

Newspaper of the Jewish Community of Lithuania

JERUSALEM



of Lithuania

DECREE

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FOR AWARDING THE ORDER OF LITHUANIAN GRAND DUKE GEDIMINAS AND THE MEDAL OF THE ORDER OF GEDIMINAS TO CITIZENS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

Chapter 1. On the occasion of Feb. 16 - the Day of Restoration of the State of Lithuania - and of Mar. 11 - the Day of Restoration of Lithuanian Independence - the following citizens of the Republic of Lithuania are awarded the Order of Lithuanian Grand Duke Gediminas and the Medal of the Order of Gediminas for their achievements for the good of the State of Lithuania:

IIIrd Level Order: Emanuelis ZINGERIS - Lithuanian Independence Act signatory.

IVth Level Order: Chaim POTASHINSKI - conductor, pianist, pedagogue, professor.

Vth Level Order: Olga STEINBERG - pianist, professor with the Lithuanian Academy of Music.

PRESIDENT OF LITHUANIA VALDAS ADAMKUS

HUMAN KINDNESS AND SOLIDARITY



Lithuanian citizens who saved Jews during the Second World War were awarded Yad Vashem diplomas and "Righteous among the Nations" medals on Feb. 10 at the Lithuanian Jewish Community assembly hall.

- From a speech by S. Alperavičius, Chairman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community:

Four hundred and twenty people have already been awarded diplomas and "Righteous among the Nations" medals in Lithuania. Today 12 more people will receive this award, and we hope that the future will continue to reveal new names.

The Lithuanian Jewish community expresses its deep respect for those who heroically risked their own and their families' lives during the period of the Nazi occupation, and helped people who were citizens in their own country (...).

What came to be a significant contemporary world event - an international Holocaust forum - was recently held in Stockholm.

Taking into account issues discussed at the forum, it is very important to remember those who saved people; but we must also not forget the horrifying events of that time. This is a very serious problem which needs continued and careful study (...).

On behalf of the Lithuanian Jewish community I would like to congratulate all of the "Righteous among the Nations" people who are gathered here today. Please accept our sincere gratitude for your heroic deeds.

- From a speech by Ronit Ben Dor, Acting Israeli Ambassador to the Baltic Countries:

I have the great honour today to award diplomas and medals to those whom we call the "Righteous among the Nations".

We consider it our duty to pay tribute to these noble people who are with us today, and to declare our respect for their dignity and stoicism - for they remained human in the hour of truth. To speak words of thanks to these people is very little in terms of what we can

do, and we are obliged to speak them loudly and openly. Lithuania should be proud of these people. Today the country is facing choices. Will it be able to look at its past openly and honestly?

One of the very saddest issues is the fact that there were criminals among the Lithuanians. Perhaps Lithuania's young people are fairly knowledgeable regarding their own nation's suffering during the Second World War, but not all of them are aware of the history of the Holocaust, when 95% of Lithuania's Jews were annihilated simply because they were born to Jewish mothers.

We presume to look at a person as a brother, and to maintain that there is a distinction between barbarism and civilization. The generation of people who survived the Holocaust is gradually disappearing, but those who carried out the crimes walk the streets freely. Lithuania must therefore look at its past, and restore historical justice. People must renounce discrimination and incorrect stereotypes.

The "Righteous among the Nations" are an example to us and to everyone, and I think that you will agree with me that they are special and unusual people, and that the world must know about them. Unfortunately not all whom we call the "Righteous among the Nations" are with us today, and thus their diplomas and medals will be given to their family or friends.

- From a speech by Vytautas Landsbergis, Chairman of the Parliament: (...)

In dealing with the day to day problems which seem significant to us, we often forget that there are more important events and deeds in life. Ones which are carried out by those whom we call the ordinary, common people. But it turns out that they are neither ordinary, nor common.

An elderly woman, whom we would probably pass on the street without even considering in terms of what she had accomplished during her lifetime, has just accepted this award.

These people acted correctly because that is what their heart told them to do. They felt a great

compassion and love for those close to them, and for others, especially the weak and the helpless. They often had to save helpless children from death. And that feeling was far stronger than the fear of the Nazi terror or the awareness of danger.

Several years ago, in Austria, I had the opportunity to see a film made by journalist and director Marek Halter about people who saved others, and their own accounts of how and why they acted as they did. Nearly all of them were surprised to hear the standard journalist question: "Why did you do it?" They had never asked themselves. For they had not been able to do otherwise.

The noble, elderly people whom we see here could long since have spoken out about their deeds, but they didn't. They had to be found so that we could express our respect to them.

There are in fact many more people who took part in helping the Jews than is officially acknowledged. There are a great many who played some role, but they're not prepared to talk about it, and they don't consider it anything special.

There are many who simply took a young Jewish girl by the hand and brought her to someone. Back then it was considered a crime and was very dangerous. Someone brought an infant in a farm basket and left it under a tree at the head of Laisvės alėja at a designated time; someone else came at the appropriate time, took the basket, brought it to my aunt's door, rang the bell, and disappeared. We will never know their names, but they also took part in saving people.

There are a great many such facts of human kindness and solidarity. For certain given reasons we read and hear much more frequently about criminals and suspected crimes. Those things must be talked about, and justice must be carried out. But it makes sense to remember and to speak of honourable people more often as well. Then we ourselves will think better of others.

