



## **Meaningfulworld Post War Recovery Mission to Armenia**

Day 1-5

*Dr. Ani Kalayjian & Irene Tananyan*

The Meaningfulworld Mission to Armenia this year focuses on the hope and resilience of the Armenian people as they continue to heal from generational trauma related to genocide hundred and six years ago, horizontal violence, and the more recent pain and scars of a war. This year's Mission team includes Dr. Ani Kalayjian and Irene Tananyan. Some of the goals of the Meaningfulworld Humanitarian Mission include post-war recovery, Emotional Intelligence workshops, and the installation of a suicide lifeline. What follows is a diary of the first five days of the Mission as related by the team.

### **Day 1: 30 April**

We began the first day of Meaningfulworld's Humanitarian Mission in Armenia with a dynamic team, full of perseverance, passion, and patience. Our dedicated team led by Dr. Ani went to several governmental institutions to get registered so that we could establish the suicide prevention lifeline in Armenia. Although it is challenging to work with governmental institutions in any country today, we experienced Armenia as an exception to the rule, as all the doors were opened wide for us. We greatly appreciate the help and guidance of Dr. Arman Vardanyan, Founder & Director of the Mental Health Foundation, who is supporting us with the suicide prevention lifeline.

We are extremely grateful to our local team: Margo Sargsyan, Artak Begoyan, and especially Gevorg Gharibyan, who have been supporting us tirelessly from Armenia over the past several months. It was exciting to meet with the phone company to agree on the conditions of a suicide prevention lifeline. Of course, we will celebrate joyfully as soon as we sign the contract in the next few days. The highlight of the day was meeting with the Minister of Emergency Situations (MES), Mr. Piloyan, and his able crisis intervention team led by Dr. Arevik Yerityan. We discussed the current needs of the Armenian people in post-war recovery, how to transform horizontal violence, as well as how to overcome the collective trauma of the war.

### **Day 2: 1 May**

The team had a very full schedule today, meeting officials from civil society and government to negotiate the best way to install the new suicide prevention lifeline! The mental health need is so great due to multiple challenges in the nation. There are also many people and organizations reaching out to us to be part of this new initiative! Special gratitude to the Minister of Emergency Situations, the Chief Psychologist Dr. Arevik Yeritsyan, Gohar Garapetyan, Marianna Galstyan, Sona Matinyan, Margo Sargsyan, Artak B., and Gevorg Gharibyan! Dr. Ani states, "I would like you to witness how our Meaningfulworld mindful village is multiplying daily! These partners feel the pulse of humanity and passionately share their talents and creativity with us! This is the true spirit of humanism and oneness!" Further, if you are among those around the world who are interested in sharing your talents with Meaningfulworld, Dr. Ani encourages you to kindly send your CV and information to Meaningfulworld via its website at [www.meaningfulworld.com](http://www.meaningfulworld.com). "Together we create miracles!" says Dr. Ani.

### **Day 3: 2 May**

The team had originally planned to pray and rest on Sunday but found that they had to make sure all of their plans were in place for the next week! “Irene and I worked in the morning and met our families at noon!” says Dr. Ani. “I then met professor Avanesyan to discuss practical steps for implementation of the lifeline and how to broaden it to become a stress and mental health crisis lifeline!” Dr. Ani further added that “We also planted seeds to pull together a National Psychology Association comprised of eight organizations and university psychology departments. I’m just beyond joy waiting for my next meeting while it’s raining so hard here in Yerevan! Could you tell from the photos?” Day 3 continued and, as always after the storm, a beautiful rainbow appeared in the sky. Dr. Ani was in the car so she unfortunately couldn’t take a great photo! “We met with the next generation of passionate change makers: Gevorg, Artak, Margo, and Lara!” she exclaims. “Together we strategized to reach excellent clinicians for the lifeline!” The team also surveyed individuals both online and in the packed cafe to settle on the best name for the lifeline. The two options were Emotional Support Lifeline and Life Meaning Lifeline. Ninety percent voted for the first one. Dr. Ani related that “This young and dynamic next generation of humanitarian clinicians are no nonsense and it’s just a pleasure to work with them.”

The team then had a big surprise when a colleague stopped by to collaborate. This was Raffy Semerdjian, founder of a great master’s program for medical doctors which is called Management Mix. It is a one-of-a-kind initiative to help medical doctors learn up-to-date management skills and become hospital administrators! We discussed how to bring Emotional Intelligence training to these physicians and have planned a short program for them for next Friday! Abris Raffy Jan! Tomorrow is a long day. Once again in the morning the team will run around in official offices to complete Dr. Ani’s registration and secure her identity card, and in the afternoon will conduct a workshop with Dirakonia Charitable Foundation, with the able leadership of the wonderful psychologist Dr. Avakian, funded by Kristina Haladjyan from California! “This is an amazing project to support our soldiers, veterans, and their families! Abres Kristina Jan!” says Dr. Ani.

