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Erik Laubscher
Vollemaan Kouebokkeveld,
oil on canvas
R200,000 - R300,000

Yaacov Agam
Star, agamogram
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South African Jewish Report

The source of quality content, news and insights

■ Volume 24 - Number 10 ■ 20 March 2020 ■ 24 Adar 5780

www.sajr.co.za

South Africa's shuls close to stop spread of coronavirus

JORDAN MOSHE
AND TAL FEINBERG

The chief rabbi of South Africa, Dr Warren Goldstein, made the toughest decision of his career on Wednesday (18 March) by announcing the closure of shuls across the country in a bid to curb the rapid spread of COVID-19.

For the first time ever, South African Jews won't be able to go to shul, effectively putting a hold on regular *minyanim*, *shiurim* (study sessions), and shul events.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* after the announcement, Goldstein described the decision as "heart-breaking".

"The process has taken all day, and the decision is the result of multiple consultations," he says. "We followed a very thorough process which involved medical consultations and extensive discussions with the *dayanim* (judges) of the Beth Din and other senior rabbis."

In addition to all the telephonic consultations, Goldstein also conducted a conference call on Wednesday with more than 45 rabbis in South Africa in which he explained the process and reasoning behind the decision.

"Since the call, I've had many messages from them supporting the decision," he says. "This was a unanimous decision taken across all the rabbinic structures."

He stresses that a decision like this is driven by the Torah value of protecting human life. "This is a temporary measure, and we look forward to seeing things return to normal."

"It's an important time for people to take personal responsibility, to perform more *mitzvot* (good deeds), and to *daven* at home. Just because no services are being held doesn't mean we don't pray. Now, more than ever,

we need to pray, learn Torah, and perform acts of kindness."

The decision was announced in a statement issued jointly by Goldstein, the Johannesburg Beth Din, the South African Rabbinical Association, and the Rabbinical Association of the Western Cape.

According to the statement, the decision to close shuls was made after extensive consultation with many parties including Netcare Chief Executive Dr Richard Friedland; virologist Professor Barry Schoub, and world halachic authority Rabbi Osher Weiss.

"Their expert [...] advice is that in order to prevent further spread of the disease, our shul services

should not continue at this point in time," reads the statement.

"It's with a heavy heart that we recommend that people *daven* at home, on their own, without a *minyan*, and that shul services no longer take place at this stage."

The chief rabbi says that many rabbis are investigating setting up online *shiurim* using video conferencing platforms, stressing that we all need to involve ourselves in novel approaches like this. "This is the time to pull together in unity in the knowledge that we can emerge even stronger."

Rabbi Yossy Goldman of Sydenham Shul says, "This has

never happened in my lifetime. We are in uncharted waters. There have been times when we haven't been able to *daven* together because of anti-Semitism and hate, now it's because of love."

He and other rabbis across South Africa are to meet their leadership committees in the next 24 hours to decide the way forward. This will include providing support in all spheres.

"Thank G-d there is much Jewish inspiration and teaching available online which we can share, and we have our own talented rabbis to do the same," says Goldman.

Rabbi Hazdan of Great Park

Shul says that *shiurim* will continue using the online conferencing platform Zoom, and the shul hopes to offer even more *shiurim* than before now that people have more time on their hands. "We want to make something negative into something positive, and to enrich the community with the possibility of *davening* in their own homes."

Chabad Greenstone's Rabbi Pini Pink says that closing shuls is devastating, but it will continue to support congregants by having a roster of volunteers to assist with shopping and errands for

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New reality for community as pandemic takes hold

NICOLA MILTZ

A birthday party celebrated more than 12 000 kilometres away in the United States brought the dreaded COVID-19 virus right into the living room of the South African Jewish community, rocking it to its core.

The virus had already announced its arrival on our shores on Thursday, 5 March, in Kwa-Zulu Natal – the same day an ex-South African and former King David Linksfield alumni celebrated

Africa partied alongside ex-South Africans from various parts of America. The party vibes ended abruptly when one of the guests touched down at OR Tambo International Airport a few days later feeling "a little off" knowing "in the back of his mind" he could possibly have contracted COVID-19.

"After advice from my doctor, my wife Elana and I decided to go straight home from the airport where I placed myself in quarantine," said Gary Sweidan of Johannesburg.

As the *SA Jewish Report* was put to bed last Wednesday night, Sweidan – who has still not been able to give his young children a welcome-home hug – announced via WhatsApp that he had tested positive, thereby becoming the first member of the community to do so. He is being quarantined separately from his wife and

children, who are also in isolation.

The community of Westport was thrown into chaos as it was revealed in local newspaper reports that he had tested positive, and that a further 14 party goers had possibly contracted the virus.

One of the ex-South African Americans at

the party posted the following on Twitter on 14 March: "Since last Sunday, I've been locked in my study with a dry cough/fever/headache. In spite of trying [to get a test] since Monday, I was tested on Friday – extended family had some symptoms and tested positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday. It hasn't been a good week, but it's given me time to think."

Five South Africans from the party tested positive. All are in quarantine and recovering well, if not fully recovered.

