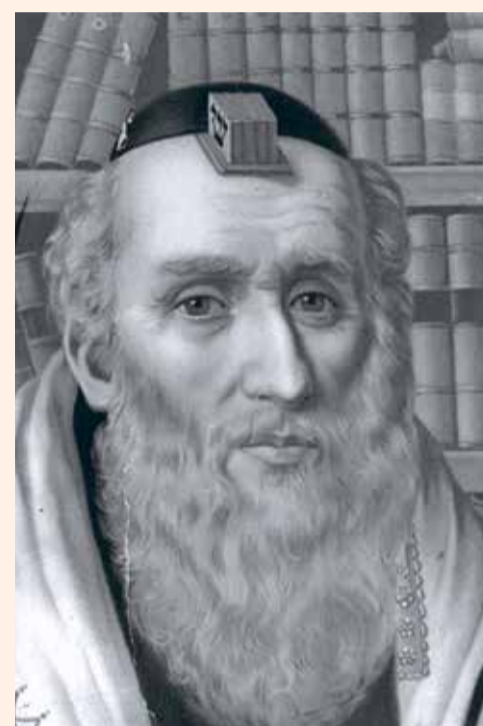


א קלייט פון בייגל the bagel shop



The year 2020 was declared the Year of the Vilna Gaon and Litvak History in Lithuania. Despite the global viral pandemic, Litvak history did receive much attention in the country. While there weren't as many public events as might have been desired, we can say confidently there were more articles, radio and television programs and news items in the media and on the internet than ever before in the history of modern independent Lithuania. The Lithuanian Jewish Community would like to thank for allocating funds for this, and we would like to thank all the people and organizations who contributed to commemorating the anniversary of the birth of the Vilna Gaon and to preserving the Litvak legacy. It is good to feel that we are an integral and respected part of Lithuania.



Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman / 1720-1797

issue theme

Commemorative Coin Celebrates 300th Anniversary of the Birth of the Vilna Gaon

Rabbi Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman was a very interesting character, all the more so since he was an unusual rabbi for his time. In the Jewish world the title Gaon was used to designate exceptional people in the 10th, 11th and 12th centuries. The significance of the title is illustrated by the fact there was no Jew worthy of the name of Gaon from the 12th to the 17th century. The title was revived after more than half a millennium in order to honor the exceptional sage Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman.



Obverse of commemorative coin from Bank of Lithuania



Coin designed by Viktoria Sideraitė Alon, Jūratė Juozėnienė and Albinas Šimanauskas of JUDVI&Š

Viktorija Sideraitė Alon

Portraits of the Vilna Gaon have come down to us, although scholars are unsure whether any of them is authentic or even close to his actual appearance. In all portrayals the Gaon is pictured wearing tallis and tfilin (a rumor went around he never took them off during the course of the day), he is usually holding a book and a quill, and there are often bookshelves behind him. We are to infer from these illustrations the Vilna Gaon left behind a very religious and educated picture of himself.

Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman wasn't a typical Vilnius rabbi. During his era, the official chief rabbi of Vilnius was Shmuel ben Avigdor, although the Gaon was more renowned. Other

rabbis responsible for weddings, divorces, burials and kosher food were simply hired back then. Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman was a very private person "in the role of rabbi" who spent all his time engaged in studying Scripture. He wanted to be left alone and devote all his time to Torah study. The Vilna Gaon used to shutter his windows when he was engaged in studying Scripture so the noise from the street wouldn't distract him. There is a story that once, his sister arrived from another town to visit him, but the Gaon was deep in study, and said: dear sister, we will have a plethora of time still for the two of us to talk in the afterlife, but in this earthly life I am too busy to engage in conversation at this time.

It is known, that Vilna Gaon never spoke in public. He didn't speak in the synagogues, either. He only prayed in his own kloyz with small group of student followers, and only those who were especially invited were allowed into the Vilna Gaon's kloyz (synagogue). During his lifetime the Vilna Gaon never published a single book he wrote. All his writings were published posthumously. He left behind a large body of manuscripts and commentaries. His sons and students later collected it all and published it.

To this day the personality of the Vilna Gaon is surrounded by mystery. The question naturally arises: how did this person of such erudition and deep insight, who never published a single book and never spoke publicly during his lifetime, become so famous, even though so few ever saw him while he was alive? He became

famous through his students, they spread information about him, quoted the Vilna Gaon, declaimed his authority, and the spirit of secretiveness surrounding him only served to enhance his popularity. The legends which have come down to us about the Gaon arose later, from the utterances by his sons and students, made from about 10 to 15 years after the death of the Sage.

The Gaon used to say, if you don't have sufficient scientific knowledge, you will have a lesser understanding of Torah: without a good command of anatomy and biology there won't be good shkhita (kosher butchering), and if you don't know about engineering, you can't build a sukkah (tent or tabernacle) well. Without an understanding of astronomy it is impossible to calculate the Rosh Hodesh (the beginning of the new month). All of these scientific disciplines are tools which need to be utilized in Torah study.

Using his knowledge of astronomy, the Gaon calculated the onset of the Sabbath himself and didn't pay attention to when the Vilnius Jewish community began celebrating the Sabbath, he lived by his own calculations. While he was extremely humble (not appearing in public and avoiding publicity), the Vilna Gaon was also very self-confident, independent and courageous. He was the kind of person who sets his own rules and exerts influence. Although the Gaon highly appreciated wisdom in conjunction with learning, he was a nest of paradoxes, a mystic who loved science. The Vilna Gaon

Commemorative Coin Celebrates 300th Anniversary of the Birth of the Vilna Gaon

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studied Kabbala deeply and had the urge to perform miracles, especially in his youth when he wanted to create a golem with the aid of God and the teachings of the Kabbala.

In the JUDVI & AŠ creative group we didn't choose the easiest way in designing this commemorative coin with an imaginable portrait of the Vilna Gaon; we set for ourselves the goal of trying to convey the Sage's world-view, his conviction the Truth doesn't lie on the surface and that the Truth must be sought through intellectual exertion, and that requires search and study. The Vilna Gaon's kabbalistic world-view and his attention to symbols also became a source of inspiration for us.

We think it is important as well to present to the public the acronym used around the world to signify the Vilna Gaon, Ha GR" A (Hebrew Ha Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu), which is encountered in all the written sources. The acronym appears in gold in the center of the coin.

Above the acronym the Hebrew letter ψ (shin) appears in gold, the letter which also stands for the number 300 in Hebrew tradition. This anniversary date in the language sacred to the Vilna Gaon is intended to show special respect for the man and his deeds.

Coinage from the Gaon's era discovered during archaeological digs at the Great Synagogue in Vilnius shows it was characteristic at that time for a coin to feature a crown above the ruler's initials.



The graphic form of the Hebrew letter ψ recalls a crown, which is an extremely important symbol in the decoration of Jewish sacred objects. Crowns adorn the Aron kodesh (ark) and sacred Torah scrolls in synagogues. It makes sense to honor the Vilna Gaon who has earned the status of holy man with this beautiful symbol.

The bottom of the reverse side of the coin portrays a stylized Torah scroll and the number 300 marking the 300th anniversary of the Vilna Gaon's birth. The form of the symbolic Torah scroll recalls the openwork (ajoure) tracery and screens encountered in so many Litvak synagogues (such as the screens around the bimah). The field behind the main compositional el-



ements is decorated with decorative elements – Torah scrolls. The reverse side of the coin is an historic first: it is the first coin issued in the European Union with Hebrew writing, as the Israeli press immediately noted.

The obverse of the commemorative coin from the Bank of Lithuania bears the Litvak symbol. In 2017 the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice issued permission to the Lithuanian Jewish Community to use the historical heraldic Columns of the Gediminids symbol in the Litvak symbol (Victoria Sideraitė Alon is the designer of the Litvak symbol and the Lithuanian Jewish Community owns it). This symbol contains one of the most important national symbols for Jews, the Menorah. The columns of the Ge-

diminids, one of the most ancient symbols in Lithuanian state heraldry, are incorporated in the center of the Menorah. The combination of both symbols in the Litvak symbol signifies the Lithuanian Jewish community as an integral historical part of Lithuanian society and recalls the community's contribution over 700 years together with Lithuanians in creating the Lithuanian state. This is a dignified remembrance of the origins of the appearance of Jews in Lithuania when the leaders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania invited the Jews of Europe to come, settle and contribute to the welfare of the state.

