

AM ECHAD

Volume 3, Issue 1

January 2001

Our Mission

Am Echad was established to provide direct financial and moral support to elderly and disabled Jews in the former Soviet Union, to help the most lonely, the most desperate, those with no relatives to help them, those, who are not reached by the efforts of the mainstream Jewish organizations.

Chanukah Concert

The first night of Chanukah, the festival of lights, was made a little brighter for residents of Ring House, a retirement home in Rockville, Maryland, when Am Echad organized a concert of local klezmer musicians for them. The audience enjoyed many Jewish melodies, superbly played by clarinetist Daniel Rozas and accordionist Joan Grauman, who donated their time and talent to brighten the evening for so many. The concert was dedicated to Jewish seniors, both in Russia and the U.S. JDS 4th-grader Leo Feldblyum lit the first candle, which was dedicated to seniors living in Russia.



Mrs. Lotte Nussbaum and Mrs. Clara Rudman at the concert.

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Reports from St. Petersburg

These reports are sent regularly from St. Petersburg to Am Echad by its volunteer, whose task is to visit each potential recipient to verify eligibility for assistance, and to report to Am Echad, where the final eligibility decisions are made. The reports have been superbly translated from Russian by Larry Cannon, but otherwise are unedited. They speak for themselves.

L.V.I. (b. 1934)

Date 7/5/2000, time of visit: 12:30-13:00

L.V.I. an artist, a member of the Artists' Union, and also a member of some creative association under the aegis of UNESCO, but today none of this does him any good. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union he has been able to sell just one or two pictures a year if he's lucky.

L.V.I. has been disabled since childhood (with tuberculosis of the bones and joints), and walks on crutches. Apart from his problems with the loco-motor system, his digestive system and nervous system both are in bad shape. He has no money for treatment of dysbacteriosis or other gastrointestinal diseases and consequently suffers badly. His pension is 660 rubles (\$23).

L.V.I. receives packages from EVA and also gets some services from there. He gave me an article about himself. His apartment/workshop is more a storeroom than a living space. He has a wife who lives not with him, but far away; she too is an artist with no income at all, who moreover has the financial burden of a daughter still in school.

Since July 2000 L.V.I. has received \$50 dollars a month from Am Echad.

G.G.R. and I.G.R. (b. 1925 and 1927)

Date 7/10/00. Time of visit: 14:00-14:30

The sisters G.G.R. and I.G.R. have lived together their entire life, and have no families of their own. Their pensions are 816 (\$28) and 844 (\$30) rubles, respectively. They live in a decent apartment. The elder sister is quite ill: she has heart trouble and diabetes, and had an operation for cancer in 1998. A year ago she became bedridden with back pain, and could not get up for several months. Then a doctor was found who began to treat her, and a series of drug injections brought about some improvement, so that she now can get out of bed and take a few steps. She needs another series of injections, but it would cost nearly 2000 rubles (\$70) and she has no money. Apart from this, she constantly takes painkillers, heart medicine, blood-pressure drugs, diuretics, and other drugs as well.

G.G.R. gets monthly packages from Hesed, and I.G.R. receives them on holidays, with house visits twice a week and medical devices from Hesed.

Am Echad: The Update

By Igor Feldblyum

Exactly one year ago, I first discussed the desperate situation of tens of thousands of elderly and disabled Jews in Russia with my friend Philip Berry. At that time, we could not have envisioned how much that could be achieved in a short time, how many people could be saved from hunger, suffering and loneliness. Together, we started the charity, Am Echad, and soon many others joined us. Thanks to the generosity of Am Echad's supporters, we have been able to make a real difference in the lives of many, many people.

As of today, 60 people have benefited from Am Echad, with most receiving assistance every month, some quarterly, and a few who received one-time assistance. Now, with our help, they can buy medicine and food that otherwise they would not be able to afford. More than one-half of the people we support are either bed-ridden or too sick to venture out of their apartments. For them, we organized monthly home delivery of medicine at discounted prices, and twice-monthly delivery of food packages.

In addition to supporting the elderly, we began supporting two families who had almost no medical help for their severely sick and handicapped children, and who had to live daily with the sad reality of malnutrition.