One of them who wished to remain anonymous told the *SA Jewish Report*, "This thing is real. It's super contagious. This is about a virus, and not about who spreads it."

"If you think you may have it, go into major precaution mode, and become quite obsessive. It's not Ebola, so don't panic. If you are fit and healthy, it's not as bad as the annual winter cold. But it spreads."

According to Zev Kregel of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), at least 300 members of the community including parents and their children have placed themselves in quarantine for a number of reasons including having come into contact with someone who has tested positive for the virus. Many have been abroad, and have chosen to self-isolate following strict travel guidelines.

No sooner had the news ripped through the community than the miniscule virus continued to make its presence felt in other parts of the country, all in unrelated incidents.

In less than a week, the very best and worst sides of the community reared its head.

When news that one of the partygoers from America had attended a *simcha* (celebration) in Johannesburg last Wednesday night – before travel protocols and international-health guidelines were in place – she was lambasted and harassed on social media for doing so.

A frightened community was quick to blame,

Continued on page 14>>

Communal leaders unite



Communal leaders from around South Africa gathered for an emergency meeting on Wednesday to make decisions about how to curb the spread of COVID-19

her 40th birthday in Westport, Connecticut, in the US.

Little did she know that the novel virus – which has literally brought the world to its knees – was lurking amongst her 40-odd guests as they danced with joy.

Tight-knit friends and family from South

For the good of all



CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN

Times like these require us to respond with heroic strength. One of our foundational Torah values is the sanctity of human life – every human life – to the point that, as our sages teach us, whoever saves one life, it's as if they have saved an entire world.

Every human being is an entire world. Which is why we must do everything in our power to follow the medical guidelines drafted by leading experts in the field to combat coronavirus and curtail its spread. For, if our collective efforts result in saving even one life, it would all have been worth it.

These guidelines are simple but require total dedication on our part if they are to be effective. As ever, we can look to our holy Torah for guidance and inspiration. The Talmud teaches that the saintliest sages of the time distinguished themselves by their care for other people, and the painstaking measures they took to avoid causing harm. It describes how if they came across a shard of glass on the ground, they would bury it deep in the earth so no one could

possibly come to harm.

And let's be clear: with the coronavirus, we need to be extremely vigilant in case, G-d forbid, something we do or don't do causes the sickness or demise of another human being. We all need to be so careful to wash our hands, to self-quarantine if we have travelled overseas, to isolate ourselves and get tested if we display any symptoms of illness, and to follow all the other medical guidelines which have been published.

“For, if our collective efforts result in saving even one life, it would all have been worth it.”

A lot rests on our compliance. There are many in our community whose immunity is compromised due to old age or chronic illness. Furthermore, we live in a country where millions of people lack access to adequate medical care. A widespread outbreak would be catastrophic.

The Torah tells us, “Do not place blood on your home.” We have a Torah obligation to make our homes physically safe – to put a railing on a balcony and a fence around a swimming pool. Certainly, we need to ensure that we don't have blood on our hands when it comes to this virus; that we observe the letter and spirit of these *mitzvahs* (commandments), and follow the example of our saintly sages.

This is a difficult time for everyone. There is fear and uncertainty everywhere. The economic consequences have been devastating. The world has become dark and confusing. Everyone feels vulnerable. This vulnerability is all the more shocking for our prior assumption that at this stage of human history, with all our technological and scientific prowess, an invisible virus couldn't bring the entire world to its knees. And yet, here we are, with waves of fear

sweeping the globe, healthcare systems bracing, and governments battling to cope.

How do we cope? Part of the response must be to give love, care, and comfort to our families, communities, and the country at large. G-d says in the Book of Genesis right from the beginning of creation, “It is not good for man to be alone.” We draw untold strength from each other.

But we also turn to G-d for comfort and strength. At a time like this, we need to deepen our faith and connection to our creator, turning to Him with our heartfelt prayers, knowing that He cares and He listens, and that the world, and our lives, are in His loving hands. This is not a simplistic belief that somehow everything will turn out exactly as we wish; it's a deep faith grounded in generations of Jews who have known in their bones that G-d is our loving father, that He cares for us, and that ultimately, whatever happens is part of His loving plan for us.

And in our prayers and all our efforts, we should have in our hearts not just our precious Jewish community, but the welfare of all South Africans, and indeed all human beings. The coronavirus sees no difference between people. It's blind to race, religion, social and economic status. Our sages have always taught us, based on our tradition from Sinai, that all human beings are equal before G-d. As it says in Pirkei Avot, “Beloved is the human being created in G-d's image.” It's the G-dliness that radiates within every human being that defines the preciousness and dignity of all.

At a time like this, we need to embrace our common humanity. We need to reach out in love and care to everyone, mindful that we are all brothers and sisters, all children of Adam and Eve, all part of one human family.

And as we cry out to our creator, we also rededicate ourselves to becoming better people.

Our sages teach us that moments of crisis can be awesome catalysts for personal growth. That we can leverage feelings of fear and vulnerability to become stronger, to get closer to G-d, and closer to our fellow Jew and fellow human beings.



