Can Trust Heal the Shattered Pieces of Our World?

She ran into the forest, tears streaming down her face, searching for a place to hide. She ran until her feet ached, her lungs burned, and exhaustion clawed at her every step. Crouching beneath a bush, my great-grandmother lay trembling on the cold ground. Then, she was caught.

November 29, 1940, Zakrzówek, Poland: Bluma Herlich was born into a family of twelve, struggling to survive. They were forced into the Warsaw Ghetto- twelve people in a one-room apartment, food a luxury. Yet Bluma refused to let cruelty define her world. Even in the ghetto, she trusted that humanity was not all lost, that there were still hearts capable of compassion.

October 7, 1942, Oświęcim, Poland: Polish collaborators stormed the apartment. "Run!" echoed through the walls, and she did, with her family trailing behind. One by one, she heard the screams as her siblings were captured. Hiding beneath a bush, she cried. Then, grabbed by rough hands, darkness swallowed her, the train came, and Auschwitz awaited.

Bluma was one of the few children spared immediate execution. She was forced to watch, helpless, as her innocent family—her siblings, her father—dug a large pit, unaware that it would become the very pit in which they would be murdered. Auschwitz broke Bluma’s body, but not her will. She clung to the belief that goodness still existed. Trust became her lifeline, the one thing she refused to let them take. She chose to trust that life could still hold meaning, kindness, and that she could rebuild. She believed without trust, there was nothing left to fight for.

January 27, 1945: Liberation. Bluma survived. She grew up. She rebuilt.

Her name was Bluma Herlich, but to my mother, she is Safta Bluma. I never met her. Yet I know her—her strength, her pain, her lessons. My children will know her. Their children will know her and how Safta Bluma spoke of trust and forgiveness. “The world stands on trust,” she told her children. “We must forgive to heal.” Instead of harboring resentment, she focused on building a loving home, treating people with kindness regardless of their background. To outsiders, she seemed unbroken, but her obsessive cleaning told a different story—a scar left by trauma. My mother says it was proof enough. I can only imagine her scrubbing the floor with tears in her eyes, trying to erase specks of dust only she could see. They broke part of her, and yet, she trusted—because trust was the only thing that kept her human.

Safta Bluma believed the world was good, that every person deserves respect, kindness, and trust. Lately, however, I have found myself struggling to regain my trust in humanity. With the horrors of October 7–*exactly 78 years after Safta Bluma’s attack*–so indelibly burned into my brain, I wonder: how can we ever truly trust again? Trust makes us vulnerable, but it also blinds us. Perhaps the Jewish people have learned, in the harshest of manners, that being trusting, in today’s times, may simply be too risky.

In my moments of turning away from openness, I find myself turning back to Safta Bluma’s words. My mother always tells me that even while enduring the horrors of Auschwitz, Safta Bluma would remind herself, “Hashem, the world feels so dark. But I trust you, I trust that you will turn the lights back on.” Her ability to hold onto trust in the darkest moments inspires me and helps me see a different perspective.

I still wrestle with trust. I still question if the world deserves it. But then I think of Safta Bluma. If she, after witnessing the worst of humanity, could still choose trust- if she could rebuild, love, and believe in goodness- then maybe I can, too. Maybe, in holding onto trust, I am not being naive but rather honoring the strength my Safta Bluma passed down to me. Maybe trust is not a risk, but a responsibility. And maybe, just maybe, it is how I, too, can help turn the lights back on.