

The Survivor Mitzvah Project

Helping Elderly Holocaust Survivors in Eastern Europe and the Former USSR

The Survivor Mitzvah Project is a humanitarian effort providing direct financial aid to elderly Holocaust Survivors in remote areas of Eastern Europe and Ukraine. They are in desperate need of food, medicine, suitable shelter, and some loving kindness. Most are sole survivors of their families who were murdered by the Nazis, many are the last Jews in their town or village, some are survivors of the killing fields, some fought with the Russians or as Partisans in the forests of Belarus, and some were slaves in the Gulag long after the war ended. All are elderly and in dire need of help. Alone and isolated, they do not receive WWII reparation funds from Germany.

“The Survivor Mitzvah Project began in 2001, when I traveled to Vilnius, Lithuania. There I met Prof. Dovid Katz, Academic Director of the Vilnius Yiddish Institute at Vilnius University. Every year Prof. Katz goes on expeditions in Eastern Europe seeking out the last remaining elderly “shtetl” Jews, bringing them aid, and documenting their unique life stories on film. Knowing I was making a journey through small villages in Lithuania and Belarus, he gave me a list of elderly Jews to visit. At his request, I brought them food, Yiddish papers, and small packets of US dollars. This was a wonderful and life-changing experience for me.

When I returned to the United States, with the help of Prof. Katz and his colleague Mr. Chic Wolk, the Survivor Mitzvah Project was created, which now reaches out to hundreds of Holocaust Survivors in Lithuania, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, and Slovakia-and the list continues to grow. There are thousands of elderly Holocaust survivors who urgently need aid.

These last remaining Shtetl Jews are living in horrific conditions and have little or no money for food, heat, or medicine. Many exist on what food they can grow-mostly potatoes. Now, in their 80s and 90s, they are too old to continue to dig the earth. The call for help is urgent. It is our mission to see that these elderly and forgotten people, who have experienced the horrors of the Holocaust first hand, will not be hungry and neglected in their final years.” - Zane Buzby



Zane Buzby in Belarus 2001

Each person on the list has a unique story to share about his or her life in wartime and about the Jewish world of yesterday. Excerpts of some letters from survivors include:

Kaunas, Lithuania: In 2004, 86 year old Josif “Itske” Gavenda, wrote in Yiddish that the letter and aid we sent was *“like Manna that G-d sent to the Jewish people in the Sinai.”*

Pinsk, Belarus: Maria Kemerova writes, *“From your letter I feel warmth. We have the same Jewish blood. When I think I have friends in America, Jewish people who think of me, this is very nice.”*

Grodno, Belarus: Inna Genyush writes, *“I am very grateful to you for all the letters and help. Thank G-d he gives to the world such people like you who care about us.”*

Kherson, Ukraine: Yefim Fabie, 87, writes about the political chaos and poverty brought to his country by Perestroika, robbing the elderly of their pensions and denying them medical help. *“Maybe even in Ukraine, there will come a time when people will work and receive rewards for their labor so they will be able to live with dignity and not only barely make ends meet.”*

Marijampole, Lithuania: Mera Abramovich writes, *“The fate of the Jews in Marijampole was terrible. Those who could not run were all shot and were put in one grave all together, men, children, women and elders-all undressed, naked, and shot. After that, the hole was covered with lime...for 3 days and the earth in this grave was raising up and down and there was moaning coming out of the grave. More than 8000 people killed. This is the fate of the Jews in my town.”*

“Who saves a life saves the world entire.”

The Survivor Mitzvah Project In Action

We devote considerable ingenuity and precautions to ensure the safe delivery of funds in these areas, whether by registered mail or personal contact. Our devoted courier in Belarus, a native Belarussian non-Jewish high school English teacher, wrote the following dispatches in the course of carrying out the mission of the Survivor Mitzvah Project.

"I must thank you...that I get this opportunity from you to change the life of these people...to play this role of some kind angel."