Let us continue to observe the protocols. And let us continue to pray for the welfare of every human being. And, as we turn our hearts to G-d, let us have in mind not only ourselves and our families, and our Jewish community here in South Africa, but all South Africans, Jews all around the world, and indeed every human being.

• This was written before the announcement of the closing of the shuls on Wednesday.

Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
18:00	18:48	Johannesburg
18:39	19:29	Cape Town
17:48	18:38	Durban
18:08	18:57	Bloemfontein
18:10	19:00	Port Elizabeth
18:01	18:51	East London

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Torah Thought

Moving forward when time stands still

Usually during this time of the year, my wife and I are deeply engaged in getting ready for our annual Pesach retreat. We refer to it as the “PPPPPP” (Post-Purim Pre-Pesach Preparation-Period), but now the last two words seem to have become something like “pandemic plague”.

The current global situation has created much uncertainty, anxiety, and fear. Many are grappling with the loss of a sense of certainty that has now become the norm. Plans are up in the air, businesses are struggling, and so much of our daily routine has been disrupted.

The very first *mitzvah* (commandment) that G-d instructed the Jewish people to do before our departure from Egyptian bondage was called *Kiddush HaChodesh* (sanctifying time). By establishing the beginning of each month, we can determine when each of the Jewish holidays will be. With most commandments we uplift an object, but this one affects the entire flow of time.

How appropriate to read about this

message now as we do this Shabbos, when time seems to be at a standstill. Judaism teaches us that nothing is random, and that every difficulty is an opportunity for personal and communal spiritual growth.

How do we make the best of this situation? Amidst our fears, are we strengthening our trust and faith that G-d will protect us? Can we remain positive and optimistic in the face of difficulty and challenge?

With our kids off school, now is a perfect time to reconnect and bond with our loved ones. We can seize the moment to fortify our homes with Torah study, and to promote Jewish values. So many of our shuls have been offering online classes in lieu of the usual learning schedules. Perhaps we can go inwards and reconfigure the trajectory of our lives with ourselves, our loved ones, and G-d.

Let's embrace the fact that while we can control some things like taking proper health precautions and following guidelines, we can't control everything. After doing our part, we

Rabbi Ari Kievman, Chabad Goodness and Kindness Centre



can rest calmly with absolute faith that whatever happens is exactly what's supposed to happen. Let's keep the faith that all is according to divine plan. We were in G-d's hands all along, and continue to be.

Torah teaches us that whenever confronted with a challenging situation, our *mitzvahs* and acts of kindness can generate positive energy from above to combat negativity. Consider performing another *mitzvah* in the merit of world health and stability.

This is a time to look out for each other and be supportive in whatever way we can. If you know anyone who is in quarantine, or the elderly and more vulnerable, consider reaching out with support. Channelling your energy towards helping others will help you to deal with your own stress.

As we bless the upcoming month of miracles this Shabbos, we pray to the almighty for protection, healing, and good news for all.

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 Tel: 0860 525 200 • Board of Directors Howard Sackstein (Chairperson), Dina Diamond, Herschel Jawitz, Shaun Matisonn, Benji Porter.
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Cape Town fire ‘like the early ten plagues before Pesach’

TALI FEINBERG

“Witnessing a fire about to destroy the home you grew up in is a sight I hope few people have in their lives”, says David Horler, who experienced this on Sunday in Cape Town.

The fires that broke out on Table Mountain and Lion’s Head at the weekend led to scenes of destruction and fear as the flames approached homes and even a shul and Jewish school at record speed. Cars and one fire engine were destroyed, and a number of homes were burnt.

“Flames were in our garden and were making their way around the full perimeter of the property creating a giant ring,” says Horler, whose family home on the Atlantic Seaboard was saved by firefighters.

“Within what felt like less than a minute, the smoke became so thick that everything went dark. Sparks began to rain down and burned holes in my t-shirt. At this point, we knew it was over, and that we had to leave,” he says.

“In 1995, there was a similar fire, and the following year, a devastating mudslide due to loosened earth that caused extensive damage to my parents’ house. So, ever since then, my family has been extremely vigilant – and quite traumatised – about fires,” says Horler.

“This fire had already been raging on Table Mountain for several hours when I received a call from my sister. She had just received a panicked phone call from our mom to collect their animals and take them to safety. The fire had crossed the road, and was now heading down Lion’s Head towards their house. The wind was howling.

“I arrived at the house about 30 minutes later to see smoke billowing from the tree line just beyond their property. The house sits just below a ridge, inside a ravine, right up against the mountain. We knew, if things got bad, we would have very little time to react due to the house’s position. We started to load cars while they used hosepipes to wet the garden, walls, and roof of the house.

“Within 30 minutes of the news

that the fire was far away, out of nowhere, we saw the first flame appear on the top of the ridge and ash started to blanket everything. We all donned wet clothes as the smoke and ash was starting to burn our chests and eyes. At the same time, fire trucks were hurtling past our house to tend to the flames higher up the mountain, oblivious to how close it was to our property. Eventually, out of sheer desperation, I ran into the middle of the road and forcibly stopped a fire truck and begged them for assistance.