The edge of the coin features the inscriptions in Yiddish and Lithuanian: "VIL NOR GOEN | JEI NORĖSI IR TU TAPSI GENIJUM" [IF YOU WILL IT, YOU TOO CAN BE A GENIUS OR GAON]. This was a household phrase during the Vilna Gaon's era among Litvak families whose homes without exception contained a portrait of the Gaon. The Jewish mother used to point to his portrait and tell her children: "Vil nor Goen" ("If you will it, you, too, can be a genius").

This kind of important design, intended to become a legacy to future generations, imparted a special sense of responsibility to the design team. We couldn't disappoint the world Litvak community, the Lithuanian Jewish Community or ourselves. We are very glad this commemorative coin has garnered such widespread interest among the descendants of the Jews of Lithuania living around the world. Litvaks, realizing the next issue of a coin commemorating the Vilna Gaon will only take place 100 years from now, want to own this souvenir of our time for posterity, and to pass it on to their grandchildren. Collectors and numismatists have also shown a keen desire to acquire this commemorative coin for their collections. ■

The World Has Been Talking about the Vilna Gaon, Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman / 1720-1797 / for 300 Years Now

Geršonas Taicas

As with other historical figures, a number of different stories have circulated about the Vilna Gaon, many of them containing little truth. It is said the Vilna Gaon was a recluse, an ascetic and even a fanatic. Actually, like us, the Vilna Gaon cherished love, friendship, gratitude and moral behavior. It was by his own will, his own innate talents, his hard work, discipline and photographic memory that he became the star of Talmudic study that he is.

The Vilna Gaon had a number of great teachers: his father initially helped him learn Torah, then later in Keydan (Kėdainiai) he learned from the renowned Talmudist Rabbi Moses Margolies (aka Moshe ben Simon Margalit, 1710-1781), and in Ciechanowiec (now located in Poland) he studied under the kabbalist Rabbi Meir. Margolies later travelled around Europe seeking ancient scrolls and parchments, and discovered a very old commentary on the Babylonian Talmud on parchment in Amsterdam. He intended to travel to



Ciechanowiec synagogue, Poland

the Land of Israel but died during the trip. The Vilna Gaon repeated his teacher's travels in Europe, looking for the ancient parchment, but failed to find it.

It was one of the great privileges of Ciechanowiec that the Vilna Gaon first began his studies there. Rabbi Meir, a descendant of the great 17th century Rabbi Shabbetai Cohen,

known as the Shakh, flourished when the Vilna Gaon was still young and the latter came to Ciechanowiec in order to study Torah at his feet. This is told in the name of the Vilna Gaon: "In my youth I arrived during my wanderings and straying at the hamlet of Ciechanowiec which is full of scribes and sages. The rabbi there, R' Meir, was my instructor in the secret

kabbalistic studies, and he was my comrade in the open rabbinic studies." The close ties between the Vilna Gaon and Ciechanowiec found their source in Rabbi David Saul Katzenelbogen, head of the court in Ciechanowiec. Rabbi's David son Aryeh Leib was the comrade of the Vilna Gaon. There is a standard edition of the Hebrew Bible with many commentaries known as the "Mikraot Gedolot" which includes a commentary of the Vilna Gaon entitled "Aderet Eliyahu" (Mantle of Elijah). In the section dealing with Leviticus we find: "When the Vilna Gaon was ten years old he had a companion closer than a brother, that famed Gaon, our Master and Rabbi Aryeh Leib of Ciechanowiec." So close was the friendship between these two scholars that the Vilna Gaon subsequently named his firstborn son Yehuda Leib after Aryeh Leib of Ciechanowiec.

The Gaon, Rabbi Eliyahu of Vilna, lived in Seirijai for one year, under Prussian rule, in the house of Yisrael Berloiner, a rich man and a scholar. Here he completed his book "Aderet Eliyahu" and was friendly with the local tzadik Khayim Filipovera, who was a teacher of the Gemara according to the Lithuanian system. Probably Vilna Gaon spent time in Seirijai because his son Rabbi Yehudah Leib lived there. Yehudah Leib was the son-in-law of a rabbi of Seirijai, Rabbi Avraham ben Yekhezkel (of Lazdijai).

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Commemorative Anniversary Year Works to Add to Collector's Collections



Commemorative Vilna Gaon anniversary medal

OBVERSE: Logo of the year framed on two sides by the date of the birth of the Vilna Gaon composed of symbols: open books in the shape of a Star of David. The symbol of the open book is made of two arcs which recall the silhouette of the curved top portion of a traditional Jewish headstone and the Jewish head-covering the yarmulke. The double triangle structure forms a Star of David and recalls the lily of God hexagram widespread in synagogue decoration. The marking of the 300th anniversary of the birth of the Vilna Gaon within the symbol employs a special symbol, the letter ψ (shin). The letter shin also adorns the cube-shaped headgear Jews use when praying, the tfilin. The tfilin are always visible on the Gaon's head in all portraits of him. The graphic form of the letter ψ also recalls a Crown for the famous sage of Vilnius, whose wisdom is still remembered 300 years later. The intertwining of the fluid elements gives flesh to the philosophical assertion that everything

in this world is interconnected and tied together by many threads. This commemorates the fact the historical Litvak legacy is an indivisible part of the whole of Lithuania's history. **REVERSE:** Façade of the Great Synagogue of Vilnius, the best-known symbol of the Jerusalem of Lithuania, with a broken sky above, symbolizing the tragic fate of the Lithuanian Jewish community in the Holocaust. Bottom: synagogue courtyard, the characteristic central feature of the shtetl, where the shadow of the synagogue falls, impressed with the Litvak symbol incorporating the two most significant symbols for Litvak identity, the Menorah and the Lithuanian state. At the center of the medal: earth and heaven are divided by the famous line from the poem „Vilne“: „Tu esi Lietuvon [statytas tamsus talismanus...“ [„You are a dark cameo set in Lithuania...“] (Moyshe Kulbak, 1926, Lithuanian translation by Alfonsas Bukontas). The hexagonal talisman is formed at the center from the synagogue and the outline of its shadow.



Lithuanian Post Stamp Commemorating 300th Birthday of Gaon

The letter shin (ψ) appears near the top of the postage stamp with a stylized crown atop the final branch symbolizing the spiritual authority of the Vilna Gaon. According to the gematria the value of this letter is 300, as Lithuania celebrates the 300th anniversary of the birth of the Gaon this year. Underneath is a stylized Torah scroll along with an open book, an allusion to the Decalogue, the two slabs of stone Moses received on Sinai inscribed by God with His Commandments, and at the same time representing the tradition of a pair of windows on the façade of the synagogue. The coloring of the symbols and characters and the graphic design was based on the stylization of the decor of ancient Jewish writings. The nominal value of the stamp is 81 euro cents, meaning it can be used to send letters abroad. The stamps have a print-run of 20,000. The issue also featured a first-day release envelope for sale. ■



The JUDVI & AŠ design group designed the postal stamp celebrating the Vilna Gaon

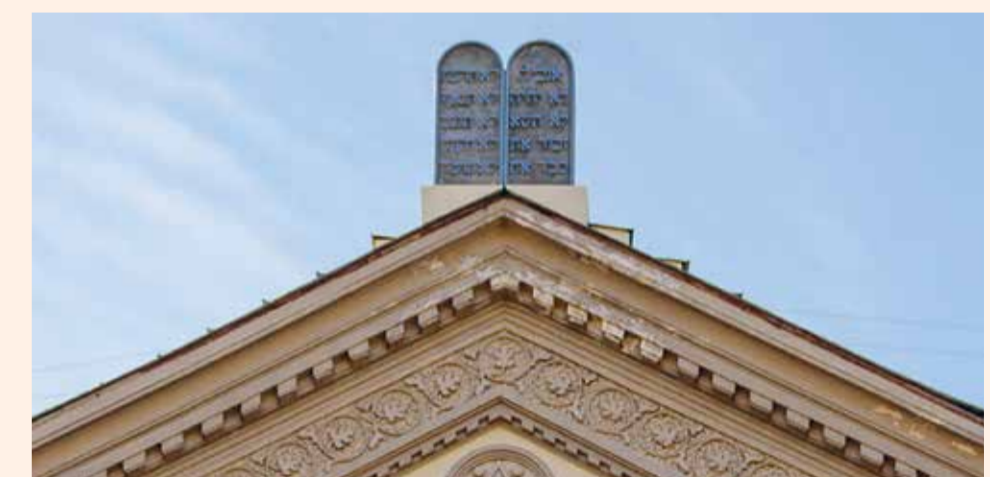
Symbols Which Inspired the Makers of the Vilna Gaon Commemorative Coin and Medal