From a database of 37,000 elderly and disabled Jews in St. Petersburg, Am Echad selects a list of the oldest, poorest, and loneliest. Katya K., our volunteer in St. Petersburg, continues to regularly visit those who have been selected for assistance to verify their current situation. We then make the decision who will get assistance, and *who will not*. This is quite an unenviable task. The level of poverty and misery is such that the "*who will not*" part can break one's heart.

The Greater Washington Committee for Post-Soviet Jewry became one of Am Echad contributors in December, 2000, and we proudly continue our cooperation with them.

By December 31, 2000, Am Echad had provided assistance to 60 needy people in Russia, totaling \$7,777. The infrastructure to identify the needy and deliver assistance to them was established and is functioning smoothly. But our most serious challenge has been to raise enough money to continue our support of the current recipients. We have had to put on hold our search for new recipients, and haven't even been able to help those that we already personally knew, those who were trying to survive with almost no medicine and food.

In the past month we have received donations, but these new funds will not last very long. It is paramount that we engage in serious fundraising efforts immediately. I ask all of you reading this newsletter to do what you can to let others know about the importance of what we all are doing. There are already so many of us who have shared the pain of the elderly in Russia. **Let's share with our friends and relatives the information we have, the stories from Am Echad newsletters and, most of all, your conviction of the importance and urgency of our assistance to the elderly in Russia. We are saving lives, pure and simple.**

Am Echad is truly a grass roots organization that needs the participation of the entire Jewish community. What started as a conversation between two concerned individuals has grown to include 32 supporters. But the abilities and time of everyone involved is limited. **Just imagine how many more needy would be helped if all of us would give an opportunity to do a mitzvah, to be a mench, to at least one more friend, relative, neighbor, or co-worker.**

Volunteers are needed to help with fundraising and administration of Am Echad

- We have a list of **foundations** that could contribute to Am Echad. Could you contact them?
- We have a list of **Jewish organizations** that could contribute to Am Echad. Could you contact them?
- We need an **accountant** - perhaps you know a retired accountant who could donate her or his time to assist in keeping our books and in filing a tax return.

Many families preparing for the Bar or Bat Mitzvah of their child have begun to ask their guests to make a donation to their favorite charity instead of purchasing a gift. If you know such families, please ask them to consider Am Echad as their charity of choice.

I would sincerely welcome and appreciate your ideas and help with fundraising. Today it is our most urgent task at hand.

I want to thank everybody who worked hard to make Am Echad a successful operation. My special thanks go to Katya K., who continues to do an excellent job visiting and helping the elderly in St. Petersburg, and to Steve Jacobson, who took care of registering Am Echad with the IRS. ❖

Number of Sponsors	Total Amount Donated
26	\$14,137
Total number of recipients on 12/31/2000	60
Total amount distributed to recipients	\$7,777
Expenses May-December, 2000:	
▪ Start-up expenses	\$2,475
▪ In St. Petersburg	\$ 320
▪ Postage, stationery, printing supplies, telephone, etc.	\$ 331
▪ Salaries	None

on December 31, 2000

Reports from St. Petersburg (cont.)

Even if we ignore the need for back medicine, 500 rubles a month is not enough for their drugs. They need help.

Since September 2000 G.G.R. and I.G.R. have received \$50 a month from Am Echad.

M.A.Z. (b. 1926)

Date 7/10/00. Time of visit: 14:30–15:10

M.A.Z.'s pension is 1000 rubles (\$35). She has a lovely apartment, but there's a settlement deed on the apartment, so she can't own it and can't even get any housing compensation. The deed is in the name of the son of her niece, who lived in Israel and helped until she passed away 3 years ago, and her husband and son do not maintain any relations with the aunt.

The list of her diseases, and accordingly of her medicines, is all but endless: she has suffered rectal prolapse, an insult, evidently a minor one, and thrombophlebitis, walks with difficulty, and has glaucoma and high blood pressure (up to 260). She needs 1000 rubles (\$35) a month for medicine. She needs assistance badly.

Since September 2000 M.A.Z. has received \$36 quarterly from Am Echad.