“By this time, the flames were already in our garden. At this point,

occurring when the winter rains arrive.

“There are literally no words to express the gratitude we have for the fearless firefighting heroes.”

Meanwhile, many community members co-ordinated efforts on the ground. Jacqui Biess assisted with traffic control, evacuating residents, calling in volunteers, and keeping stakeholders updated.

“I was watching a live stream of the fire, and it was so scary. It was also so surreal that in this time of Covid-19, it felt like we were experiencing the ten plagues early for Pesach,” she says.

Artist Beezy Bailey has had numerous



CSO medical responders assisted firefighters and residents battling with the smoke, wind and ash

Photos: CSO Cape Town

an official evacuation order was made. Two hours later, on returning to the house, we could see that the entire property was surrounded by a glowing halo of small fires, but they were under control and we got word that the house had been saved but there was extensive damage all around it. We then heard that some houses above us had been lost.

“While all of this was happening, the president was addressing the nation about plans for a national lockdown to combat Covid-19. Things felt truly apocalyptic. I felt a great sense of helplessness.

“The next morning, at first light, helicopters arrived to douse the remaining smouldering areas, and the full scope of the disaster revealed itself. We will now have to take proactive steps to protect the property with sandbags and retaining walls to prevent another mudslide from

encounters with fires, including losing his holiday home to the catastrophic Garden Route fires in 2017. Once again, fire encroached on his home on the slopes of Table Mountain. “The drill to evacuate was in place. I hosed down my studio, the house, and the trees around it, and we had to wear masks and goggles because of the smoke. The firemen were absolutely outstanding, doing a heroic job in mad winds to contain the fire for 24 hours.”

Leonard Katz lives one road away from the mountain in the City Bowl, and two houses caught fire on the road above his. “Every year, we have a mountain fire, but this was the first time I thought our home was going to go. The police told us to evacuate. The wind was pounding, and the smoke was thick.” His family spent

the night in a nearby hotel, and their home was saved. “Our house would definitely have caught alight without the firefighters.”

Meanwhile, on the other side of the mountain, the fire was threatening Camps Bay Shul and the Phyllis Jowell School, which are nestled in a forest called The Glen. Community Security Organisation (CSO) responders rushed to the scene, and together with community leaders, decided to evacuate the Torah scrolls. “The CSO also assisted in treating firefighters who needed eye drops and the like,” says the

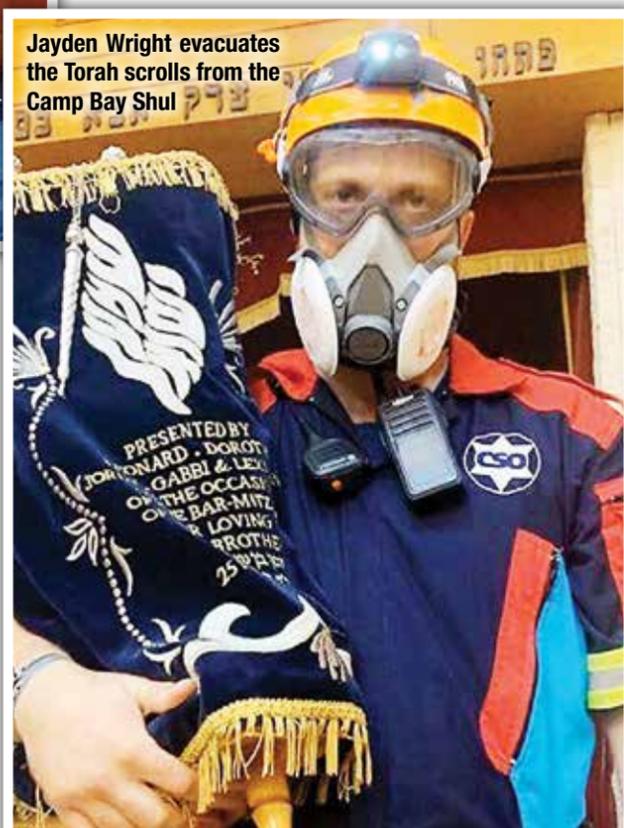
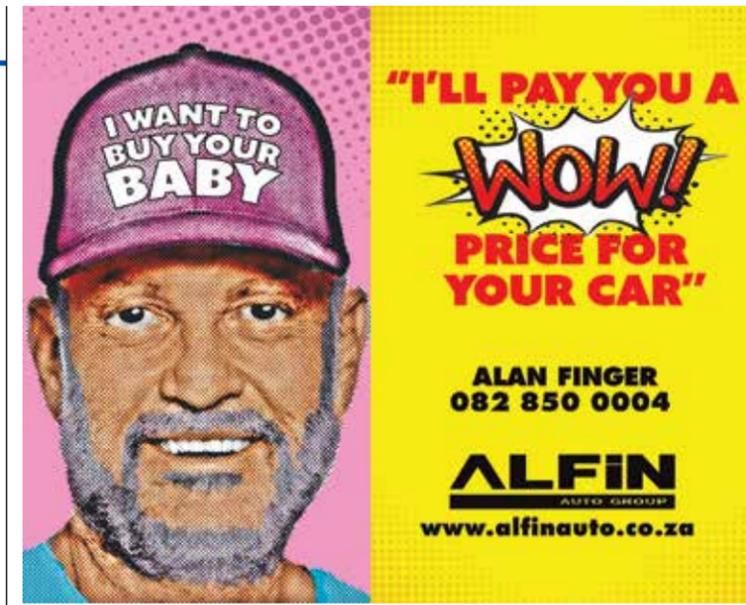
were threatened by the fires. “People are so quick to say how we’re living in a broken city, broken country, broken system. Well, there are two clear factors that averted massive damage to property: first, local authorities ensure that there are firebreaks in place that are regularly cleared. Second, the fire department and its heroes were tireless, dedicated, and thoroughly professional. They arrived in our area after battling the fire for hours on the other side of the mountain.