#### **Day 4: 3 May**

After much needed official meetings, we conducted a workshop at the Diaconia Charitable Funding Center. The center provides educational and moral support for young women. Many girls with trauma have found a home here. We met Dr. Avaniyan who introduced us to the center and the many arts and crafts created to support the girls. The center teaches important professional skills that are empowering. We offered our psycho-educational workshop focusing on Emotional Intelligence, collective trauma, generational trauma, and Horizontal Violence. The experiential aspect of workshop was received extremely well, as laughter and release transformed the room. Participants asked questions and shared their feelings. The most frequently expressed feeling was sadness – several participants cried, releasing some of their sorrow. “I see my brother in the passengers,” said one young girl who lost her 19-year-old brother, crying. “I cry when I remember the road that I used to take to Artsakh to see my granny and now can’t take. I lost so many people and I feel that my soul is hurting.”

The Soul-Surfing yoga and tapping were the most delightful part of the workshop. The feedback was transformative. People felt uplifted, released, lightened, and relaxed! “I laughed so hard. I have not laughed so hard for a long time,” said one of the directors of the center. “I feel so much lighter and full of positive energy,” said another. And further: “My negative emotions were lifted.” We too felt uplifted witnessing this transformation. We concluded with our signature heart-to-heart circle of love! We were then surprised with a musical interlude by the children from the conservatory. An amazing trio of piano, qanun, and singing performed! We ended by presenting certificates and gifts of essential oils and a group photo!

#### **Day 5: 4 May**

We begin our day with preparation to conduct two workshops. Our first workshop was at Maple Leaf’s clinic with Dr. Vardges Avagyan, director of the clinic. Participants of the workshop were medical doctors, psychologists, and staff of the clinic. We focused on the psychological impact of the recent war and on self-care, Emotional Intelligence, and resilience. There was a special request from the group for mindfulness meditation. We then conducted a five-minute meditation session. This session was exceptionally well received. Here are some of their expressions: “I felt my stress melted away”; “I felt relaxed”; “I felt my shoulder tension and pain gone”; and “I experienced inner peace.” We concluded with the emotional freedom technique or tapping practice. The frequently expressed feeling was fear, worry, sadness, and frustrations with the political upheaval. While tapping, we focused on releasing fear. Although the level of fear was initially very high with group tapping, we were able

to bring the level of fear down to level two. The director gave us a tour of the clinic, showing us the massage and physical therapy rooms.

We were impressed with the equipment and the quality of the psychological therapy rooms. As soon as we said goodbye at the clinic, we rushed to the next workshop at the “EGO” NGO of Young Psychologists. This NGO shares the Mental Health Foundation’s office. The place has a spacious room with big windows, a small balcony that sets a peaceful atmosphere. Marianna Frunjyan, the president of the organization, greeted us. The workshop was interactive. We focused on the 7-Step Integrative Healing Model, Emotional Intelligence techniques, and how to cope with stress. We personalized the workshop to the needs of the participants, since it was a small group of psychologists and social workers. We emphasized the importance of establishing morning and evening routines for self-care. They also learned to practice gratitude in the morning and journal. Women shared that their meaning in life is raising children, giving them a good education, and reaching self-actualization. Aromatherapy was another favorite topic, as we gifted them with essential oils of lavender and rosemary. We also gave them post-trauma stabilizer and fearless flower remedies, generously donated by FesFlowers.com. After much needed soul-surfing, participants shared that they felt light and uplifted. At the conclusion, we discussed challenges of starting the first emotional support (suicide lifeline) in Armenia.

**Conclusion:**

The first five days of Meaningfulworld’s Humanitarian Mission was a great success thanks to the devoted partners and so many colleagues at home and in Armenia. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, “You must do the thing you think you cannot do.” On this Mission, Dr. Ani and her team are helping Armenians to confront the past as a part of their personal healing from genocide, war, and embedded generational trauma. In doing so, workshop participants are helped to slowly release and heal from a lifetime of emotional numbness, loss, and grief. The next week will bring even more opportunities for the Meaningfulworld team and colleagues in Armenia to apply the salve of human kindness and skilled therapeutic techniques to so many of those suffering from unthinkable pain of trauma.