikvah and Ramat Gan.

Throughout the year, members of Amcha's staff initiate and participate in important professional seminars and share the experience accumulated by Amcha's 450-plus mental health professionals who provide care to over 18,000 Amcha clients.

This year Amcha held a day-long seminar in memory of the late **Natan Durst, z"l**. Dr. Durst was among Amcha's visionary founders and a Holocaust survivor himself. He was a gifted therapist and a charismatic teacher and mentor. The seminar, with over 300 professionals participating, centered on a discussion of "Trauma and Growth in the Life of the Patient and the Therapist." Speakers included **Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, Mr. Aryeh Barnea, Ms. Ofra Ross, Professor Zahava Solomon, and Professor Zvi Eisikovits**. Professor Dasberg, Amcha's president, recalled Dr. Durst's conviction that "being post-traumatic is not an illness but rather a human existential condition, and it can either result in emotional crippling or can constitute a source of renewal." The closing session featured **Roni Frishoff**, from **Amcha Tel Aviv**, who sensitively presented "Thoughts from the Clinic."

At the 2015 Israel Medical Conference, **Amcha's National Clinical Director, Dr. Martin Auerbach** addressed an audience of some 1,200. He stressed that "It is never too late for emotional help to support survivors as they cope with present situations and their memories of the past." Amcha's prominent role in treating Holocaust survivors was also reflected at the "Israel Holocaust Survivors Convention – Challenges in the Present and the Future", where 15 Amcha professionals presented the organization's various therapies and activities.

On the international front, Amcha's staff members were also sought-after speakers, appearing before the Annual Congress of Child Holocaust Survivors and the Symposium on "Lost Childhood" in Berlin, the International Symposium on Psychotrauma in Vienna, the "Living with Dignity" Convention of the European Institute for the Holocaust Legacy in Prague, and the meeting of the European Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy Association in Berlin.



Amcha Seminar in memory of Dr. Natan Durst z"l

TIKKUN OLAM - The Legacy of the Survivors and those that care for them

We must share the knowledge that we have accumulated, show generosity, help others. This is how we continue to realize the legacy of the survivors, towards Tikkun Olam.

▶ "When I see photos of the destruction that took place in New York, Japan, Nepal or anywhere else, with destroyed homes, villages erased, children running with small packages, I know that like us who survived the Holocaust, they too will continue to suffer for many years. I am very sensitive to the suffering of any human being, anywhere. I would like to help them find hope and tell them that one day, they will smile again" says Penina, an active member of the Amcha Club in Jerusalem.

When Amira Greenberg-Kagan, a rehabilitation psychologist at Amcha Ashkelon, heard that the Israel Trauma Coalition was organizing a delegation to help the victims of the earthquake in Nepal, she immediately asked to join. "I wanted to help the victims in real time process what they had gone through. I hoped this would make their recovery and return to life easier. Working at Amcha with survivors, I understand just how powerful such an event can be. It will always be a part of their life. What we have learned at Amcha from treating Holocaust survivors can help many others and it was very meaningful for me to be able to share this."

The **Israeli Trauma Coalition** was founded 15 years ago at the initiative of the UJA – Federation of New York, bringing together experts in the field of psychotrauma, resilience, and emergency preparedness. Initially providing immediate response and direct care to those impacted by terror in Israel, the Coalition has developed a wide range of programs and secured critical funding for their implementation. Amcha was one of the founding members and continues to be a leader. Over the years, Amcha's staff have developed and implemented innovative programs to support various population groups in Israel. Special efforts have been focused on supporting the elderly and training their caregivers and family members. In addition, extensive work has been done in providing support and training for first responders, such as fire fighters, emergency medical teams, and spiritual leaders, including recent training for Muslim Imams.

Over the years, Amcha staff members have stood out in their contribution to the international relief work done in France, Japan, Boston, Haiti, the Philippines, Eastern Europe, New York, Jordan and more. **Dalia Sivan, director of Amcha in Haifa and the North**, who represents Amcha on the board of directors of the Coalition, participated in several delegations. This year she went to Japan for the fifth time in order to assist victims of the tsunami. According to Dalia: "The mutual help and generosity of survivors, one towards the other, and of strangers - the 'righteous gentiles', during the Holocaust, at tremendous risk, left its mark on me and influenced my beliefs. At Amcha, we must share the knowledge that we have accumulated, show generosity, and help people suffering from disasters, including people of other nations, throughout the world. This is how we continue to realize the legacy of the survivors, towards Tikkun Olam."



Dalia Sivan training caregivers in Tokyo, Japan

From Generation to Generation

The younger generation is inspired by the survivors' resilience and appreciative of their contribution to society

"The meetings with young people strengthen us and add years to our lives..."

"Looking at this young generation I see myself at that age; I lived a normal life until it got abruptly interrupted; it's good to see today's children and know they will carry on our heritage in this country"...

These and other moving statements by the survivors are heard time and again following their meetings with the young generation, within the framework of Amcha's inter-generational projects held throughout the year, in all of our centers. Much of this work is supported through a generous grant from EVZ Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility, and Future".

Amcha's aim is to create a bridge between the generations. To reach this goal, Amcha facilitates meetings between survivors and students from Israel and abroad, IDF soldiers from different units and groups of employees from various organizations and companies.

In each session, an exciting dialogue between the survivors and the youngsters takes place. Both groups benefit from an enriching and productive discussion and often form friendships outside the framework of the program. "Survivors feel more confident and optimistic about a better future, in light of the encounter with the young people. The younger generation is inspired by the survivors' resilience and appreciative of their contribution to society, which leaves them with the desire to carry on the survivors' legacy and tell their story to future generations," says Marga Gannon-Junowicz, director of Amcha Netanya.