“They didn’t think twice before venturing into steep, scrubby bush that is difficult for an experienced hiker to tackle on a regular Sunday hike. But they were doing it in cumbersome, hot protective gear and carrying heavy hoses. And they were walking into a solid wall of scorching flames, in the dark, with crazy gusting winds that kept changing directions and fire torrents of embers that would land on trees a hundred meters away and set them alight,” says Gimpel. “Conditions like these are

organisation’s Jarred Marcus. The fire didn’t reach the premises, and the Torah scrolls have been returned.

David Gimpel’s family’s properties

taxing to the max, but the fire teams just kept at it, and didn’t leave until 09:00 this morning once they were sure everything was under control. *Kol hakavod* (well done) to them!”



Jayden Wright evacuates the Torah scrolls from the Camp Bay Shul

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‘Stop lying,’ visiting Arab Israeli activist tells head of BDS-SA

NICOLA MILTZ

A visiting Arab Israeli activist accused the head of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions South Africa (BDS-SA) movement of being a liar in a live television debate this week.

Muhammed Desai of BDS-SA, the organisation just rebranded as Africa For Palestine (AFP), was humiliated more than once during a Newzroom Afrika debate, and called out for a lie.

Desai falsely claimed on TV that the Israeli health ministry warned its citizens of coronavirus only in Hebrew, something he said was typical of apartheid South Africa, which used the medium of Afrikaans to communicate important messages.

Yoseph Haddad, 35, stopped Desai mid-sentence and told him, “Stop lying, I got Israel’s coronavirus warning in Arabic.”

The Haifa-born activist is the founder of Together – Vouch For Each Other, an Arab Israeli organisation which encourages the integration of Israeli society including all its citizens – Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Druze.

He is in South Africa for Israel Apartheid Week (IAW) an anti-Israel movement driven by boycott groups internationally on university campuses in March. IAW has since been postponed owing to the outbreak of Covid-19.

What made him come to South Africa during an unprecedented viral pandemic, knowing full well he would have to isolate himself for two weeks when he returned to Israel, a country in virtual lockdown?

“I have a mission,” he told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “I want to expose the BDS lies. I’m here to tell the truth – the good, the bad, and the ugly.”

“I love that I’m an Arab, and I love that I’m an Israeli. Sure, Israel has problems, but name one country that doesn’t.”

Haddad has no fear. He has stared death in the face after having had his right foot blown off in a Hezbollah terrorist attack during the Second Lebanon War in 2006 when he was serving as a commander in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Israeli doctors miraculously re-attached his foot after multiple surgeries, and he was able to walk again unaided after a year. He has even gone back to playing football, he said.

Haddad was born in Haifa, one of Israel’s largest and most diversely populated cities, known as the “capital of co-existence”. He grew up in Nazareth, known as the Arab capital of Israel.

“As a boy, I would catch the bus from Nazareth to Haifa after

school to play with my cousins. Together we played football with kids from every community. We didn’t care about religion or identity, my friends were Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Druze,” he said.

So, when Haddad turned 18, he also wanted to be called up to serve in the IDF like his Jewish and Druze friends. It was rare for Arab Israelis to volunteer for the IDF.

“I felt that I was Israeli. I wanted to serve my country and be of service to my own Arab community. People thought I was crazy. My parents supported my decision even though my mother was very scared,” he said.

He realised he had made the right decision one month before he went into the army, when a suicide bombing took place at the beachfront Maxim restaurant in Haifa in October 2003, killing 21 people including Arab Israelis.

“I realised then that terrorism doesn’t differentiate between Jew and Arab. That so long as you are an Israeli, you remain a target. I wanted to defend the entire society including my own Arab community,” he said.

Haddad was eventually selected to serve in one of the IDF’s toughest and most highly decorated infantry units, the Golani Brigade, where he became a commander.

“Imagine me, an Arab, giving orders to Jewish soldiers. And they must obey me! Whoever equates Israel with apartheid is dumb because he is speaking out of ignorance,” he said.

Sadly, two months before completing his service, he was seriously injured in a Hezbollah terrorist attack. “Hezbollah fired an anti-tank missile in my direction narrowly missing me. I saw my foot lying next to me,” he said.