Interior detail from the Choral Synagogue in Vilnius: the shoshan, or lily of God, a decorative motif used in many synagogues around the world, as decoration on column capitals, to honor the Most High



The pinkas from the Gaon's era, opened



The Ten Commandments, Lukhot haBrit. Façade, Choral Synagogue in Vilnius



Crown above the initials of the ruler on coins from the Vilna Gaon's time

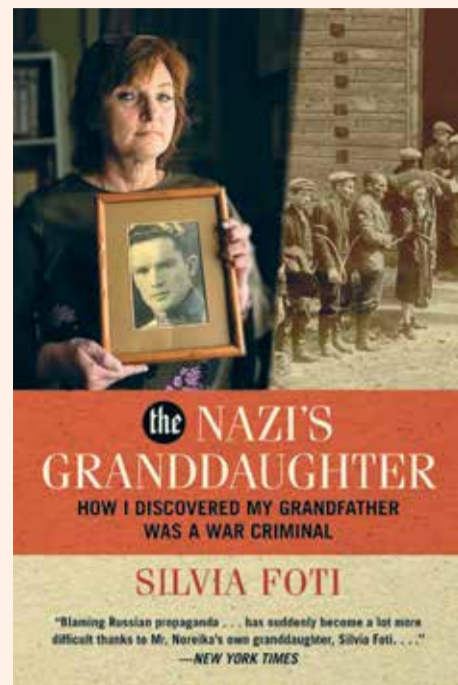


Bimah rail at the Choral Synagogue in Kaunas



Portion of portrait of the Vilna Gaon showing tfilin worn on his head bearing the letter ψ

Silvia Foti: How I Discovered My Grandfather Was a War Criminal



Jonas Noreika's granddaughter Silvia Foti doesn't understand and cannot justify the Lithuanian Government's behavior in trying to white-wash the crimes of her grandfather. Her book consisting of 77 letters Noreika wrote at the Stutthof concentration camp will be issued in the spring of 2021. To insure the safety of her archive, Foti has transferred

ownership and rights to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D. C. Now a U.S. federal institution owns items and historical documents which belonged to Jonas Noreika.

Jonas Noreika is only one of many Holocaust perpetrators whom Lithuanian institutions have transformed into national heroes. The rewriting of Holocaust history underway in Lithuania right now is worthy of a hearing at the European Court of Human Rights. For decades the Lithuanian Jewish Community has been drawn into heated discussions concerning Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisans who were involved in Holocaust crimes. The LJC has maintained each case must be considered individually in terms of criminal law and for the cause of historical justice and reconciliation. We have watched how Lithuanian institutions take one step forward followed by two steps back when it comes to the figure of Jonas Noreika, always seeking new defensive fallback positions.

LJC chairwoman Faina Kukliansky called the judgment rendered by the Center for the Study of the Genocide and Resistance of Residents of Lithuania concerning Noreika during World War II controversial. The Center draft-

ed a finding of history on Noreika following calls by a group of well-known public figures to take down a plaque commemorating Noreika on the outer wall of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences. The group said Noreika collaborated with the Nazis. The Center countered Noreika's actions when he held the post of head of the Šiauliai district only involved the isolation of Jews. An order, or what the Center calls a letter, by Noreika in 1941 said Jews had to be settled in a ghetto. "The occupational Nazi regime was successful in drawing him, as with other officials from the Lithuanian civil administration, into regulating affairs connected with the isolation of the Jews," the Center's historical finding claimed.

A network of Israeli and American citizens has formed and is undertaking a campaign to educate U.S. federal officials about the Holocaust denial and distortion being supported by governments in Eastern Europe. Unlike Lithuania, the United States takes the Holocaust seriously and has decided to preserve the historical materials Silvia Foti has which demonstrate her grandfather Jonas Noreika's complicity in Holocaust crimes. ■

Faina Kukliansky Becomes Member of European Jewish Congress Executive Board



photo by Milda Rūkaitė

Dr. Moshe Kantor has been re-elected president of the European Jewish Congress by representatives of European Jewish communities. Board of Deputies of British Jews president Marie van der Zyl was re-elected president of the EJC executive board. Dr. Kantor said: "...despite the challenges of Covid-19 and rising anti-Semitism, European Jews are resolute and ready to continue working together to overcome these challenges and strengthen Jewish life in Europe." At a virtual general assembly, the heads of 42 Jewish communities in Europe also undertook new initiatives to encourage the adoption at the national level of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism. The General Assembly also recognized *ex officio* members these Jewish communities: Austria, Belgium the Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Switzerland. Faina Kukliansky now represents the Lithuanian Jewish Community at EJC general assemblies. ■

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda: The Shoah is Not Just a Jewish but All of Lithuania's Tragedy



This year the annual Lithuanian Holocaust procession from the Ponar (Paneriai in Lithuanian) railroad station was different. Along with members of the Lithuanian Jewish Community, esteemed guests from abroad and



Lithuanian politicians, this year's procession included the Lithuanian president, Gitanas Nausėda. We present his speech at Ponar on the Lithuanian Day of Remembrance of Jewish Victims of Genocide.

Photo courtesy Chancellery of the Office of President of the Republic of Lithuania, photo by Robertas Dačkus

Lithuanian Jewish Community Social Center Continues to Care for Elderly

It is the duty of the program coordinator of the LJC and of all of us to protect our community's senior citizens. All of them fall in the high-risk category due to age as well as illness. Social programs director Žana Skudovičienė often speaks with clients by telephone, especially to those who live alone and those who don't receive home-care. Ema Jakobiėnė makes sure to inform our clients about the medicine and food cards allocated for them.

Dr. Ela Gurina, a member of the LJC's social commission and the chairwoman of the advisory committee on Holocaust survivors, taught home-care staff how to work during the virus pandemic, first in March and then more recently. "Why do we keep reminding people they need to wear masks and gloves? Because the number of asymptomatic cases keeps increasing, and a person might not know he's infected and could infect others. Distance must be maintained. If the mask becomes moist, it should be discarded, since a moist mask is ineffective. Do not take the mask off with your fingers, only touch the elastic band. Disinfecting hands when you arrive at a store is very important and when you touch unknown surfaces you need to use gloves. Gloves need to be removed such that they turn inside out, then discarded. According to some researchers, in those who have been vaccinated against the seasonal flu

and who then contract COVID-19, the disease takes a milder course, so it's worthwhile considering getting vaccinated," Dr. Gurina said.

Dr. Gurina also said it's crucial to protect LJC home-care workers because they could carry the virus and infect their clients.



New US ambassador Robert S. Gilchrist visits the Lithuanian Jewish Community. He met with chairwoman Faina Kukliansky, took a tour of the Community buildings, met LJC senior citizens and inquired about their activities at the Community's Seniors Club

Home-care workers are being tested for the virus. It's the duty of our home-care staff to care for our clients and to protect them from making unnecessary visits in public. When a worker enters the home, he should wash his hands for not less than two minutes un-

der running water with soap, disinfect the hands with disinfectant, then get undressed and dressed in the appropriate uniform. The Lithuanian Jewish Community has been supplied the necessary hand disinfectant.

"We have a large number of clients who live alone, and of those who are bed-ridden, who need to be fed, dressed and so on. The work is not easy, but it is meaningful. Since the situation is changing on a daily basis, and some staff have small children of their own to care for, while others are themselves ill, and sometimes are simply afraid to leave the house, we are doing as much as we can. We do know, however, that we simply must help our elderly, our ill and our LJC members who are living alone. The children of our senior citizens are helping their parents and grandparents during this difficult time because there might be interruptions in our home-care," Dr. Gurina said.

