World’s oldest man dies
113-year-old was an Auschwitz survivor

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Yisrael Kristal, a Holocaust survivor from Haifa who was recognized by Guinness World Records as the oldest man in the world, has died a month before his 114th birthday.

Born on Sept. 15, 1903, in the town of Zarnow, Poland, Kristal moved to Lodz in 1920 to work in his family’s candy business.

100 years later, he celebrated his Bar Mitzvah — missed due to WW I

He continued operating the business after the Nazis forced the city’s Jews into a ghetto, where Kristal’s two children died.

In 1944, he was deported to Auschwitz, where his wife, whom he had married at 25, was killed.

In 1950, he moved to Haifa with his second wife and their son, working again as a confectioner. In addition to his son and daughter, Kristal has numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Guinness recognized him as the world’s oldest living man in 2016. When asked at the time what his secret was to long life, Kristal said: “I don’t know the secret for long life. I believe that everything is determined from above and we shall never know the reasons why. There have been smarter, stronger and better-looking men than me who are no longer alive. All that is left for us to do is to keep on working as hard as we can and rebuild what is lost.”

Last year, when he turned 113, about 100 family members celebrated his Bar Mitzvah — a century after he missed it due to the upheavals of World War I.
Like those orphans, he was totally alone.

He had no pleasurable use to which to put his wealth. He also was wounded with guilt, since his factory had made uniforms for the Nazis or their collaborators. So he dedicated his wealth to this orphanage.

He spoke. Shaking.

He could hardly stand.

He faced the orphans and spoke.

Suddenly, a word escaped his lips, in Yiddish. *(kindred)* (children).

Then, two more words, with emotional force, *Tovsher kinder* (precious children).

When these three words, unplanned, the boys spontaneously lifted their heads.

The speaker was shaking.

The headmistress feared for him and came up to him, supported him, and put her arm around his shoulders until the breath of her speech, you just gave your speech, and put her arm around him down.

The boys cried.

It was a tale of years, people weeping through their empty cheeks from tears.

Somehow, Mr. Lowitz powerfully three words gave them permission to cry.

They cried and cried, for five minutes.

Five minutes is a long time. Unasked, one of the boys arose to speak. He introduced himself and gave his name.

Aharon.

He was about 20 years old. He had seen his father killed before his very eyes.

He said:

I have not been selected to represent the orphans, but I feel that what I am about to say will represent the orphans.

We have become non-human. We are no longer human because every single night in the barracks, we were no longer human beings. We had difficulty even crying.

Mr. Lowitz, now we cried for the first time in years.

He who can cry today can laugh tomorrow.

We are human beings again.

Aharon went on.

He said:

I have more to say.

I can claim, my fellow orphans will not mind.

When I was a child my parents sent me to spend the summer holidays with my grandfather, the Rabbi. My grandfather was a great scholar. He taught me verse after verse, biblical book after biblical book.

In the Holocaust, I forgot everything. Except one chapter.

During the Holocaust, I survived because every single night in the barracks I recalled one thing my grandfather taught me.

It was the only thing I remember.

It was the prophecy of Ezekiel.

The dry bones.

Ezekiel saw a valley of the dry bones, the dead bones, then suddenly flesh came upon these bones and then one by one they ashen up, their fingers down, their arm to a hand, until they were whole and they came alive.

The valley of the dry bones. I said it myself every single night.

This is how I survived.

Rabbi Israel Lau, the ‘living legend’

The former chief rabbi of Israel recounts his liberation from Buchenwald

Didn’t even know Aharon’s last name,” said Rabbi Lau. “At the orphanage, age, we sailed to Eretz Yisrael, and didn’t know what happened to Aharon.”

Rabbi Lau and his brother arrived in Israel on April 11, thirty-eight years later.

At that moment, Rabbi Lau seemed to veer off topic from his theme of what happened to him at liberation. Suddenly, he was talking about Israel in the 2000s.

Talking about the intifada.

About the 1,000 Israeli innocent lives lost.

He circled around to one horror story in particular, one incident, the bombing of the Shoroo Pizza shop in downtown Jerusalem in 2003.

Suicide bomber blew himself up and 15 customers in the pizza shop.

Among the victims were two parents and five of their children, with two women.

Rabbi Lau knew the family personally. He had officiated at the parents’ wedding.

Throughout the intermission, he visited the shiva houses of all the victims.

He went to many of the funerals.

He also visited the wounded, and mainly the wounded children of this family, whom he knew.

He faced an eight-year-old girl in a hospital bed, severely injured, orphaned in a moment.

To this day, he remembers how he knew that he had lost both parents, who was all alone in the world, and in that country with just one brother and needed to learn a new language. He went on like this, trying to encourage the wounded.

“I pointed to him, and said: ‘Know it. It is you.’

I could not disclose to the children all the details of their condition — that their lives were in danger."

So the rabbi and the doctors did the best they could do, where the rabbi was apprised by the medical team of the true situation.

Suddenly, the hallway was rather narrow and crowded with back of the doctors and the rabbi waving hands.

So they split and a man walked through.

He spied Rabbi Lau and said hello.

As if he knew him.

Rabbi Lau did not know him.

“I am Aharon.”

From three words, 56 years passed away.

Aharon. Rabbi Lau is speechless.

Moved.

Moved beyond any understanding.

of the doctors standing around him. Aharon? Aharon of the dry bones?

“This followed you,” says Aharon. “I know you. I have watched you.”

Aharon has risen himself.

“I had seen so much destruction many years ago, and I was standing there like a doctor. When I came to Israel, it was impossible. I had no sponsor. But the rabbi who helped us — Rabbi Lau became responsible for me. He brought me to the hospital. He told the doctors depend on me.”

As I am mesmerized by Rabbi Lau, still his voice was calm, his demeanor — again — by Aharon.

A heap of corpses.

Dry bones, come alive.

Rabbi Lau was brought to Denver and Vail by Chabad of Colorado.