He woke up five days and seven operations later to find that doctors had reattached his foot.

This rescue and subsequent recovery filled him with a desire to give back and make a difference.

He studied political science at Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv, and became the chief executive officer of a marketing research

company.

“I started seeing a rise in anti-Semitism and a hatred of Israel. I wanted to connect Arabs with Israeli society and become a catalyst for change,” he said.

With a group of young Arab Israelis made up of Arab Christians, Muslims, Bedouin, and Druze, he founded Together – Vouch for Each Other in 2018.

“Our aim is to connect Arab Israeli society with Israeli society to create a unified society, diverse but living side by side. We believe in national service, and our motto is, “serve the country and the community”. All of this will help us to find solutions to the problems that Arab Israelis face. We believe Arab society is an integral part of Israeli society, and this demands recognition and acceptance by both sides.”

Haddad has received threats from all sides, including extremists on the left and right of Arab and Israeli minority groups. It doesn’t seem to deter him.

“I have nothing to fear. What can be worse than what I have faced. The only way forward is to tell the truth,” he said.

He shot down Desai with another insult during this week’s studio tv debate.

“I asked the BDS leader in SA, ‘Would you use a corona antidote if Israel develops one?’ Not surprisingly, he didn’t answer me because saying yes would show that he’s a hypocrite, and saying no that he’s an idiot.”

“I’m here to shake people up, to make them question themselves and their beliefs,” he said.

Although progress is slow, he is seeing a shift in attitude back home.

“Five years ago, there were about 200 to 300 Arab Israelis who volunteered annually for national service. This year, there was close to 5 000, and about 48% come from the Muslim sector,” he said.

“I’m not going to say Israel is perfect. I’m here to reveal the truth, also to criticise my country. I do it because I’m a proud Israeli, and I’m obligated to fix it, not to cry about it.”



Yoseph Haddad in Nazareth

Jewish schools take bold, proactive steps to minimise infection

TALI FEINBERG

Jewish schools took the lead this week as they made the bold decision to close their doors because of coronavirus before it was official policy.

United Herzlia Schools (UHS) was the first to take this step after it “became aware of a parent in our community who had had direct contact with a confirmed COVID-19 carrier, and was experiencing symptoms while awaiting test results. His children attended the school for four days. We decided to close the school immediately [on Thursday 12 March] as a precautionary measure, pending the outcome of the test. When the test came back positive, we extended the closure to the end of the term,” says UHS chairperson Matthew Gruzid.

“The response from parents has been overwhelmingly supportive and grateful for the decisive leadership,” says Gruzid.

Meanwhile, practical steps have been taken to keep the virus at bay. “Biometric access systems are no longer in use, and hand sanitiser has been placed in strategic places. All our campuses are undergoing deep cleans, and the staff still on campus are applying social distancing. We are providing safe transport to work for our support staff.”

A Grade 9 Herzlia pupil tested positive for coronavirus after travelling overseas. According to Gruzid, “This learner did have direct contact with

others prior to testing. All the people she had close contact with have been notified, and are now undergoing self-isolation.

“The school is supporting all learners in our system. Lessons continue remotely using technology where necessary, and our teachers have been outstanding in their dedication, preparing work for younger learners to complete at home.”

“**The virus will spread and subside over time, yet what will remain is the way in which we treat others, speak to them, and assist them.**”

The remote learning system varies by grade. “In the high and middle schools in particular, technology is already effectively used in teaching using Google Classroom. In the younger grades, there is a greater reliance on hard copy workbooks. We are confident that with our professionals’ dedication, this is sustainable over the long term. Matrics are receiving special attention.”

Rabbi Craig Kacev, the general director of the South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE), says a number of factors influenced the decision of the Jewish education cluster (all Jewish schools in South Africa) to close their schools before the president made it an official directive.

These variables include a “known

case of a parent who was positive [with coronavirus] and had been in the environment with children in various schools”. Another factor was “the risk associated with children who are often asymptomatic yet do carry and transmit the virus”. In addition, a lot of families had family coming to South Africa for Pesach.

“Now that the schools are closed, deep cleaning will take place.”

In terms of remote teaching, “Each school is using its own strategy to reinforce learning. Some of this includes educational packs per week, and online or remote learning. Exams and tests have been suspended. King David Linksfield will complete matric prelims – some written in school and others online.”

“We did attempt to maintain schooling for as long as possible, yet in the end, considering all the risks, we felt we needed to take a decision that would assist the community and South Africa. There has been much hype and hysteria and initial aggression by many. The virus will spread and subside over time, yet what will remain is the way in which we treat others, speak to them, and assist them.”

Rob Long, the academic director of Yeshiva College and principal of Boys High School, says that the school closed after consultation with the leadership of Jewish schools. “The response has been overwhelmingly positive and supportive, and the staff have been very positive in their approach to providing ongoing online learning. The school is

being disinfected including all buildings, furniture, and grounds.”

He says the school’s counsellors, grade controllers, and teachers will support pupils emotionally and educationally through this tumultuous time.