The home-care workers from the Social Center continue to supply our clients with food, but the elderly need to know that a home-care workers shouldn't go shopping for no reason, and entry to public spaces needs to be limited, as do trips on public transportation, and shopping should be planned to suffice for at least several days. ■

Dear Holocaust survivors, Ladies and gentlemen,

We are gathered here today to pay our respects to the hundreds of thousands of Lithuanian Jews who lost their lives in the Holocaust.

Shoah means catastrophe. But this is not just the tragedy and catastrophe of the Jewish people. The Shoah is Lithuania's. This is the Shoah of all mankind. This is a Shoah of our humanity, compassion and ambivalence.

Here alone in Paneriai, we, the state of Lithuania, lost tens of thousands of our fellow citizens with whom we built the independent Lithuanian state together. Fighting together in the battles for independence, suffering together the young state's most difficult years, together putting our hopes in the future of an independent Lithuania.

We lost talented scholars, artists, poets, doctors, businesspeople and artisans, teachers and clerics. We lost elders who preserved the memory of hundreds of generations living together in friendship, and we lost the children who would have been this country's future.

Here, in Paneriai, and throughout Lithuania, over the course of a few years we lost a large and very important part of ourselves. And today, sadly, we can only imagine what a creative, educated, industrious and smart Lithuania there would have been if not for the Catastrophe.

It is said there are six stages to understanding the grief of every loss: shock, denial, an-

ger, bargaining, depression and finally acceptance and reconciliation.

Which stage are we at? The only way to come to terms with history is to realize and tell ourselves the truth, no matter how painful it might be. For many years after the war, Lithuania wasn't able to talk about the Catastrophe. Even after the fall of the Soviet Union, people found it difficult to discuss the Shoah and to understand how this kind of tragedy could have happened.

We denied it, we got angry, we tried to bargain with our conscience, calculating and comparing that which cannot be calculated

nor compared, human suffering, human lives. It was difficult for us to admit to ourselves that our country's citizens died at the hands of Lithuanians as well.

We found in ourselves the power, however, to look history in the face; in 1995 the first president of the independent Republic of Lithuania travelled to Israel and asked forgiveness for the Lithuanians who contributed to the Holocaust.

I really want to believe today we have reached the stage of accepting and understanding our loss.

This cannot be reconciliation—no one will ever reconcile themselves to the Holocaust. No one will ever revive the innocent victims, either. And no one will ever ease the suffering

of those who here in Paneriai and at many locations throughout Europe lost their families, their friends, the people they loved. They say time heals all wounds, but this great loss will take hundreds and perhaps thousands of years to heal.

But it is only by understanding the scale of the tragedy, by comprehending the facts and responsibility, that we can begin to talk about the future.

When Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel delivered his speech upon receiving the Nobel prize, looking back over the 20th century, he didn't talk about the bloody events, about Auschwitz and Buchenwald where he lost his family.

He spoke about ambivalence. The indifference which led the world to this tragedy and these horrors, to genocide, to the Holocaust. The lack of caring and compassion which kept us from reaching out to help those who were suffering and dying.

I am proud that almost one thousand Lithuanians risked life to help their neighbors, and have been recognized as Righteous Gentiles. I am filled with regret there were too few Righteous Gentiles to put a stop to this inhuman barbarity.

The route thousands of Lithuanian citizens were marched from the Vilnius ghetto to Paneriai was one way, from hell to death.

But standing here today at this Holocaust memorial we see life. We see the future.

A future where all the ethnic communities living together in Lithuania, shoulder-to-shoulder, are building the independent Lithuanian state. A strong, just, educated,

democratic state which defends human rights, where there is no place for pervasive indifference.

Building this future is our task and our obligation to the victims of the Shoah.

The ray of hope is brightest in pitch blackness. So, standing here, in Paneriai, I would like to read an excerpt from a poem by Abraham Sutzkever, an inmate of the Vilnius ghetto, a writer who testified at the Nuremberg trials and a recipient of Lithuania's Knight's Cross of the Order of Gediminas:

*Last hour, bring with you such nourishing belief
That in a single tear seven suns will be afire,
And in the resurrected dust, the seeds of heroes
Will germinate their will and terrible desire.*

Thank you. A dank. Toda.

Israel's ambassador to Lithuania Yossi Avni-Levy spoke at Ponar as well, thanking president Nausėda for taking part and for his pledge to honor memory and the two-nation agreement in the name of Israeli president Reuven Rivlin and the State of Israel. Here is what he said:

<...>

A year has passed, and again we stand in front of this silent beautiful forest, which hides endless pain, despair, but also hope. Through the trees, we try to see the faces of the victims. They looked like us, 70,000 fathers, mothers, children... We bow our heads in front of them. But we also see the faces of the murderers. They also may look like us,

Chiune Sugihara Statue Unveiled in Kaunas

The Lithuanian Government announced 2020 the Year of Chiune Sugihara. 2020 mark the 80th anniversary of Japanese Consul Chiune Sugihara's work in Kaunas (1939-1940) and the 120th anniversary of his birth. A statue was unveiled to World War II-era Japanese diplomat Chiune Sugihara. The unveiling of the monument was the final event of the Sugihara week in Kaunas. Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda, the abasador for Japan Shiro Yamasaki, Kaunas mayor Visvaldas Matijošaitis and other honorable quests.

The bronze statue is almost 12 feet high and is located on Kaunas's famous promenade, Laisvės aleja, next to the Metropol hotel where Sugihara continued to issue visas even after being ordered to stop, close down the Japanese consulate and travel to a new assignment in Berlin. The sculpture designed by Martynas Gaubas depicts origami cranes which he says symbolize freedom. An inscription in Lithuanian, Japanese, English and Yiddish, reads: "Whoever saves a life, saves the world."

The Lithuanian president attended the ceremony together with staff from the Japanese embassy. "We unveil in Kaunas a sta-



Photo courtesy Chancellery of the Office of President of the Republic of Lithuania, photo by Robertas Dačkus



Kaunas mayor Visvaldas Matijošaitis, LJC chairwoman Faina Kukliansky, Kaunas Jewish Community chairman Cercas Zakas

ue to a man whose humanity and courage long ago became our moral compass. We had to live through the Nazi and Soviet occupations, to lose and to get back again an independent Lithuania, in order to understand more fully where hatred and apathy towards the suffering of our fellow human beings can lead.", Lithuanian president Gitanas Nausėda said. The friendship between Lithuania and Japan was honored by the

Speaker of the House of Representatives of Japan Tadamori Oshima whose greetings were read by the amabassador for Japan in Lithuania. „It is highly symbolic that honoring the 80th anniversary of the activities of the Japanese diplomat the monument was placed by the Freedom avenue (Laisvės aleja) – Sugihara gifted the freedom to thousands." Visvaldas Matijošaitis said. ■

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda: The Shoah is Not Just a Jewish but All of Lithuania's Tragedy

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fathers, sons, ordinary people, who chose to become volunteers for evil.

The massacre of Paneriai was especially cruel and merciless, also because it was direct, almost eye-to-eye. The murderers saw the people in a vicinity of a few meters or even less. They saw young mothers carrying babies, screaming out of fear. They saw grandmothers, who could not walk. They saw men and women of their age, all helpless, naked.

They saw children, girls and boys, and looked in their eyes. They humiliated and tortured them on their last way to death, their Via Dolorosa. And they shot them in pits, whole families, layer after layer, until the pits were full...

This is the story which must be told. As the Ambassador of the Jewish state of Israel and as a father of two children, I feel that the families butchered here, and in over 200 other places across Lithuania, ask me to tell their story. Not to let the story of their cruel and tragic death be forgotten.

We are good friends, Lithuania and Israel. We live in an era of strong cooperation and prosperity. Lithuania is a great democracy with wonderful people. We appreciate very much the efforts to remember and to revive the Jewish heritage. We appreciate the important educational activities done by the International Commission, their work is very valuable. Our internal moral imperative must be to educate

the people and to tell the true story of what happened. The Jews of Lithuania did not just walk into a green forest in 1941 and disappear in a foggy list of statistics. No. They were murdered almost to the last of them by German Nazis, but also by their neighbors and by local volunteers of death. Painful as it is, the truth is written on the trees and on the grass and cannot be erased.

We also remember the heroes. Those good people who risked the lives of their families in order to save a little girl or a hungry child

from death. We cherish their noble morality and salute them.

