



On April 27, 1988, the Israeli government issued a stamp commemorating the 50th anniversary of the founding of Israel that honored the Righteous Among the Nations. The portraits of five people were shown, and Sugihara Chiune was one of them.

杉原千畝

SUGIHARA CHIUNE

Sugihara Chiune: 'Visas for Life' and the bond of humanity

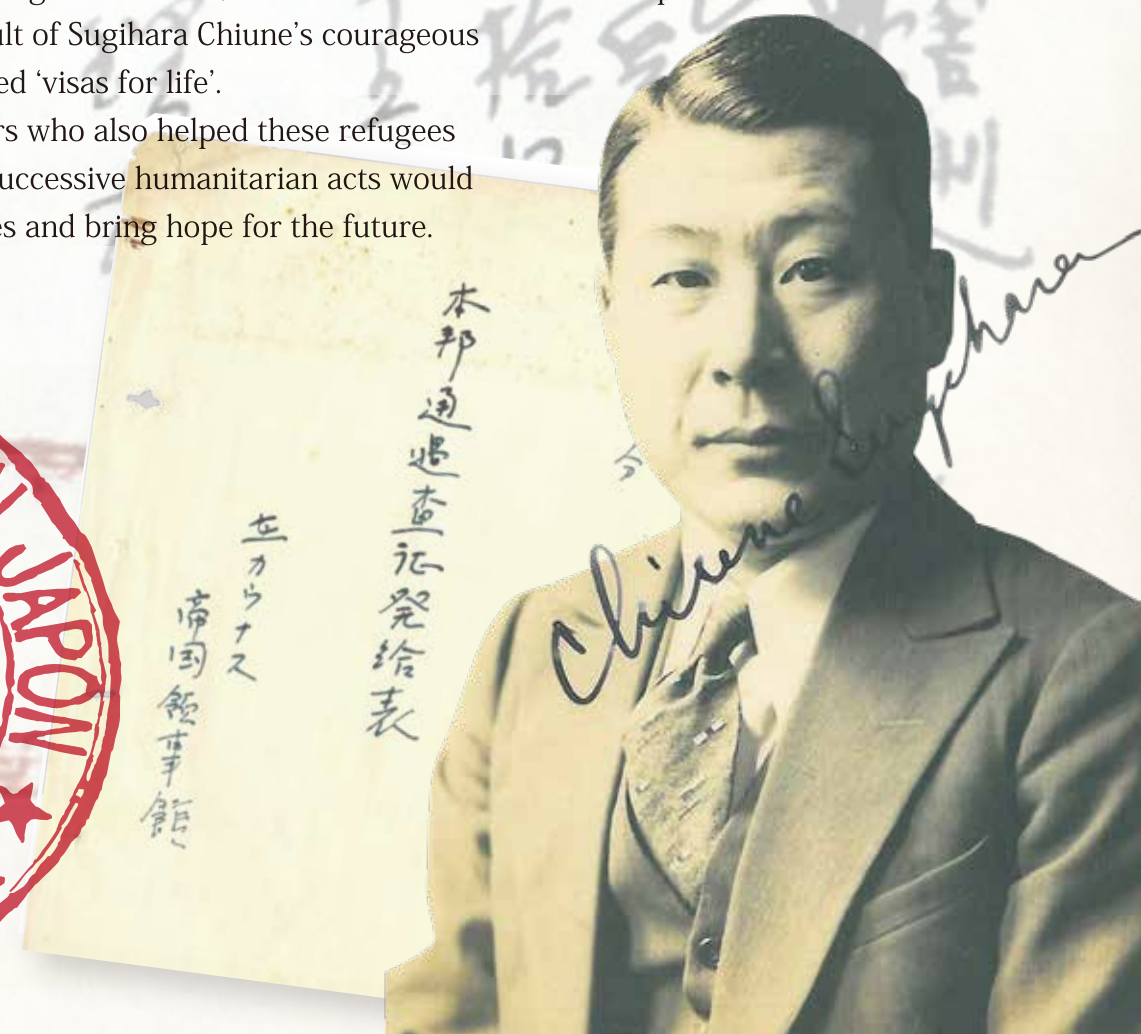
During World War II, there was a Japanese diplomat who saved the lives of thousands of displaced Jews by issuing transit visas to Japan at the Japanese Consulate in Kaunas, Lithuania. His name was Sugihara Chiune, and he was also known as Sempo. The visas issued as a result of Sugihara Chiune's courageous humanitarian act are called 'visas for life'. With the support of others who also helped these refugees fleeing for freedom, the successive humanitarian acts would eventually save many lives and bring hope for the future.