When the trip begins, I always encourage myself that "everything will go well", when it comes to an end, I smile inside at myself – how could I have had any doubts in the success! On my way back (six hours in a bus) I was thinking of what I will write in a letter to you and came to the conclusion that I must thank you not from all those who are eagerly waiting for me there, but from myself, for the fact that I get this opportunity from you to change the life of these people, to support them, to play this role of some "kind angel".



When I come to the door, I repeat the name not to mix it, put the broadest smile on my face and meet the one who opens the door with the warmest words I can imagine, listen to bits of their news, mostly troubles, diseases, I ensure that everything will be better, that God helps them and always thinks of them, promise to come back, and smile, smile, smile. Don't you think that psychologically I get lots of cure and positive energy for myself? After such "trips" I look at the world from a bit different angle. Actually, I feel much happier. This is what I wanted to thank you for.

General impressions are beyond any possible words. The people I visit don't have enough words to thank you, some said that now they have an opportunity to live (the situation with all the medicine and all the numerous problems was almost unbearable.) There were tears in their eyes, some kissed my hands (I was feeling like falling underground because of the shame.) Of course I tried to convince them that I have nothing to do with all of this, simply a transmitter, but at the same time I was happy to be connected to such a godly deed. Your smiling photo is in a special place behind some glass (usually it's an old-fashioned sideboard) among the closest relatives. I gave almost everybody your address and the names of the families you sent but don't expect letters from all - some are blind, others and immovable, still others don't understand how to do this, etc. I am sending you great thanks from everybody on the list.

It's all risky, I felt afterwards, I sit with several thousand dollars in a train at night, early in the morning absolutely unprotected for several hours at the station. There is a [Russian] folk tale heroine – Frog Traveler – the nickname my closest friend gave me.

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If you wish to participate in this project please contact us.
We accept all donations, large or small, and
are seeking grants and other forms of sponsorship for the whole project.



Mina Sheffer 2005

All donations are tax deductible.
Checks can be made payable to The Friends of the Vilnius Yiddish Institute
a non-profit 501 (c) (3) - earmarked for

The Survivor Mitzvah Project

Zane Buzby, Director
The Survivor Mitzvah Project
2658 Griffith Park Blvd., Suite 299
Los Angeles, CA 90039

or donate online at
www.SurvivorMitzvah.org

For more information on how you can participate, please
email us at zzmail@sbcglobal.net or visit our website www.SurvivorMitzvah.org.

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A humanitarian effort dedicated to helping elderly and forgotten Holocaust Survivors in Eastern Europe.

Most are sole survivors of their families who were murdered by the Nazis, many are the last Jews in their town or village, some are survivors of the killing fields, some fought with the Russians or as Partisans in the forests of Belarus, and some were slaves in the Gulag long after the war ended. All are elderly, isolated, alone and in dire need of help.

**FUNDS ARE URGENTLY NEEDED:
and our list continues to grow.**

As of December 2006 we have a list of over 650 elderly Jewish Holocaust survivors who live in poverty and are in urgent need of help.

These people do not receive reparation from the German government, and with the collapse of the Soviet Union and Lithuania joining the European Union, their meager pensions are now either nonexistent or so small that they do not lift these people above the poverty level.

Their needs for food, medicine, heat and shelter can be totally met and their dire circumstances relieved through financial aid.

The basic minimum to help these people is a little over one dollar a day (approximately \$40 per month for each person). This will, at the very least, buy some food and a few medications. To provide basic food and a few medications to 650 persons we need \$26,000 per month. \$312,000.00 per annum).

We are currently working with a meager budget and cannot help all of those who are in such great need every month.

Any donation, large or small, can make a difference and truly save lives immediately. The months of harsh winter make the current situation even more urgent as many of the elderly are without heat.

Donations are tax deductible. The Survivor Mitzvah Project is a project of The Friends of the Vilnius Yiddish Institute. All donations are tax deductible.