More than 900 Righteous Lithuanians received the medals from Yad Vashem, and their real number is higher. Tomorrow in Kaunas we will award 4 more Lithuanian families as Righteous among the Nations.

I speak here today on behalf of hundreds of Israelis, children and grandchildren of survivors, who could not come here because of the pandemic. Among them, I speak on behalf of



Photo courtesy Chancellery of the Office of President of the Republic of Lithuania, photo by Robertas Dačkus.



an Israeli woman whose father was forced to burn bodies of the victims until he succeeded in escaping through the tunnel into life. I say to her, I tell your story.

I speak on behalf of so many Israelis whose families are still here, in the forests of Lithuania. These families have no grave to mourn. The forest became their final tombstone.

<...>

I bow my head to the memory of my sisters and brothers. Parents who had to carry their children into the pits. Children who did not have a chance to grow – Reizele, Gitel, Moishele, Sruele, Hirsh, Miriam, Itzik...

Itzik, or Icchok Rudashevski, was a Jewish boy of 16 whose life ended here in 1943 and whose diary of the Holocaust was translated from Yiddish by Lithuanian Minister of Culture Dr. Mindaugas Kvietkauskas. I wish to thank the Minister once again. This is the appropriate commemoration. ■

Kaunas Commemorates Lea Goldberg

There's a larger-than-life fresco painted on the wall of a building on Kęstutis street in Kaunas featuring a portrait of celebrated Israeli poetess Lea Goldberg framed by her poem in Hebrew and Lithuanian. Her family fled their home on this street 85 years ago, with Leah making aliyah and settling in Tel Aviv in 1935, after receiving PhDs from universities in Bonn and Berlin in Semitic and Germanic languages. This is the second commemoration of the poetess in the city of her youth; a plaque commemorating her hands on the outer wall of the Hebrew gymnasium which operated between the two world wars and where she studied. The painting was made by Linas Kaziliunis. It's 30 feet wide and 45 feet tall. The left side features a translation in Lithuanian of the Hebrew poem on the right side of the poet's portrait, a poem called Oren, or Pines. The poem has become a popular song in Israel and it is performed every year during Independence Day. It entertains the idea of a dual homeland:

*Perhaps it is only the migrating birds
Suspended between earth and sky
Who know the pain of two lands.*

*With you I have been replanted, o my pine.
With you, pine trees, I grew
With roots in two different landscapes.*

Israeli ambassador to Lithuania Yossif Avni-Levy said at the event: "If the great poet Lea Goldberg, who missed this beautiful city her entire life, could see her face on this street where she lived as a child, she would feel great happiness." Bella Shirin, who has been appointed ambassador of the city of Kaunas as Capital of European Culture for 2022, recited in selections from Goldberg's corpus in Hebrew to Patris Židelevičius musical accompaniment. Israeli exchange student Shahr Berkowitz sang Goldberg's work.

Goldberg's work spans genres: she wrote poetry, prose, children's books, theatrical and literary criticism, studies in literature and translated works from around the world in about ten languages, as well as writing plays. She established the Comparative Literature Faculty at Hebrew University in 1952 and led the faculty as professor until her death. Following her death in Jerusalem in early 1970, she received the country's highest award, the Israel Prize, for her literary work. Her portrait graces the 100-shekel banknote.

Daiva Citvarienė, curator of the Bureau of Memory which is part of the Kaunas 2022 Capital of Culture program, said: "She speaks in her poems, most of which have become popular songs, about [the Kaunas neighborhood of] Zaliakalnis as well, where, gazing out from Pelėdos Hill over the city, she sought poetic inspiration. ■



Lea Goldberg fresco in Kaunas. From right: street artist L. Kaziliunis, Israeli ambassador to Lithuania Yossi Avni-Levy, Bureau of Memory curator D. Citvarienė.

The World Has Been Talking about the Vilna Gaon, Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman / 1720-1797 / for 300 Years Now

3

Some of the Gaon's manuscripts remained in the possession of Yehuda Leib, for example, his commentary on "Shir haShirim" (the Song of Songs, or the Song of Solomon), which the Gaon completed when he was in Seirijai: "He was very satisfied, he invited his daughter-in-law's father and his son over, he told our teacher Rabbi Leib to seal up his room and to close the windows. Many candles were burning although it was day, and when he finished, he rose up to glorify heaven."

The Song of Songs is a collection of folk love and wedding songs symbolizing the relationship between God and the Jewish people. Earlier it was forbidden Jews under the age of 30 to read this collection. One of the best known poetic expressions in the Song of Songs is "love is strong as death" (Song 8:6). Two commen-

taries by the Gaon on the Song of Songs were published in Warsaw in 1842. The publisher claimed he copied the work from a manuscript owned by the Gaon's grandson, probably Yaakov Moshe of Slonim. We know of this manuscript from Rabbi Israel from Shklov who wrote: "I heard from his [the Gaon's] son the great Rabbi of blessed memory who heard from him that he [the Gaon] had one hundred and fifty commentaries on the first verse of "Shir haShirim" and there was no scribe found fast enough to write down his ideas and he did not want to spend his time on this. ... And I heard from our Rabbi and teacher Menachem Mendel of blessed memory from the holy city of Jerusalem, may it be rebuilt, who wrote ten holy books on secrets in manuscript form, that when he served our Rabbi the Gaon, may his soul rest in Eden, when he visited the

holy community in Serey, upon finishing the commentary on "Shir haShirim" which he received from him [the Gaon], he [the Gaon] was in good spirits and was gleeful in the happiness of the holy Torah. Finishing the commentary, he raised his eyes to the heavens in great devotion in blessing and praise to His great name, may He be blessed."

Sometimes it is said the Vilna Gaon never wrote a single commentary on the Torah. According to Rabbi Fishman-Maimon, the Gaon preferred the Oral Law to the Written Law, such that his son Yehudah Leib used to read the Torah, but he had the Gemarah read to him, and then he would relate what he recalled from his father. He quoted his father's preference, that hearing was more important than seeing, based on the tractate Nezikin (Damages) where it is stated that the

punishment of he who causes damage to another's sense of hearing is greater than that due for damage to the sense of sight. The ear hears what has been conveyed by oral tradition handed down from former generations, from person to person.

The Gaon often dictated Talmud commentaries to his students, later checking and correcting errors and lapses. Only a very few of his works were written down as manuscripts more than a decade before his death. The Lithuanian National Martynas Mažvydas Library conserves about 70 books by Eliyahu ben Solomon Zalman, the only such large collection of published works by the Vilna Gaon in Lithuania. The written legacy of the sage is available to all people interested in the tradition of Torah study. ■

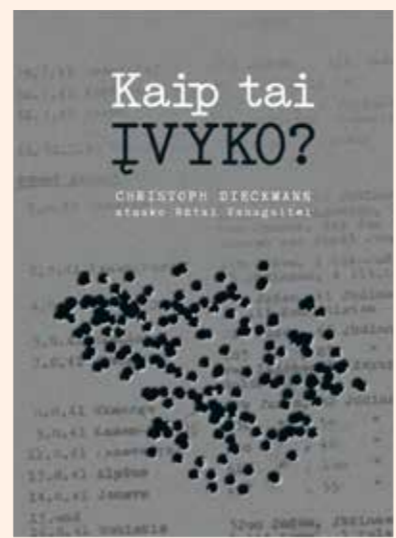


Left: Synagogue in Seirijai. Right: Town of Seirijai in the 1920s.

A Book about the Future: Vanagaitė Interviews Dieckmann

In April of this year Rūta Vanagaitė's new book was published without much fanfare in the Lithuanian media. She interviewed Christoph Dieckmann, a highly respected historian working in the field of Holocaust studies who published a landmark book „Deutsche Besatzungspolitik in Litauen 1941-1944," or German Occupational Policy in Lithuania, 1941-1944. Some historians have called that book the most important work on the

Holocaust in the 21st century. Dieckmann's „Persecution and Mass Murder of Lithuanian Jews during Summer and Fall of 1941" co-authored with Lithuanian-American historian Saulius Sužiedėlis deeply influenced the course of Holocaust studies in Lithuania. Lithuanian MEP Aušra Maldeikienė was one of the few people to review Vanagaitė's new book in the press and we invite you to read her thoughts below.