A reproduction of the Japanese Consulate office in Kaunas.



People onboard a ship bound for Vancouver, Canada, after transiting through Japan on "visas for life".
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Eric Saul

Sugihara Chiune's diplomatic passport issue document.



In alphabetical order, images courtesy of:

The Chiune Sugihara Memorial Hall
Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
Embassy of Israel in Japan
Kobe City Archives
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Visas of Life & The Epic Journey by Akira Kitade

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United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Hiroki Sugihara

LIST OF VISA-GIVEN BY THE CONSULATE TO PORTUGAL					
(1939 - 1940)					
NO.	NATIONALITY	NAME	DATE OF BIRTH	DATE OF VISAS	REMARKS
1.	German	Sigfried ROYER	1891	9/VI/40	
2.	Lithuanian	Wanda KAJAR	1891	10/VI/40	
3.	"	Oswald FELDERS	1891	11/VI/40	
4.	"	Chaim FISHMAN	1891	12/VI/40	
5.	"	Gerda KLOSTERMANN	1891	13/VI/40	
6.	German	Reza LOVIN	1891	14/VI/40	
7.	"	Leila FINKELSTEIN	1891	15/VI/40	
8.	Lithuanian	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	16/VI/40	
9.	Polish	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	17/VI/40	
10.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	18/VI/40	
11.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	19/VI/40	
12.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	20/VI/40	
13.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	21/VI/40	
14.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	22/VI/40	
15.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	23/VI/40	
16.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	24/VI/40	
17.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	25/VI/40	
18.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	26/VI/40	
19.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	27/VI/40	
20.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	28/VI/40	
21.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	29/VI/40	
22.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	30/VI/40	
23.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	31/VI/40	
24.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	1/VI/41	
25.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	2/VI/41	
26.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	3/VI/41	
27.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	4/VI/41	
28.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	5/VI/41	
29.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	6/VI/41	
30.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	7/VI/41	
31.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	8/VI/41	
32.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	9/VI/41	
33.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	10/VI/41	
34.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	11/VI/41	
35.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	12/VI/41	
36.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	13/VI/41	
37.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	14/VI/41	
38.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	15/VI/41	
39.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	16/VI/41	
40.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	17/VI/41	
41.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	18/VI/41	
42.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	19/VI/41	
43.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	20/VI/41	
44.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	21/VI/41	
45.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	22/VI/41	
46.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	23/VI/41	
47.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	24/VI/41	
48.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	25/VI/41	
49.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	26/VI/41	
50.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	27/VI/41	
51.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	28/VI/41	
52.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	29/VI/41	
53.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	30/VI/41	
54.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	31/VI/41	
55.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	1/VI/42	
56.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	2/VI/42	
57.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	3/VI/42	
58.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	4/VI/42	
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69.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	15/VI/42	
70.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	16/VI/42	
71.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	17/VI/42	
72.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	18/VI/42	
73.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	19/VI/42	
74.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	20/VI/42	
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80.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	26/VI/42	
81.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	27/VI/42	
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95.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	10/VI/43	
96.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	11/VI/43	
97.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	12/VI/43	
98.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	13/VI/43	
99.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	14/VI/43	
100.	"	Yehuda FINKELSTEIN	1891	15/VI/43	

Chiune Sugihara

The issuing of the ‘Visas for Life’

1939 Assignment to the Japanese Consulate in Kaunas

On August 28, Sugihara Chiune became a vice-consul (acting consul) of the newly opened Japanese Consulate in Kaunas, Lithuania. Soon after, World War II erupted.