“Our teachers are engaging with remote learning, which is a blend between face-to-face lessons using Zoom and various Google suites including Google Classroom. We believe that this could be maintained long-term if necessary, but studies in pure e-learning show that teacher contact is important. Thus, our teachers will endeavour to keep contact with our pupils via Skype and telephone calls.” At the moment, any tests and assessments will be completed remotely.

Rabbi Dovid Hazdan of Torah Academy says that the decision to close the schools temporarily prior to the president’s announcement was a unified decision. “There was particular concern that the virus would spread through children. Many families and parents were shocked by the extreme policies that were put in place. It takes a while to grasp the severity of the threat and the urgency of the response that’s required. In general, gratitude was expressed for the united Jewish communal response.

Torah Academy has engaged professional cleaners to do a deep clean throughout the campus.

“The virus is creating huge anxiety in the community, particularly among

students. The principals have been in touch with families that have gone into self-quarantine to lend support,” Hazdan says. “There is also much work that needs to be done to further empower parents to share pertinent information with their children. Knowledge alleviates fear. We’ve taken technical steps that need to be supported with emotional and psychological support. This would be particularly urgent should a child or parent be tested positive for the virus.

In terms of remote learning, “School was closed on Monday, and Torah Academy teachers immediately began workshopping ideas. At this stage, live online learning is really complicated. Every single child needs to have a computer throughout the day which we don’t necessarily have,” the rabbi says.

“So we are developing study programmes that will include videos, worksheets, packs of crafts for nursery school, and also a reading programme. We are still at the very early stage of ensuring remote learning in both Torah and secular studies. If it’s going to be a long-term requirement, we are going to need additional strategies. We haven’t yet set up a system to test students. We are hoping to continue with certain classes for matric.”

He concludes, “This dark and difficult pandemic has resulted in many hurtful and painful responses to others in the community. But over and above that, what it has brought into focus is the exceptional strength of our South African Jewish community.”

Controversial post leads to mayhem for Mevrou & Co

STAFF REPORTER

A controversial social media post from popular South African clothing brand Mevrou & Co. on Sunday, 15 March, resulted in anger and confusion, but had the positive side effect of a Muslim mother raising funds for Holocaust education.

Mevrou & Co. is a small company based in Cape Town that prints uniquely South African expressions on high quality cotton t-shirts. Its social media platforms are peppered with irreverent humour and satire in South African languages. Its shop even has an entire section devoted to the “Jew Crew” and owner and founder Catherine Raphaely is Jewish.

But on Sunday, a new post asked the question, “What do Afrikaners and Jews have in common other than small gene pools, nowhere to run, and concentration camps?” The next image answered this with “We are *realisties* [realistic] and have a dark sense of humour!” The following post elaborated: “We thought you should know that all Jewish schools across the country have been closed due to coronavirus until Monday 23 March.” (The post was made before the president’s announcement that all schools would be closed until after Easter.) It then went on to highlight South Africa’s particular challenges in dealing with coronavirus, and suggested that all schools should close as soon as possible.

The post was also published in Afrikaans. It was met with a wave of outrage from social media users of all backgrounds, and the English version was taken down by Instagram. But Raphaely told the SA Jewish Report that there was no need for this response.

“We were trying to get an important message across about coronavirus. What we were saying is that Jews and Afrikaners have troubles in common, and perhaps that’s why we are both realistic. Then

we went on to say that the Jewish schools are closed, and why can’t the government close all the schools across the country and follow their example – which has now been done.

“The post isn’t a joke, and this is the misunderstanding. Maybe that’s what has caused the problem as people expect [a joke] from us. They couldn’t get past it and misconstrued the post. I tried to explain this, but my explanations fell on deaf ears. So I gave up! In addition, I was in the middle of being evacuated as a result of the Lion’s Head fire.”

Raphaely is adamant that she won’t remove her post. “I don’t feel we should take the post down because people don’t understand it, and don’t want to listen when we try to explain. I know what I meant, and I actually feel it’s abundantly clear. We wrote facts ... we didn’t joke about it. We should not self-censor due to people’s sensitivity. We won’t be bullied by people either. I feel very strongly about that.”

Her message to the Jewish community is, “Well done for closing your schools! And also, we shouldn’t jump to conclusions too quickly. I have been aggressively bullied and even threatened with physical violence. This is disgusting and shameful, and I’m embarrassed that these people are Jewish.”

When community member Leora Hessen saw the post, she said, “I was truly astounded and kept trying to find the punchline.” She responded by sharing the number tattooed on the arm of her grandmother, a Holocaust survivor, who was deported to five different concentration camps. “I was lucky enough to have my grandmother with us into my 40s. I suppose I feel overprotective over her, other Holocaust survivors, and victims. And now they’re no longer here, it’s our duty, as third-generation survivors, to keep their memories alive and their dignity intact.”

Another social media user, Nuriyah Gallow, saw Hessen’s post and reacted to it with deep concern.