S.Y.P. and A.Y.P. (b. 1932 and 1938)

Date 7/10/00. Time of visit: 15:20–15:40

The P-o brothers receive pensions of 750 (\$26) and 430 rubles (\$15).

The older brother (S.Y.) lives with the younger (A.Y.), an invalid since childhood whose development was retarded at the age of 6 or 7 years. The older brother has two sons, but has almost no contact with the one who lives here. He does have warm relations with the one who emigrated to Israel, but S.Y. thinks that they can get along on the money they have, so he doesn't ask for help. They have the younger son's apartment, which they want to sell, but S.Y. says, "It's not mine, it's his, I'll get by somehow. . . ." He is very sick: heart trouble, blood pressure, adenoma, a hernia — he buys what medicine he can for 200 rubles (\$7) a month because he can't afford any more. A neuropsychiatric pharmacy must prescribe drugs for the younger brother, but there are no longer any free clinics, and these drugs are so expensive that they no longer even bother getting the prescriptions.

They are visited by Eva once a week, and get packages monthly. Samuil needs a minimum of five prescription drugs, plus aspirin, and should also get Riboxin, but he doesn't buy it — it's too expensive. If the older brother should pass away (God forbid!), the younger one would die too. **I believe they should be helped with the medicine.** S.Y. would never ask anyone for anything on his own.

Since September 2000 S.Y.P. and A.Y.P. have received \$50 a month from Am Echad.

M.G.K. (b. 1921)

Date 7/10/00. Time of visit: 15:50–16:30

M.G.K. lives in a communal apartment. She has a group 1 (severe) disability. Her pension is 900 rubles (\$31). She is entirely alone, having not even distant relatives, and is very ill. She has cancer, suffered a heart attack in January 2000, and suffers from hypertonia, gynecological problems, and a detached retina, which cannot be operated on because of the pressure. She says that some 500–600 (\$17-21) rubles a month goes to medicine, but her list runs to a good 1000 rubles (\$35). Hesus makes two house visits a week, and she gets packages on holidays.

Since September 2000 M.G.K. has received \$20 a month from Am Echad.

B.I.B. (b. 1906)

Date 9/24/00. Time of visit: 18:30–19:30

B.I.B. worked 50 years in a school, taught Russian language and literature, lost her parents at a young age, and raised three younger brothers, all of whom died at the World War II front. She lives in a communal apartment, and has very bad neighbors and no relatives. She gets meals from Hesus and is visited three times a week by a lady who helps with the housecleaning. B.I.B.'s hearing and vision are poor. As a result of several broken bones she lives in pain, and a lot of her money, nearly all of her pension (900 rubles) (\$32), goes for medicine. Since she herself no longer can do any housekeeping, she has to pay for everything, but hasn't the means to do so.

Thirty dollars a month would make her life much easier.

Since October 2000 B.I.B. has received \$30 a month from Am Echad.

L.M.B. (b. 1947) and V.B. (b. 1985)

Date 8/29/00. Time of visit: 13:40–14:20

The boy V.B. suffers from ICP (infantile cerebral paralysis) and neurofibromatosis, and his mother L.M.B. has cancer and also suffers from asthma. They live in a communal apartment, in utter poverty. The mother's pension is 620 rubles (\$22) and V.B.'s 439 (\$15). They receive 400 rubles (\$14) in support payments. The boy speaks poorly, and has defective motor coordination, but writes well, has an innate literacy, is doing well in a special school, and has advanced to the 8th grade. Apart from money for medicine and repairs of the apartment, they unquestionably need money for him to study, but his mother cannot even think about this, as there's not enough money for bread. Hesus sends packages monthly and medicine once a year, and has them in the "Clean House" program. This mother and her son need help.

Since September 2000 L.M.B. and V.B. have received \$75 a month from Am Echad.

D.S.V. (b. 1934)

Date 8/10/00. Time of visit: 13:30–14:00

D.S.V. receives a pension of 670 rubles (\$24). He suffers from infantile cerebral palsy. He moves about his apartment with difficulty, using a walker. His friends help. He has an older brother, who also is disabled, though he does have a job. After paying 250 rubles for the apartment, D.S.V. barely has enough to keep from starving.