A powerful ceremony where survivors handed students their first Israeli Identify Cards and shared with the youth the challenges they had to overcome to become Israelis



Students absorbed in hearing Moshe's experiences

The excitement is particularly evident when the meeting is among survivors and soldiers in uniform or young people about to be recruited. At the end of one of these meetings Binyamin said: "If only back then we'd had an army, uniforms, a country. How wonderful it is to see you now. Please, keep us safe, take care of yourselves, and someday, keep your children safe."

Dina, one of the students who enlisted shortly after participating in the program said: "I draw a lot of strength from the witnesses' survival experiences. Their life stories are unforgettable and I realize how important it is to keep on telling them, passing it on to future generations."

"Do not forsake me in my old age, when I have no more strength do not leave me"

This year, Amcha will provide 50,000 therapy hours to homebound Holocaust survivors. This service is a vital link in the comprehensive psycho-social support system provided by Amcha. It began on a small scale close to 20 years ago, and today comprises a third of the total therapy hours provided by Amcha, and is continuing to grow rapidly. "The challenge was to ensure compassionate, accessible, professional, and flexible care to homebound, and in some cases, bedridden Holocaust survivors, who are very much in need of emotional support" said Dan Waldman, director-general of Amcha. For most survivors, coping with old age and the complex diseases and physical disabilities that it may bring is very difficult. Yet, the fear of moving to an institution and being separated from the community is even more difficult, as it arouses traumatic memories from the Holocaust. Therefore, Amcha staff decided to leave the confines of its centers and reach out to the survivors in their homes, in order to enable them to remain in their homes and communities, for as long as possible. The funding for this service is provided through the much appreciated support from the Company for Location and Restitution of Holocaust Victims' Assets, the Authority for Survivors Benefits Authority of the Finance Ministry, the Claims Conference, and UJA – Federation of New York.

In an evaluation carried out recently among a sample of 360 survivors who benefit from therapeutic interventions in their homes, they shared that the primary benefit is the accessibility of emotional support which improves their quality of life and strengthens their faith and hope in life. Joseph, born in Germany and 89-years-old, wrote: "I am so alone now. There is no one to really hear me. There are things that I cannot say to anyone else in the world, even to my children, because it is too frightening. But now, I must get them out. My psychologist hears me. I speak about what happened then, what is happening now and what will happen when I am no longer here. She helps me find meaning in my life now. I wait for our meetings like the air that I breathe"

"The challenge was to ensure compassionate, accessible, professional, and flexible care to the homebound"



Providing care in Sderot, during Operation Protective Edge

Amcha's Social Club - 'The Moadon' - is my second home - actually, it's simply 'home'

Only at Amcha am I sure that I will be understood

Rachel celebrated her 86th birthday this month. For many who survived the Holocaust as children – those thrown out of trains by parents trying to save them, those sent to monasteries and convents, those growing up in families of 'righteous gentiles', who lived for years with false identities – their actual birthdays and their real families remain a mystery.

Rachel was one of them, but she recently began celebrating her birthday at Amcha's social club – the 'Moadon'. Over the years, Amcha developed a unique club model that provides critical support as well as an enriching environment. A cardinal element in Amcha's clubs is the fact that all the members are survivors, sharing similar pasts; all of them 'were there'. Rachel: "Only at Amcha am I sure that I will be understood. I never celebrated my birthday before, but at Amcha's 'Moadon' I began to celebrate it."

Today over 3,000 active members participate in the 13 Amcha social clubs all over the country. For many of the survivors it is a 'second home' or, as they say, simply 'home', offering meaning to their lives and helping them cope with the memories of the Holocaust and the challenges of aging. As Moshe says, "The 'Moadon' is a reason to get up in the morning, a group of friends who smile when I come in, a place where they understand me, even without talking, and where it is nevertheless possible to talk about everything."

Dr. Bella Kantor, director of Amcha Beer Sheva and Sderot who has been instrumental in developing Amcha's work in the Negev region explains: "Many survivors come to us during a crisis, when they face serious problems impacting their functioning" Taking part in 'Moadon' activities is an important component in the therapeutic framework we have developed at Amcha. It helps reinforce cognitive, social, and emotional skills, and provides the survivors with support in a process of genuine rehabilitation."



Enjoying Yiddish literature at Amcha Jerusalem



Performance of Amcha Tel Aviv's chorus

Amcha's social clubs are operated by a staff of mental health professionals assisted by professional and volunteer group leaders. The clubs receive much appreciated support from the Survivors Benefits Authority of the Finance Ministry, the Claims Conference, and the Jewish Federations of New York and Northern New Jersey. Activities offer assistance through group sessions, creative writing, the arts, and much more. The programs are geared to provide social and therapeutic support as well as opportunities for enrichment and creativity. The range of activities is impressive and is adjusted to the survivors' needs and wishes. Some favorites are Zumba in Ramat Gan, where everyone gets into the rhythm, through Jerusalem's "Taim-Li" cooking group, where favorite dishes are prepared and served up together with stories of the "old home," to Tel Aviv's popular chorus and internet classes in Ashkelon, Beer Sheva and Haifa taught by employees who volunteer their time and skills from leading high-tech companies including Sandisk, Orbotech and Elbit.

This year, Amcha's Social Club network was given a special award at the annual conference of Israeli Non-Profit Associations for the Aged. Dr. Jenny Brodsky, Chairman of the Prize Committee, noted its "unique contribution to the physical and emotional well-being of thousands of aging Holocaust survivors, and choosing a skilled, devoted staff of psychologists, social workers and other professionals, who are caring and attentive to the life stories of the survivors in the past and the present, instilling into their lives a strong sense of meaning and belonging."

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