

SHIRT

Shmuel Daich was imprisoned with his family in the Kovno ghetto. Together with his father Menachem Mendel he worked at forced labor, building an airfield outside the ghetto. One day, when they returned from the night shift they saw an *aktion* taking place in the ghetto, with residents standing in two groups in the town square. Menachem Mendel, realizing what was happening, decided to divide his large family into smaller groups so that they would go through the selection separately as he quoted: "The camp which is left shall escape." (as learned from the biblical story of Jacob and Esau in Genesis 32:8-9). Shmuel, aged 18, Chaya Fruma, aged 17, and their younger brother Yitzchak, aged 2, stood together in a group. In his final words, his father requested that Shmuel serve as a father to the children. Following the *aktion*, Shmuel, Chaya Fruma and Yitzchak returned to their home. The rest of the family was transferred to the "Ninth Fort", where they were all murdered. Shmuel found protected work as a shoemaker in the ghetto. He joined the "Shomer Hadati" movement and the "Zionist Covenant" underground, which acted in the ghetto to provide goods to the partisans active in the forests surrounding Kovno. Despite harboring many doubts, and although he felt responsible for his siblings, Shmuel decided, with the encouragement of his sister and cousins, to leave the ghetto and join the partisans, to increase the chances that someone from the family might remain alive. At the end of the war, Shmuel was the only member of his family to survive.

Before leaving the ghetto, his sister Chaya surprised him with a gift – a shirt on which the Tablets had been sewn in blue thread, with the initials of his name, S.D., and said to him: "The two Tablets will be near your heart... you are joining the Red (communist) partisans whose war is also against religion..." Shmuel left the ghetto with a pistol in one pocket and his tefillin in the other.

He did not remove the shirt he received from his sister the entire time he fought with the partisans. Even after liberation, while fleeing from Lithuania to Romania, he did not remove the shirt, which symbolized for him his obligation toward his heritage and identity, and which was the last item remaining from his family. When he later wed, he wore the shirt under the *chuppah*.

These artifacts, like others carried by those torn from their families and who were sent or fled to the unknown, later became the last connecting thread with their families and were a source of strength and hope.



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Shirt embroidered by Chaya Fruma Daich for her brother, Shmuel, in the Kovno Ghetto, prior to his joining the partisans.

Yad Vashem Artifacts Collection, Donated by Shmuel Ben-Menachem (Daich), Hadera, Israel.