Since September 2000 D.S.V. has received \$30 a month from Am Echad. ❖



Letter from Chief Rabbi of St. Petersburg

Am Echad has established a close working relationship with the Grand Choral Synagogue of St. Petersburg, and together we work on delivering assistance to where the greatest need is. We search for the most needy Jewish elderly, visit them, determine the level of assistance needed, and use the synagogue's infrastructure for Am Echad to deliver assistance to the recipients. In November, 2000 we received a letter from Mendel Pewzner, Chief Rabbi of St. Petersburg, which we would like to share with you:

FROM : St.Petersburg Azrat Achim

PHONE NO. : 8121136209

P01

ה"ב

Раввин М. Певзнер
Главный раввин Петербурга



Rabbi M. Pewzner
Chief Rabbi of Petersburg

November 29, 2000

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sirs,

On behalf of the St.Petersburg Jewish religious community I would like to express our gratitude to the Am Echad organization and especially to its President Mr. Igor Feldblyum for the help they give to the needy elderly in St.Petersburg, Russia.

All the elderly who receive monthly financial support are suffering due to the desperate situation of many elderly here. These people have got very insufficient income from the state, can not get help from their children, they are unable to earn for living because of age and poor physical ability - they don't have enough money just to buy food or medicine.

So any kind of help is highly appreciated. Support given by Am Echad monthly has become an important part of our community programs dedicated to help Jewish people in St.Petersburg.

Sincerely,

Chief Rabbi of St.Petersburg
Jewish Religious Community

Mendel Pewzner



Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School Supports Am Echad

Children of many Am Echad supporters attend the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, so it was most natural for us to discuss with Dr. Geraldine Nussbaum, Principal of the Lower School, how we could educate the JDS children about Jewish life in Russia. After all, so many of their grandparents came from there, and instilling a sense of common roots and common heritage is one of the most important aspects of Jewish education. Dr. Nussbaum supported this initiative with great enthusiasm. At the faculty meeting on October 19th, 2000 a decision was made to designate all Kabbalat Shabbat collections in November and December, as well as the proceeds from the Faculty Dress Down Day, toward helping the elderly Jews in Russia. Am Echad's representative was invited twice to talk with 5th-graders about Jewish life in Russia, and about the desperate situation of many elderly Jews there. The JDS students took this issue very close to their hearts; their response was overwhelming. In just a few short weeks they collected \$292.40. Below is the letter that came with the first donation from JDS to Am Echad, and our response to it:

November 7, 2000

Dear Am Echad,

Our 5th grade Judaic Studies Class at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School in Rockville, Maryland has been collecting Tzedakah every Shabbat since school began. Our school decided, when we were told about your organization, that we wanted to help Am Echad. This is an important mitzvah that we are fulfilling. The elderly Jewish population in Russia is a very important one and must not be forgotten. Enclosed please find \$95.50 that we have collected. We hope that this will help the elderly and disabled Jews in Russia and bring smiles to their faces.

B'Shalom,

David Fink
Joshua - Sk
Hagar Hauser
Jamie Slovon
Sarin Stahler
Eli Klausner
Naomi
Shiran Berookhim
Adam Lazarus
Sari Pappas
Rachel
Ben Berman
Meryl Feinstein
Ari Eisenberg
Dana Levit
Ron

Yeva!
Sarah
Nam Wein
Ariel
Clemens

Thank you, 5th graders!

Dear kids and parents of JDS:

In the last "It's Wednesday" newsletter there was an article about the critical situation of tens of thousands elderly and disabled Jews in Russia. Many of them do not have money for food and medicine, and do not have a family to support them. Well, we all are one big family. And you proved it! Only one week after the article was published, Mrs. Lerner's fifth grade already collected their Tzedakah and submitted it to Am Echad. These \$95 not only will feed one person for three months - it also demonstrates that we, Jews, stand together, that we are a one big family where misfortune of one is of a great concern for everybody. Your Tzedakah money will be sent to Russia this week, and soon we will be able to tell you about a person you saved from misery.

