



8.21x6.68	1	עמוד 22	the jerusalem post - front	27/03/2020	72538385-1
בנימין זאב הרצל - בהקשר לציונות - 80790					

GRAPEVINE
• By GREER FAY CASHMAN

■ APROPOS RIVLIN, he may miss out on several state visits abroad that he had planned for his final year in office. Among the many invitations for him to visit was one from Lithuania to join in celebrating the 300th anniversary of the birth of the Vilna Gaon, Elijah ben Solomon Zalman, who was born on April 23, 1720. The anniversary preparations have been underway for the past three years, but now it seems that like so many other major events around the globe, it will either be canceled or postponed.

When Lithuanian Ambassador **Lina Antanaviciene** presented her credentials in September last year, she invited Rivlin to come to Lithuania for the opening events of the Vilna Gaon year. Rivlin, who is of Litvak stock himself, and whose family in the old country were followers of the Vilna Gaon, in telling her of this, said, "You are almost my ambassador."

As is the case with many other countries, Lithuania, in response to the coronavirus pandemic, declared a national state of emergency, so there is little likelihood of a global Litvak reunion in Vilnius at any time in the near future.

In addition to the Vilna Gaon, the organizers of the various anniversary events also intended to pay attention to other famous Litvaks, such as David Wolffsohn who was the second president of the World Zionist Organization and who acted as an adviser to Zionist visionary Theodor Herzl. It was Wolffsohn who at the first Zionist Congress proposed a blue and white flag based on the Jewish prayer shawl - the tallit. He also proposed that the WZO membership fee be based on the biblical coin - the shekel, which today is the mainstay of Israeli currency.

Another famous Litvak was French novelist, diplomat, film director and pilot Romain Gary, who was born in Vilnius as Roman Katzev.

Violin virtuoso Jascha Heifetz, widely acknowledged as the greatest violinist of all time, was also born in Vilnius, where he was recognized as a child prodigy when only six years of age.

From an Israeli standpoint, one of the most famous of Litvaks was Lea Goldberg, prolific poet, playwright and translator, who was an expert on Jewish literature, a researcher of contemporary literature, a literary critic and one of the great cultural figures of Israel. Although she was conceived and raised in Kaunas, she was actually born in Königsberg, which was then part of East Prussia. The medical conditions in Königsberg were far superior to those of Kaunas, and Goldberg's mother preferred to give birth there. This year marks the 50th anniversary year of Goldberg's death at the relatively young age of 58. A heavy smoker, she had seriously damaged her lungs. A few months after her death, she was posthumously awarded the Israel Prize.

A little over a decade ago, she was one of four great Israeli poets who were selected to have their likenesses appear on Israeli banknotes. Goldberg's image is on the 100-shekel note.