Photo: Elzbeta Tomashevskia accepting her award

Mazl tov Tobias Yafet!

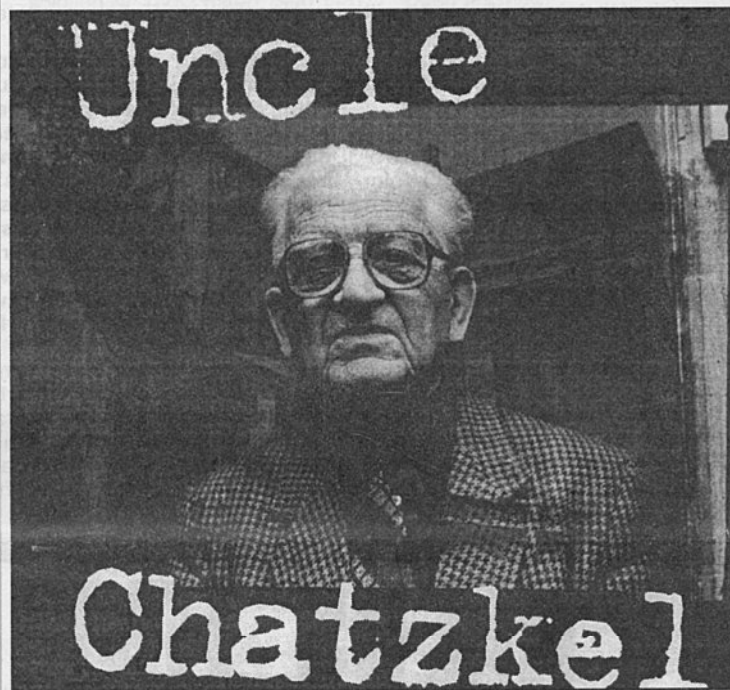
Dear friend!

Congratulations from the Lithuanian Jewish community on your 70th birthday. Yours has been a long travelled path; your childhood and early youth were tied to the difficult years of the Second World War, the Nazi occupation, and the genocide of the Jewish nation. But neither the horrors of the Ghetto nor post-war tribulations broke you. Left without family, you overcame the difficult post-war conditions, acquired a higher education, and went on to lead a fruitful working life.

With the restoration of Lithuania's independence, you joined in the active work of reviving the Lithuanian Jewish community. The members of the Union of Former Prisoners of Ghettos and Concentration Camps trusted you as their elected chairman. In this respected position, you have energetically defended the rights of people who suffered the very worst trials of the Second World War. Your concerns are for those whose health was undermined by inhuman suffering, and you have dedicated much of your work to their well-being. The former prisoners of the ghettos and concentration camps confirm their trust in their sincere appreciation of your efforts.

We wish you good health, unflagging creative energy, and ongoing fruitful work.

Lithuanian Jewish Community Executive.
Union of Former Prisoners of Ghettos and Concentration Camps.



"UNCLE CHATZKEL"

The Lithuanian Jewish Cultural Club was instrumental in organizing the premiere of a new Australian documentary film entitled "Uncle Chatzkel" at the "Skalvija" film theatre in Vilnius. Chairman of the Cultural Club, Prof. M. Petuchauskas introduced the evening (whose motto was "Cultural collaboration and harmony between nations"), and the filmmakers: director Rodney Freedman and cameraman Nicholas Sherman.

The theatre was full, with people standing, and even sitting on the floor. They were apparently drawn by Uncle Chatzkel, for the man is an epoch in himself. During the nearly 100 years of his life he has seen the Russian revolution and two world wars, has experienced the Nazi genocide and the communist regime, has lost 2 of his young sons, and is now witness to Lithuania's rebirth. Chatzkel Lemchen is a celebrated scholar, lexicographer, and cultivator of the Lithuanian language, as well as a bridge connecting Lithuanian, Russian, and Yiddish cultures.

Roots

In his film, director R. Freedman appears to be trying to argue and refute writer Shalom Aleichem's idea that the Jews are a universal people for they have no roots. He saw his uncle Chatzkel, who had been a kind of unsolvable family mystery, for the first time in a photograph taken in 1913, which he'd been given by his grandmother's sister on a visit to London in 1980. Perhaps the first film sequences flashed through his subconscious back then, but the ultimate push to create a film about Ch. Lemchen was a story told by a relative at the Pesach table, about a chance meeting with Lemchen in Lithuania while he was travelling around Europe.



Rodney spoke to us on his second visit to Vilnius: "I was overcome with confusion, emotion, and an inner anxiety when I arrived at my uncle Chatzkel's in Vilnius, and rang the doorbell. The door opened, and I said: 'Uncle Chatzkel, I'm your relative Rodney from Australia.' A short, grey-haired, suited man bowed slightly and extended his hand. He began to speak and became very upset. We hugged each other, and for an instant three generations meshed. The years and distance vanished, and we were no longer strangers, but family." The director had been particularly apprehensive and worried about showing his film to his uncle. And now the time had arrived. The telephone rang and Rodney said: "It's done. The film is finished. And I've shown it to my uncle Chatzkel."

(cont'd. on p. 5)