

How did Jewish people resist during the Holocaust?

Lesson 2: Non-violent Jewish resistance in the ghettos

History

Lesson 2 of 4 lessons

Mr Mastin



The Jewish historian Yehuda Bauer explains what he means by **amidah**.

“What does **amidah** include?”

It includes smuggling food into ghettos; mutual self-sacrifice within the family to avoid starvation or worse; cultural, educational, religious, and political activities taken to strengthen morale; the work of doctors, nurses, and educators to consciously maintain health and moral fibre to enable individual and group survival; and, of course, armed rebellion or the use of force.”



Keeping life 'normal' inside the ghetto

Whilst conditions in the ghetto were extremely difficult, some Jews were determined to continue cultural aspects of their previous life. There were schools throughout the ghetto. Adults could also attend seminars and lectures, often led by top scientists such as Professor Hirszfeld, who led lectures for medical students. Until 1942, Jewish book stores also operated in the ghetto.

There were several theatres, which showed plays, as well as artists, musicians, bands and writers. From January 1941, inhabitants of the ghetto could also send and receive post through the Post Office based in the ghetto. Post was unreliable and could be opened by the Nazis. Despite these challenges, the postal service meant that ghetto inhabitants could receive food packages from relatives in Poland or abroad, and spread the word about the poor conditions there, using careful language or drawings.



Keeping life 'normal' inside the ghetto

Jews in the ghetto resisted Nazi rule and the conditions imposed on them in different ways. Perhaps the most common form of resistance was smuggling basic supplies over, under or through the ghetto walls. Estimates suggest that between 80 – 97.5% of the total food intake of all ghetto inhabitants entered the ghetto this way. Without this form of resistance, thousands more Jewish people would have died of starvation.

Others Jews imprisoned in the ghetto resisted the Nazis by continuing to take part in Jewish religious activities and holidays, despite these often being banned. If participants were caught, they were subject to extreme punishments. An example of this religious resistance was the prayers held in secret at the house of Rabbi Szapiro.

Similarly, some set up schools. Others created cultural activities, such as plays, exhibitions, performances, and cafés with live music.



Keeping life 'normal' inside the ghetto

The Jewish historian Emanuel Ringelblum resisted during the Holocaust. Working with other historians such as Rachel Auerbach, Emanuel resisted Nazi rule from within the ghetto by creating an archive. This is what historians would normally do by collecting all sorts of documents and keeping them safe to show what a period of history would look like to people studying the period afterwards.

Emanuel and Rachel collected documents showing the Nazi crimes. Facing the threat of deportation to Treblinka death camp, Emanuel and Rachel buried their huge collection in milk cans and metal boxes to prevent the archive from falling into the hands of the Nazis. After the War, some of this record was dug up and rediscovered. This gives us detailed accounts of what life was like in the ghetto.



Janusz Korczak

Janusz Korczak (*yah-nuss kor-chuck*) was a well-known Polish Jewish teacher. Korczak had set up an orphanage in Poland for Jewish children who did not have any parents.

After the Nazi invasion of Poland, the orphanage was moved into the area called the Warsaw **Ghetto**. Despite the terrible conditions, Korczak worked tirelessly to ensure the orphaned children had enough food and social activities to keep them fit and busy.

Over the next two years, Korczak was repeatedly offered opportunities by resistance groups to escape the ghetto. Korczak kindly refused the offers because he did not want to abandon the children in his care. In the first week of August 1942, the Nazis came to the orphanage to collect the 200 children who were still housed there. Korczak insisted that he accompany them. Korczak and the children were sent to their deaths at the Treblinka **death camp**.



Glossary

Amidah: Hebrew (Jewish) word meaning to 'stand up against' something. Historians Yehuda Bauer uses the word to describe forms of Jewish resistance.

Ghetto: an area of a city that is separated from the rest of the city and is home to certain people that are rejected by those in power.

Death camp: Built by the Nazis from 1942 onwards. These camps were designed to murder Jews and had rail links, a gas chamber for murdering Jews and crematoria for burning the bodies.