Aušra Maldeikienė

A half-year before her death, my aunt, who was then over 90, made a very unexpected comment: "Maybe it was a good thing they deported us to Siberia." I simply froze for a second, unable to believe my ears, and my aunt went on: "Maybe God won't be so wrathful when I die, and will forgive, because father gave that Jewish girl back to her relatives after three months. Maybe we have atoned for our guilt that way, because we were afraid of the neighbors." That's how I learned, three-quarters of a century from that horrific year 1941, another detail about the history of my family and also of my nation. A tragic detail.

The Holocaust isn't just a great tragedy for our nation, it is the main stroke in the painting of our country's future. The moral judgment of the Holocaust shows more than anything else the sort of society in which we live, and also what sort of future awaits us. There are two choices: either we honestly realize our moral responsibility for those events and, having come

to terms with our limitations, create an ethical community, or we continue to look for justifications for what happened, and keep murdering over and over in that way. Not those who lie buried for decades along Lithuania's dirt roads and forest margins, but now murder ourselves.

"How Did It Happen? Rūta Vanagaitė Interviews Christoph Dieckmann" is a book which every right-thinking Lithuanian needs to read. The book isn't hysterical, every sentence is based on historical footnotes, the questions aren't loaded, often compel thought, and the historian's answers are terse and conspicuously complete. The authors of this book can be proud. Incidentally, the authors are a German historian who has been researching the Holocaust in Lithuania for over 20 years and Rūta Vanagaitė, whose reputation an aggressive mob has tried to ruin, but who remains unbowed.

The book is worth reading if you want to know how it all happened. But the most important thing isn't just that: it's not the tragic history of the Holocaust itself (which is more or less known) which compels reflection, but the raising

of moral dilemmas concerning it or just the attempt to tie them together. "History is neither black nor white, it has many shades of grey," Dieckmann says in the book, and it is exactly that messy, swampy wandering along the grey roads of considering the tragedy which lets us connect the past and future.

Seeking to answer the question of why during the war the absolute majority of the Jews who had lived here for centuries and almost 200,000 POWs were brutally, inhumanely violently murdered during the war, we have to take into consideration the souls of simple Lithuanians and the principles guiding the Lithuanian elite at that time, and the direction indicated by the moral compass, by the Church.

On the eve of war and at the beginning of the war the Lithuanian elite rather clearly demonstrated through their words and deeds that it was justifiable to sacrifice their Jewish brethren in the name of Lithuanian independence. Moreover, many of the elite perceived a thriving Lithuania exclusively as a homogenous, ethnically pure, militarily strong, fascist and "healthy"

state with no place for ethnic minorities. So it was a problem of morality which mainly led to tragedy.

Do we have a similar kind of thinking in embryonic form now, or maybe already sprouts which are growing strong? It's clear the answer is in the affirmative. Increasing anti-Semitism, derision towards the Roma, demonization of refugees (although their numbers can be counted on a single hand) and insulting even citizens of Lithuania who speak loudly about these things (or their demonization, as in Rūta Vanagaitė's case) are clear signs of a still unsolved moral problem. To those who might say I am simply exaggerating here, I will just invite them to read the comments below any text posted which call for thinking about these national problems in one way or another, even ones which aren't as painful as the Holocaust. And at the very least, statements to the effect incitement to nationalist hatred only becomes a real act when it is repeated three times sound horrible; it is hard to believe the prosecutor's office in EU mem-

ber-state Lithuania would decline on that basis to investigate threats towards people who talk about anti-Semitism.

What is the worth of Lithuania where a tranquil life is only guaranteed to those who aggressively or passively consent to the debasement of other ethnicities? And how does it differ from that state where the Jews were shot on the margins of the forests? Rhetorical questions. It's impossible to come up with any good answer to those who keep looking for all sorts of justifications even for the mass murder of the Jews.

Perhaps the most frequently encountered justification is connected with the fact that Lithuanians not only allegedly murdered Jews, but also saved them. The argument is empty: besides the number of Jews rescued being drastically much less than the number murdered, rescues were only an action inspired by the mass murders. Furthermore, the rescuers didn't fear the Germans so much as their Lithuanian neighbors. There were way too few Germans so to hunt down rescuers of Jews they relied directly on reports from eager-to-help Lithuanian informants. My aunt's story presented here at the beginning, incidentally testifies to this fact.

It's also a lie that the mass murder of the Jews can be justified because the Jews were Communists and deported Lithuanians to Siberia. As a percentage, more Jews were deported to Siberia before the onset of war than Lithuanians, and it's a terrific thing that it was usually these Jews who were deported who managed to survive.

Statements that those who murdered Jews had no choice also don't stand up to criticism. The facts show that not a single person who refused to take part in the mass murders was ever punished by the German occupational regime; the biggest threat they faced was the derision of those around them and lost status with the cor-

responding loss of special privileges, as well as the lost opportunity to profit at the expense of the murdered Jews.

"A cabinet, a pair of warm shoes, a writing table, a book shelf, two wooden beds with mattresses, a wardrobe, a buffet, a bathroom mirror, two night tables." That's the kind of property Šiauliai District chief Jonas Noreika, who lived at Vilniaus street no. 260 in the city of Šiauliai, guarded. The items belonged to Jews whom he "moved" to the ghetto in Žagarė, and that's where they were "liquidated." He set up an apartment in a house which also came to him after the Jewish owners were "moved." Another rhetorical question: of what worth is a nation which over and over again tries to turn a person of this sort of morality into a hero, even if that person was later proclaimed a general?

And if we're looking for heroes already, then wouldn't Ignas Urbaitis, who served as head of the Šiauliai district until Noreika, be a better candidate? At least he suggested only seizing property from Jews who were believed to be active members of the Communist movement, and resigned on humanitarian grounds when persecution of Jews increased.

Especially upsetting was the distancing from the Holocaust by the Lithuanian Church of that time, and the current lack of desire to condemn the mass murders, denying they happened and seeking after justifications because there is no justification. In the minutes of the Lithuanian Bishops' Congress from 1941 to 1944 there is practically no discussion of any issues involving the Jews. Actually there is some discussion that Lithuanians shouldn't take too much Jewish property, and that those who had taken too much should donate part of it to the Church. They said only the partisans should be allowed to take more because they had sacrificed them-

selves for the good of the country. No comment necessary. If we don't want the situation to repeat itself, a clear judgment and statements of contrition are truly needed from the current leaders of the Lithuanian Church.

The profound moral problems of Lithuanian society are also demonstrated by the fact that when there is public speech about the Holocaust, there are always questions about why this or that person has taken up the topic. In an interview several weeks ago a blogger insistently demanded Christoph Dieckmann answer whether he was Jewish or not. The German historian was compelled to explain his family history in fine detail back to his grandparents and more or less give an oath that there were no Jews among them. The historian just said the Holocaust interested him because he was a German, in other words, the topic is important to him because he is a German and feels guilt because of this. The collective guilt of a people exists, if we are souls who are capable of thought.

The story of the origin of the book "How Did It Happen? Rūta Vanagaitė Interviews Christoph Dieckmann" also gives rise to sad thoughts concerning the moral state of Lithuanian society. Several months before the book was released, Lithuanian MP Laurynas Kasčiūnas demanded the Lithuanian Jewish Community explain how it dared allocate money for publishing this sort of book. This ejaculation by this politician who openly belonged to a fascist party (and the action detailed here only confirms his fascist convictions) so clearly demonstrating disdain for the Lithuanian constitution wouldn't have been exception except for one thing: there was no public reaction to this, either.

It's also pathetic that Lithuanian MP and historian Arvydas Anušauskas posted on his facebook page, after the book was released, that he

doubted the story of the historian, whom he called honorable, because the German historian allegedly had surrendered to professional temptation and public relations. The Lithuanian MP didn't present any facts negating this or that matter discussed in the book, of course, but the German historian was obviously made into an object of derision.

Especially dangerous as well is the fact Vidmantas Vališaitis, who rather publicly whitewashes the murderers of Jews, has been given the post of advisor at the Center for the Study of the Genocide and Resistance of Residents of Lithuania. As he himself says, he doesn't plan to try to justify himself because "deeds speak for themselves." Deeds do speak indeed, and that's exactly why these kinds of appointments are horrific, shameful to Lithuania, and harmful both to the Lithuanian Jewish Community and that portion who belong to the ranks of the descendants of Lithuanian political prisoners.