On behalf of all Am Echad supporters, on behalf of all elderly Jews in Russia, we would like to thank all kids for their concern and readiness to help others. We are especially thankful to the JDS teachers for educating the kids about the importance of a personal involvement, and to parents who teach their kids the most important lesson of all - lesson of kindness, compassion and generosity.

We urge kids, parents, and teachers to actively participate in helping the elderly Jews in Russia. They are just like our own parents and grandparents, and they need us. You can help them through JDS Tzedakah program, or directly through Am Echad - a charity with a mission to find the most needy and to help them, month after month, year after year. A number of JDS parents are Am Echad supporters already. For more information please call Igor Feldblyum at 301-309-8755 or Philip Berry at 301-251-2999, or visit our website www.amechad.homestead.com where you can read more about people we support and about what you can do to help them.

Am Echad

Message from Dr. Nussbaum to Faculty:

"At our Faculty Meeting on October 19th, I designated November through December and all our Kabbalat Shabbat collections toward Am Echad. Please share with the children information from Am Echad's newsletter and its website so they understand why we are doing this. Children should be encouraged to participate in this drive, and, perhaps to write letters of support to people supported by Am Echad - there are more than forty of them today (Mr. Igor Feldblyum can provide you with their names and case histories). Make sure that all Tzedakah collections are submitted to me or Joan Miller regularly."

Tax Corner

Charitable Contributions

Submitted by Benson Goldstein

The tax filing season is upon us. It is time for us to gather up our financial receipts to compile our year 2000 tax returns. With this newsletter, you have received a letter stating the amount of your contribution to Am Echad in the year 2000.

The tax law requires persons to keep records of their charitable contributions in order to qualify for a charitable deduction. If a person makes a cash contribution, he or she should retain a cancelled check or valid receipt to be eligible for the deduction. On the other hand, if one makes a contribution of property, he or she must obtain a receipt from the charitable organization and maintain records about the nature of the gift and details about the charitable organization.

To the extent the charitable contribution is for \$250 or more, then the individual needs to obtain a "contemporaneous" written acknowledgement - such as a letter - to qualify for the charitable deduction. Thus, in the case of charitable contributions of \$250 or more, a cancelled check will not be enough for the IRS should the agency audit your tax return and challenge your charitable deductions.

For charitable contributions involving noncash property of between \$501 and \$5,000, a taxpayer must comply with the above described rules and certain additional rules as well. In order to qualify for a charitable deduction between these levels, the taxpayer must also complete IRS Form 8283 and attach the form to his or her tax return.

The author, Benson S. Goldstein, practices law in Bethesda in the areas of taxation and estate planning

Am Echad is a newsletter of Am Echad, Inc., a non-profit charitable organization
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President: Igor Feldblyum
Secretary: Philip Berry
Treasurer: Liba Feldblyum

Message to all Am Echad members and those who pledged to join

Your commitment to join Am Echad in supporting elderly Jews in Russia is a great *mitzvah*. Many of them will not survive without someone helping them. And we already have a list of those that have nobody to help them. They are malnourished, weak, suffering from a multitude of illnesses, with no chance to ease the pain - they don't have money for medicine.

They need our help, and they need it now.

Many of us think about donating to various good causes. What can be more honorable than saving someone's life?

"... the saving of life takes precedence over all the commandments in the Torah, even the commandment to bring the Messiah and achieve redemption..."

Rabbi Yosef

Send your tax-deductible contribution to Am Echad today.

When joining Am Echad in helping elderly Jews in Russia, choose from the following options:

- Support of a few people \$ _____
- Support of a couple (\$900 per year)
- Support of one person (\$600 per year)
- Periodic donations in the amount of \$ _____, _____ times/year
- One time donation \$ _____ in honor of, or in memory of _____

- Please, send the Donation Certificate to: _____

- I would like to remain anonymous
- I would like to correspond with the recipient
- I would like to help in administration of Am Echad (volunteering accounting or legal expertise, contributing to newsletter content and/or preparation, web page administration, attracting new sponsors, etc.)

Even giving \$1 will help!

With questions, please call Igor Feldblyum at 301-309-8755 or Philip Berry at 1-888-567-5273