Checks can be made payable to The Friends of The Vilnius Yiddish Institute, a non-profit 501 (c) (3), earmarked for The Survivor Mitzvah Project and sent to:

Zane Buzby, Director
The Survivor Mitzvah Project
2658 Griffith Park Blvd., Suite 299
Los Angeles, CA 90039

or donate online at
www.SurvivorMitzvah.org

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ווילנער פראָגראַם אין ייִדיש
VILNIUS PROGRAM IN YIDDISH

May, 2007

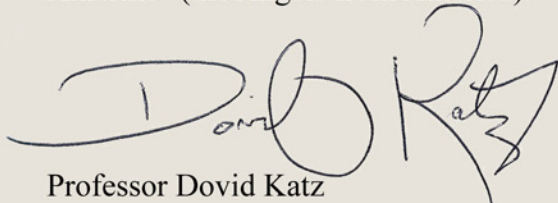
Professor Dovid Katz
Research Director, Vilnius Yiddish Institute
Vilnius University, Lithuania

It is a pleasure for me to offer my highest recommendation on behalf of the wonderful work being carried out by the Survivor Mitzvah project to help poor, elderly Jews in Eastern Europe make it through the month.

What the Survivor Mitzvah Project does is to actually send income supplements to these very poor senior citizens.... Those who were incarcerated in a ghetto or concentration camp and are "survivors" in the narrower technical sense often get 1600 euros a year compensation from Germany; but the vast majority of elderly Jews are alive due entirely to their escape to Soviet held territory where many joined the Red Army and continue to be proud of their medals won fighting the Nazis and their allies. These groups do not get that or any other compensation. They returned to their devastated homes where their loved ones were all killed, and stayed on site for all those decades after the war, right up to the present, now often guarding sites of Jewish historic interest.

The Vilnius Yiddish Institute's own expeditions for Yiddish folklore and dialectology have led us to meet more and more "Mohicans" in smaller towns in Lithuania, Belarus, Latvia, Ukraine and Moldova (Moldavia). And it has warmed my heart, on subsequent visits, to see the joy derived from the little (or more than a little) bit of extra that comes from America each month.

It is hard to find words to explain the happiness that these income supplements bring to the faces and souls of these poor, elderly people who have had such difficult and painful lives. They speak about the Survivor Mitzvah Project as "di malokhim fun Amerike" (the Angels from America).



Professor Dovid Katz
Research Director, Vilnius Yiddish Institute
Vilnius University, Lithuania



Professor Dovid Katz visits Peshke Levitan
Smolovitch, Belarus

Time is running out...

The Survivor Mitzvah Project

A humanitarian effort dedicated to helping elderly and forgotten Holocaust Survivors in Eastern Europe

Mission Statement

The Survivor Mitzvah Project is 100% dedicated to providing financial aid to those elderly and forgotten Jewish Holocaust Survivors scattered throughout Eastern Europe who are sick, impoverished, isolated and receive no direct financial aid from any other agency. Their families and communities destroyed by the Nazis, they struggle to survive in their few remaining years, lacking the means to buy even the most basic of human necessities: food, medicine, heat and shelter. Most live alone in horrific conditions.

Our project, by bringing help quickly and directly to these survivors, helps ensure that they may live out their last years with some measure of comfort, support and dignity.

Although this situation is urgent and dire, this crisis can be totally resolved with financial aid.

Zane Buzby, Director
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The Survivor Mitzvah Project is a project of the *Friends of the Vilnius Yiddish Institute*

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The Survivor Mitzvah Project

The Survivor Mitzvah Project considers all Jewish Men, Women, and Children who experienced the Holocaust “Survivors”, whether they were in ghettos, concentration camps, partisan groups, the Russian Army, the Gulag, slave labor camps, or whether they were hidden or fled to Russia to escape the killing squads. In every case the German War machine decimated lives and entire families and these survivors were left with nothing. Because the definition of “Survivor” used by the German government to determine reparation is narrow, many elderly people receive no compensation at all, even though they suffered tremendously under the Nazis and in post war Soviet times. The Survivor Mitzvah Project seeks to help these people who receive no reparations from the German government. The Survivor Mitzvah Project complements rather than duplicates the fine work being done by major organizations such as the JDC and other charitable and humanitarian groups.

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