And it's a complete tragedy that this exceptionally profound and wise book has found no publisher in Lithuania brave enough to issue it, although they print seas and seas of crap. The road to fascism and totalitarianism begins with small steps. But when a book is feared because of the truth it contains and the self-censorship button is pressed, we're already very close to that sad final destination.

I am a Lithuanian. I have never heard even a word that there might be someone of different ethnicity among my ancestors. And that's exactly why, that I am a part of the nation which so brutally exterminated its Jewish brethren, I feel guilt over all of those who are now stilled for the ages in ditches by the sides of the road. It is exactly because I am a Lithuanian that the ashes of the Holocaust knock at the door of my heart. ■

Dr. Ruth Reches Presents Her New Book on the Holocaust and Identity

The Lithuanian Jewish Community hosted Dr. Ruth Reches's presentation of her new book on personal identity and the Holocaust. Literature expert Rima Kasperionytė, psychologist Aistė Diržytė, cultural historian Aurimas Švedas and publisher Juozas Žitkauskas spoke as a panel at the book presentation, moderated by Vytautas Magnus University lecturer Algirdas Davidavičius, and shared their thoughts and impressions. Pianist Vitalijus Neugasimovas provided a musical interlude. Students from the Sholem Aleichem ORT Gymnasium where Dr. Reches serves as principal read extracts from the book at the event.

"It's very important to understand the thoughts and feelings of Holocaust survivors. As time passes we will only have the chance to interpret their emotional legacy. The main reason I wrote this dissertation was because I myself am a third-generation Holocaust survivor, and although more than seventy years have passed, I still feel consequences from what my grandparents lived

through. I cannot extricate myself from the Holocaust; I make decisions in life based on the Holocaust and its possible recurrence. I think about where I can quickly hide my children if war breaks out, which of my friends I can rely upon, which I cannot, who would receive us and who would betray us. The study performed and the writing of the dissertation were an attempt to rid myself of this burden which always and everywhere gnaws at me. I am very pleased that it has become a valuable expression and this book has appeared as a result," Dr. Reches said.

Some of the people who were eighty and older at the time of their inclusion in the study as interview subjects are no longer among the living. The material from the interviews with survivors revealed shifts in identity connected with the Holocaust. Survivors underwent a changed understanding of themselves as members of society because of their difference rooted in ethnicity. Their concept of their Jewish roots and family roles also changed. Their sense of self-worth underwent deep shifts. The loss of members of the family served to strengthen ties between surviving family members. Life goals changed as the main goal became survival. Dr. Reches says the Holocaust had long-term

effects on identity, including the group affinity of being a "survivor," which has very different meanings in the Lithuanian and Israeli societies. Informants in the research exhibited a dual relationship with the Holocaust: they saw themselves as drawing strength and life experience from it, finding meaning in the Holocaust, or they perceived themselves as having lost the continuity of life because of it.

"Very little attention is paid to the Holocaust in the schools. For instance, there is only one lesson in 11th grade. During that lesson the student will only see numbers, how many people were murdered, but he cannot feel and cannot understand there were living people behind those numbers. When you have the opportunity to read people's memories about how they survived—during the Holocaust they were from seven to nineteen years of age, just like the age of our students—then you subconsciously identify with those people, and you can get a better sense and understanding of what they experienced, what happened and was done to them, how horrible life was then," Dr. Reches said.

Reches said she believes the experiences revealed in the book can help those experiencing difficult periods in life and loss today.



"It doesn't matter if you're a Lithuanian or a Jew, it doesn't matter how old you are, you will find someone with whom to identify in this book. It reveals the experiences of people who landed in extreme situations. They talk about how relations within the family changed, interpersonal relations in general changed, and about how their life goals, values and sense of self shifted. This is the life all of us are living. And we could, at any time, find ourselves in this sort of extreme situation," Dr. Reches said at the book launch.

The Holocaust has led to long-term trauma which can bring many more negative emotions to the individual than the trauma of shock. "No one knows what the duration of the trauma will be. They don't know when and how the Holocaust will finally end. An-



Snapshots from the book presentation at the Lithuanian Jewish Community



other side of the equation is the role played during traumatic experience. If people are able to control their actions, to defend their family members, that's one thing, but if you are completely passive and no one is counting on you and you cannot control the situation, that is something else entirely. This sort of personal situation has a very great influence upon identity and personality. Another thing which distinguishes the Holocaust from

other kinds of trauma is the ability to rationalize, to explain why this is happening. When people are being murdered and exterminated only because they are Jews, when they haven't done anything wrong, they are not able to explain this rationally. The post-trauma environment is also highly significant. Nobody cheered in Eastern Europe when the survivors returned home. When they came back, they found neither their families nor

their homes, and had to begin life anew in this sort of society," Dr. Reches explained.

The book has been published in Lithuanian and Hebrew with a comprehensive abstract in English. It contains numerous photographs from the collection of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum recording Holocaust sites and scenes in Lithuania.

Ruth Reches was born in 1975. In 1996 she earned a bachelor's degree in social sciences—

sociology, psychology and criminology—at Bar Ilan University in Israel. At Vilnius University, she earned a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's in clinical psychology in 2001 at Vilnius University. From 2011 to 2019 she worked on her doctorate in psychology at Mykolas Romeris University in Vilnius, Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas and at the University of Córdoba in Spain. ■

Archaeological Discoveries at the Pakruojis Synagogue Complex Site



Synagogue, Pakruojis, 1937. Courtesy of Aušra Museum of Šiauliai

Dr. Ernestas Vasiliauskas delivered a lecture in October at a synagogue in Pakruojis, Lithuania, presenting the latest archaeological finds at the former synagogue complex which consisted of the Winter Synagogue, the Hassidic shtible (aka the Tailors' Synagogue) and the Summer Synagogue. Archaeology was performed at the site in August and early September under a project by the regional administration of Pakruojis to renovate the banks of the Kruoja River and the city park in the town of Pakruojis. The regional administration turned the archaeological work over to the Archeologijos centras organization.

Little is known about the synagogue complex, and Dr. Vasiliauskas said the most information is available concerning the Summer Synagogue, which was the first of Lithuania's surviving 18 wooden synagogues to undergo restoration. It is located further back from the

main street on the banks of the Kruoja River. Compared to Lithuania's other synagogues, this synagogue is exceptional for the original painted decorations on the interior walls and ceiling which were recorded in black-and-white photographs in 1938. The Summer Synagogue was

a working synagogue right up to World War II. After the war it was used as a recreation center, later as a movie theater and as an athletics gymnasium. The painted interior, aron kodesh, bimah and windows were destroyed during reconstruction of the building in 1954 and the interior was divided up with dividers. The wooden synagogue suffered several fires and the last one almost destroyed it forever.

Lead archaeologist Vasiliauskas said the Pakruojis wooden synagogue complex from the 19th century is unique and combines several styles, including late Baroque at the Summer Synagogue, the Classical style at the Winter

Synagogue and traditional architecture in the shtibl. For a long time the complex was a dominant feature on the Pakruojis skyline. The Algimantas Miškinis collection at the Lithuanian National Museum has a photograph of Pakruojis at the beginning of the 20th century which shows two dominating buildings: the Catholic church and the synagogue complex. The Summer and Winter Synagogues along with the shtible are arranged in a U shape around a courtyard. Way back in the 18th century the Jewish community which built the synagogue complex was dominant in Pakruojis. According to the 1897 census Jews outnumbered oth-



Section of the Winter Synagogue, 1938. Photo by Chatzel Lemchen, courtesy of Aušra Museum of Šiauliai



Portion of foundation, Winter Synagogue. Photo by Dr. Ernestas Vasiliauskas

Summer Camp AMEHAYE 2020

The Amehaye summer camp has been holding camps for children for two weeks in the summer for several years now. The program was just as rich and interesting this year and the children failed to grow bored over two weeks of learning and friendship. In summer the main and most fun events take place in nature and everyone seemed to enjoy the games and sports. Educational discussions were also held in nature.

