



Tamir Gilat: Looking the Disease Straight in the Eyes

The Israel Cancer Research Fund, chaired by attorney Tamir Gilat, held its annual benefit evening last month. The event, held in the Savyon home of Gilat and his wife, attorney Keren Nahari, marked 40 years of the fund's existence. A few days later Tamir, 53, checked into the hospital for his third cancer operation in five years. A story full of giving / **Yael Waltzer**



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Cancer Research Fund

Hundreds of people rushed to the elegant home of attorney Tamir Gilat, a businessman and former deputy chairman of the Football Association, and his wife, attorney Keren Nahari. "Party" was written on the invitation, but everyone knew the reason for the gathering: The annual benefit for the Israel Cancer Research Fund, which Gilat chairs. The event marked 40 years of the fund's activity, and was attended—for the first time—by the fund's top leaders from the United States. A few days later Gilat, 53, checked in to the Laniado

Medical Center for a complicated operation due to the third occurrence of the disease he's had in five years. "In 2010 I was still a successful businessman in the field of energy, all my business was conducted abroad. On a transatlantic flight, I began feeling something that wasn't harmonious in my body. I spent several months undergoing tests which weren't conclusive. I insisted on a CT scan, which disclosed cancer in my body, and I was operated on immediately. Do you know how many people asked 'You have the disease?'" smiles Gilat. "Even people from the medical world. I have a friend who calls it

'an infection.' People are afraid of the word cancer."

After the operation, Gilat was told he had several months left to live, and he underwent conventional treatment. A few months later, another kind of cancer was found in his body, and again he was told that he had a few months left. Gilat didn't give up. He agreed to participate in an experiment conducted on a few hundred patients around the world, headed by Prof. Bella Kaufman of the Sheba Medical Center, together with Dr. Talia Golan. "The goal of the study was to add several months to the life expectancy of patients, who were classified

as terminal," Gilat explains. "Since then all the participants in the survey, other than me, have died. I am the only patient, with my kind of cancer, who remains alive, and that's because of the experimental biological research drug. I assume that I am still alive due to the combination of the drug, the doctor, luck and mental fortitude."

For the Israel Cancer Research Fund

During this time, Nahari, Gilat's wife, was exposed to the Cancer Research Fund's activities. She was the one who told Gilat about the fund, leading to his election as its chairman. "The fund's vision is that the cure for cancer can only come from research," says Gilat, who now dedicates most of his time to the fund's activities. "Funds for research are being raised in the U.S., Canada and Israel for research conducted only in Israel by Israeli researchers. In addition to taking advantage of the immense Israeli brainpower found here, the objective is to prevent a brain drain of Israeli researchers and, in parallel, to bring Israeli researchers back home from all kinds of leading cancer research centers around the world. This demands resources, to establish research labs, so that the message in the field can come from here. Researchers here have developed life-saving or life-extending drugs. The fund is independent: up to now it's distributed over \$56 million to more than 2,000 Israeli researchers. Each year it hands out \$3.5-\$4 million to 50-70 Israelis. The fact is that there's no one in Israel who hasn't been touched by cancer, in the first or second circle, and statistics work against us. The Israel Cancer Research Fund is the only chance there is that our children and grandchildren don't get ill with cancer, or that cancer turns into a chronic disease which can be dealt with. I'm alive due to research. Without the



Photo: Eitan Levi Tamir Gilat and Keren Nahari

ICRF -- Israel Cancer Research Fund

The fund's objective is promotion of innovative cancer research in Israel by Israeli researchers, developing Israel as a cancer research center. Since its establishment, the ICRF has been extremely successful in selecting projects that have resulted in breakthroughs in cancer detection and treatment.

experimental drug I receive, I wouldn't be sitting here now and talking. Also this time, after the operation, I'm going to have immunotherapeutic treatment, a breakthrough achieved in the past year."

What's changed, since you got ill?

"All the sentences they say to cancer patients: 'You'll return to yourself and be exactly like you were beforehand,' they're all bullshit. No one returns 100% to what they were. A cancer patient will never be what he was before they discovered the disease in him. I'm now 70% of the old Tamir, but it's 100% new Tamir, that's how it must be dealt with, with the beauty and difficulty in it. There are things I had to give up, because I can't do them, but I discovered new things that it's worth breathing every minute for. I exercise every day, I look at the sun and stars, write poetry. I tell my stories, it's all a kind of mission for me. I hold on and get stronger, when

I tell other people that I'm the same person who dared look cancer and death straight in the eyes and go on living."

Are you angry?

Why? I have no anger, maybe that's part of the secret of my existence. I have realization and acceptance in me, that it's my fate. I don't have self-pity. I don't ask why it happened to me, I move ahead with a smile. I always knew how to deal with pressure situations and tragedies, and I brought my abilities and my qualities from those places. I'm helped by Buddhism, meditation, that teaches how to battle with thoughts and not to dismiss them, but not to sink into them."

Moments of sadness?

"Certainly. When I go to events with the girls, I think about cancer. There was a tear, for a second, at my daughter's kindergarten party, when they lit the candles and sang "and get to the next year." I live from day to day, don't know if I will attain, only hope. But my quality of life is excellent, I don't deal with statistics or dangers. I live my life in peace, in harmony with myself and with the world. As the former Maccabi Tel Aviv football goalkeeper, we were taught to live from Saturday to Saturday. That's what my dreams are like, short range. I got sick at 48½. At 49, the longest-range dream I allowed myself was to be 53, so that I could see Alma, my oldest daughter from my first marriage, finish high school and go into the army and Gavrielle and Maya, our two daughters who are six and seven, start school.

You celebrated your 53rd last June.

What are your dreams now?

"The landmark now, that I've set for myself, is to see the little girls in Scouts and the oldest finish the army. Perhaps," he smiles, "I'll choose when the Tel Aviv light rail is completed. That would assure me eternal life." ➔

The Israel Cancer Research Fund
icrf.org.il