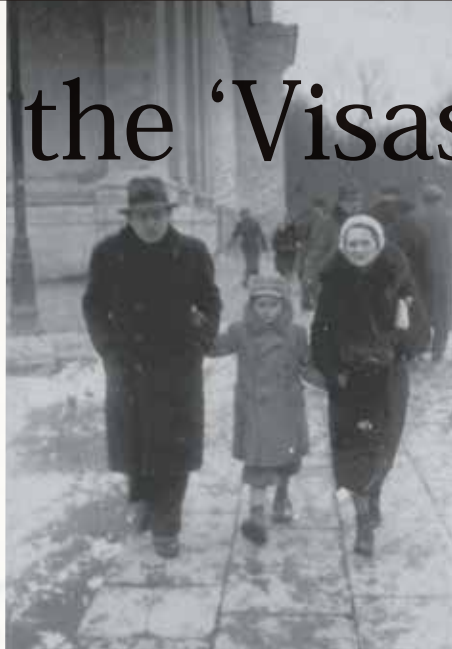
1940 Issuing of the ‘Visas for Life’

A large number of Jewish refugees from Poland gathered at the Japanese Consulate in Kaunas, in order to obtain transit visas that would allow them to pass through Japan and seek refuge in a third country. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan instructed Sugihara to issue transit visas to applicants who had completed immigration procedures to their final destination and possessed sufficient funds to pay for their travel and stay in Japan. However, from a humanitarian point of view, Sugihara also issued transit visas to those who did not meet these requirements.



The visas were issued in Kaunas from July to the end of August, when the consulate closed. The visa list remaining today contains 2,140 names. Considering that all family members were granted entry with a single visa granted to the head of a household and that there were some visas issued without being noted on the list due to lack of time, the actual number of saved lives is thought to be in the thousands.

The visa issued to Aleksander Haffka, said to have been kept with care by daughter Dr. Sylvia Wassertheil-Smoller, a medical doctor living in the United States.



The name of Leo Melamed, who is said to be the pioneer of the financial futures market, is also on the list. This family photo was shot one year before the visas for life were issued – Mr. Melamed is the boy in the center.

United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Leo Melamed, Photo by Max Reid

In 1985, the Israeli Holocaust Memorial, Yad Vashem, honored Sugihara Chiune with the title of ‘Righteous Among the Nations’, a title bestowed upon non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews from the Holocaust. In 2000, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan established a commemorative plaque in honor of Sugihara Chiune’s humanitarian acts, which is still on display to this day at the Diplomatic Archives along with other documents related to the ‘visas for life’.



The plaque and related documents are on display at the Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.

The Japanese people who supported the refugees



The refugees traveled from Kaunas, (1) taking the Trans-Siberian Railway from Moscow to Vladivostok, (2) crossing the Sea of Japan to Tsuruga Port, (3) passing through Kobe and Yokohama, (4) and onward to destinations such as the United States.

(※There were also non-Japanese people involved in the evacuation of Jewish refugees via Japan, such as Jan Zwartendijk, acting consul of the Netherlands in Kaunas, who issued numerous so-called “Curaçao visas” for refugees in Lithuania and Tadeusz Romer, then Polish ambassador to Japan, who helped the refugees with Polish citizenship to obtain visas to enter North America. However, many Japanese people also assisted and the main ones are featured below.)

Nei Saburo, Acting Consul-General of Japan in Vladivostok

Many of the Jewish refugees with ‘visas for life’ fled to Japan via Vladivostok using the Trans-Siberian Railway. Nei Saburo, Acting Consul-General in Vladivostok, worked hard to enable the refugees’ departure for Japan.

The people of Kobe

Many of the refugees are said to have made their way to Kobe, where the Kobe Jewish Community that served as their guarantor was located. They spent anywhere from a week to several months here, before leaving for their next destination, such as the United States or Canada.



Pastors handing out apples to refugees. Photo courtesy of Masato Saito

The people of Tsuruga

It is said that each time a ship with refugees docked in Tsuruga Port, more than 300 refugees would disembark. Though official records from the time were lost to fire, there are stories about how the people of Tsuruga warmly looked after the refugees, letting the refugees use a public bath for free for a day and distributing apples to them for free.



Refugees newly arrived in Kobe on ‘visas for life’. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Eric Saul

The transit visa allowed the refugees to stay in Japan for 10 days, but many of them were in no condition to leave the country during this period. At the request of the Kobe Jewish Community, Kotsuji Setsuzo, a scholar of Jewish religion and culture, negotiated persistently with the relevant Japanese authorities to extend the refugees’ period of stay.