Special attention is given to Jewish traditions at the camp. The program included a lesson on Israel and how to make humus. The young campers also learned how to prepare other Jewish dishes from matzoh and how to make challa for Sabbath. They also celebrated Sabbath with the traditional rituals, prayer and lighting of candles. Some of the boys celebrated their bar mitzvahs at camp. A children's psychologist visited the camp and delivered an interesting lesson. Campers also entered the chemistry laboratory

and took part in experiments. Two excursions also took place: one to the Safari Park in Anykščiai, Lithuania, and the other to Druskininkai, Lithuania, where the young people learned to make the Lithuanian pastry šakotis. A bubble party was held the last day of camp and the official closing ceremony included releasing balloons into the sky after making a wish, followed by the Sabbath celebration.



Community Members Enjoy Excursions



The calendar for 5771 is dedicated to Jewish symbols and most of the symbols are intended for worshipping God and are associated with holidays and religion. Hundreds of synagogues once operated in Lithuania where the Torah was read daily, the supplicants wore tallisr and all the men wore yarmulkes on their heads. There was a thriving Jewish community who lit the nine-stemmed hanukiya candelabrum on Hanukkah while the children played the dreidl. These symbols and items are now most often exhibited at museums rather than being part of our daily lives.

The Jewish Herring's Journey

It's said Litvaks used to eat at least one herring per day. There is a plethora of recipes for preparing herring in Jewish cooking: it can be marinated, chopped and cooked. Chopped herring with bits of onion, apple, dried bread, vinegar, sour cream or citrus juice is one of the traditional Litvak dishes which takes pride of place on the holiday table. Polish Jewish added sugar to this dish, and South African Litvaks add a little ginger or simple sweet cookies to the chopped herring mix.



Dovilė Rūkaitė

The History of Forshmak

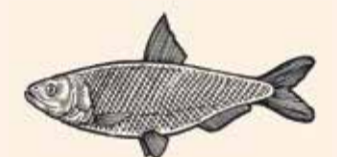
Modern Jewish cooking is much different than that of ancient Israel. Kosher food rules are the only connection between them. Herring's main advantage is in adhering to the kosher rules: a fish must have fins and scales. Several members of the herring family ply the Red Sea. Before the 15th century many peoples held the herring to be a low-quality fish because of its odor and bitter taste. Back then, in order to save money, only monks and the very poor ate this fish.

At the end of the 14th century a fisherman in Holland began to remove the gills from herring when they realized this killed the unpleasant smell. Then he began storing this kind of herring in saltwater in barrels. Others took notice. It was a cheap fish. All sorts of recipes appeared. We need to thank not just the Dutch fisherman, but also the French who didn't take care of their

oral hygiene and lost their teeth early... and so acquired a taste for pâté. At that time the persecution of Jews was on the rise in Europe. It was better in France because of the Jewish diaspora there. Jews began producing exotic pâtés. This is how the famous classic forshmak came about.

What is Forshmak?

Yiddish: פֿרשִׁמאַק. Litvaks call it gehakte herring. Officially, this is a herring dish which is cooked with potatoes, onions, sour cream and pepper. Its analogue in Russian cuisine, for example, is called сельдь, "carnal." The dish as presented in V. Levshin's book "Russian Cuisine" can be boiled or cooked and served hot or cold. It's difficult to imagine traditional Jewish cuisine without forshmak, where eggs, onions, apples, crustless white bread or bread crumbs, butter, potatoes and walnuts are also added. This snack has become the national dish of Jews.



It turns out, however, that this dish isn't really Jewish, but was borrowed from East Prussian cuisine, where it is called cooked herring. In Jewish cooking forshmak is a cold snack made by chopping up herring. In olden times the worst-quality fish, which used to be called "brown" because of spoilage, were used to prepare this dish. Serving forshmak as part of the dairy menu, it was allowed to soak it in milk. There are thousands of recipes for this dish on the internet. It may also include beef, lamb, chicken, mushrooms, potatoes, cabbage, pasta, artichokes, curds, beets, turnips, sour cream, cheese, mayonnaise, mustard and catsup. There is even a forshmak made of veal marrow. Bon appétit!

Community Members Enjoy Excursions

Gercas Žakas

The Kaunas Jewish Community has carried on the tradition for a number of years now of thanking Community members who take an active part in different activities and who help organize these activities. The usual form this takes is a dinner party held in their honor with live music, but this year Kaunas Jewish Community volunteers were invited on a one-day tour of the area in and around Kaunas. Our members visited and learned about the small town of Kačerginė and its historical and cultur-

al legacy, taking in a guided tour by the enthusiastic Lina Sinkevičienė and breathing in the refreshing air of the pine groves. They were also warmly received at the office of the Kačerginė aldermanship.

Later our group visited the Zypļiai manor estate, were treated to foods from the ethnic region of the Zanavykai, a cuisine influenced by Jewish culinary traditions, and visited the small town of Lukšiai. Unfortunately this wonderful area also contains signs of a bloody history, and members of the Kaunas Jewish Community commemorated the Holocaust victims of Šakiai, Lukšiai Zapyškis and the surrounding area.



Tour in Kačerginė



KJC chairman Gercas Žakas said: "I'm not complaining of boredom, but I miss the direct contact, meetings and fun times with the Community. A wonderful end of autumn, no farm-work, just sun, un-Lithuanian warm weather, relaxing, smiling, breathing freely. Finally we have prepared a trip long anticipated with Kaunas Jewish Community members and friends. The trip's theme is Jewish Vilna."

Members of the Kaunas Jewish Community at the monument to the Vilna Gaon, the great sage and author of Torah and Talmud commentary from the 18th century who put Vilnius on the map as the Jerusalem of Lithuania (Right and center: KJC chairman G. Žakas).

information
LJC ADMINISTRATION CONTACTS

Name, surname	Title	Telephone, e-mail
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Sofija Sirutienė	Children and youth programs coordinator	8 672 57 540 sofija@lzb.lt

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Ema Jakobienė	Chief program coordinator (food, pharmaceuticals, winter help, SOS)	8 5 261 1251 emaj@sc.lzb.lt
Žana Skudovičienė	Abi men zet zich club	8 678 81 514 zanas@sc.lzb.lt
Home-care service		8 5 261 7244 hesed@sc.lzb.lt
Volunteer doctors	Medical consultations from 12 noon to 3:00 P.M.	8 5 261 1736

OTHER LJC CONTACTS

Name of the Club	Coordinator	Telephone, e-mail
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Jewish song and dance ensemble Fajerlech	Larisa Vyšniauskienė	8 687 79 309 larisa.vysniauskiene@gmail.com

useful information

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Schedule of services at the Choral Synagogue in Vilnius, Pylimo street no. 39:

- **WORKDAYS**
from 8:30 A.M. to 9:30 A.M.
 - **SATURDAY**
from 10:00 A.M. to 12:30 P.M.
 - **SUNDAY**
from 9:00 A.M. to 11:30 P.M.
- Telephone (8 5) 261 2523

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Sabbath at home
The Lithuanian Jewish Community Makes Challa

Making Jewish bread-kneading, baking, blessing and breaking – is part of almost every Jewish holiday. The Bagel Shop Café at the Lithuanian Jewish Community makes challa bread every Friday. We always make it in the traditional way, with sesame and poppy seeds. It is cooked in round forms before Rosh Hashanah, Jewish New Year's. On special occasions it is made in other forms as well, but its taste and smell always recalls the tradition formed over thousands of years. This year for the fourth time the LJC joined a global challa-making project and made it simultaneously with other Jewish communities around the world. We invited Community members to share their thoughts on the event and their own traditions for making challa.

Friday challa

1 kg flour (sifted)
 2 eggs
 1/3 cup oil
 30 grams yeast
 1/2 cup water
 1 teaspoon salt
 2-3 tablespoons sugar

Mix the yeast and sugar in a few tablespoons of warm water and wait for the yeast to activate. In a separate bowl pour the flour into a hill and add one egg to the top, mix, add yeast, water, oil and extra ingredients and stir well until the mass fills the

bowl, and add flour if needed. Place the dough in a separate bowl and cover with a towel. Place this bowl in a warm spot so the dough rises. After 30 to 40 minutes press down on it a little bit, and separate the dough into two pieces, then form three bands from a portion and weave it like a hair braid. Place the prepared loaves on a greased tray, cover with a towel and leave it for an hour. Mix an egg and brush it on the braided loaves. Sprinkle with poppy or sesame seeds. Heat your oven to 190° C. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes until it turns a nice brown.
 A Good Sabbath!

write us!

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