A Muslim mother of three, Hessen’s words “really hit home for me. Tears literally welled up and something compelled me to do something. The fact that Leora could recite that number sent shivers down my spine, and it reminded me that there are people who are affected to this day by the traumas of the Holocaust era.”

In response, Gallow decided to make her own t-shirt with the word “regretively” on it, a misspelled word the brand had used in its explanation to outraged Instagram users. She is selling these shirts, and donating the profit to the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre. She says she took this on because “I wanted to create awareness. It’s about being ethical, being human, standing up, and having a voice.”

The response was overwhelming. “I have so many orders! Thank you to everyone who has ordered and who has said a kind word. I’m just doing what I think I’m supposed to do.”

In response to Raphaely’s explanation, Gallow says, “I don’t agree that the Holocaust should be referenced in such a way.

It’s extremely anti-Semitic. There are other ways to get a message like that across. I also don’t think Jews and Afrikaners would respond faster than the next person. No matter your religion, race or language, I can assure you everyone has been through trauma.”

Gallow would like to go to the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre and to visit Auschwitz one day. To the Jewish community, she says, “Sorry you had to be taken back to a time and place that hurts. I hope this brings people of the Jewish community together. Jewish or not, we’re all outraged. Companies have a social responsibility to use their voice for positive and good.”

Cape SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Director Stuart Diamond said, “Community members reported the post to our leadership. The Cape SAJBD made contact with the owner and unpacked her intention behind the post. She was reminded that to South African Jews, the scourge of the Holocaust will never be forgotten and is a sensitive topic, especially as Yom HaShoah [Holocaust Remembrance Day] approaches (21 April). Further to that, while the Cape SAJBD promotes an interfaith and intergroup ideal, we don’t advise any group speaking on behalf of another.

“While various parties recommended that she delete the post, Instagram took action and removed the English version of it after it was reported to the platform. She subsequently apologised on the platform. To some, her apology may be lacking sincerity.

She elected not to remove the Afrikaans post, and still backs the sentiment. “[Raphaely] has been offered the opportunity to visit the Holocaust & Genocide Centre in Cape Town, but declined. Unfortunately, at this stage, the centre is closed in an attempt to mitigate against the spread of coronavirus.”



Nuriyah Gallow

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Finding our way together



Right now, there is no such thing as business or life as usual in our community, country, or world. COVID-19 has succeeded in turning our lives as we know them upside down.

It has already brought out the best and worst in us, which is typical of any crisis situation.

The point is, as a community and as individuals, we need to be careful of our dark side. We need to steer clear of finding people to blame or finger pointing. Oh boy, it's so easy but so devastating if you are the person people are pointing fingers at. The truth is, those same fingers could be pointed at us.

There is no way anybody in this community would purposely infect someone else. It's as simple as that.

As I understand it, the COVID-19 crisis in South Africa is going to get worse before it gets better, but we are going to survive it. As a people, we have survived so much worse. We are resilient, resourceful, and so innovative, we will make a plan – or in fact many of them – to get through this. Of that, I'm absolutely sure.

Look at all those school kids who are learning from online teaching this week.

Who would have thought it possible, even two weeks ago?

How times have changed!

I'm so proud of what we have achieved in one week, ever since COVID-19 first touched our community.

I salute Gary Sweidan for immediately letting the community know that he had COVID-19 and doing what he needed to do by going into quarantine. He set a great example for us all, at great cost to himself. He had no idea how our community would react, but he did it anyway. *Kol hakavod!*

The others followed his lead, and we are grateful for that.

The truth is, only those in our community who got COVID-19 – as far as I know – have been open about their identity. It takes courage to do this in the light of the anxiety, fear, and panic coronavirus has created. And it was done with the interest of others at heart.

As a newspaper, we have purposely not named those who haven't given us permission to use their names. We don't feel we have the right to do that. This is an intensely private situation with an extremely public face.

Shortly after we heard of the first case in our community, Jewish communal leaders from all over the country and in every sphere had a long and tough emergency meeting to thrash out what to do.

Their urgency and quick thinking was wise, and the combined decisions they made were on the mark. They closed all schools, cancelled all communal functions, and laid down strict guidelines for all of us.

They stepped up to the plate and did what we always hope our leadership will do. Again, *kol hakavod!*

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein had to make a desperately difficult decision on Wednesday afternoon to close the shuls. He would have done almost anything to avoid it, but he did what he needed to do as our spiritual leader.

None of these decisions have been easy. They have all curbed our freedom, our lives, and our education. Nobody wants to make these kind of decisions.

However, much like President Cyril Ramaphosa did this week when he stepped so strongly into his own leadership role, so too did our communal leaders.

Each one of us will be faced with many tough decisions in the immediate future. They are likely to all be tough.

Some of us have already gone into quarantine because we are concerned we may have hugged, kissed, or shook hands with someone who has the virus. Don't "pooh pooh" those people, be grateful. They are worrying about you, not themselves.

The point is that we all need to step up into our own leadership roles, and make the tough decisions about our staff, working from home, going to a gathering, or sending our child on a playdate. These are everyday occurrences, but they have taken on a whole new dimension.

These decisions now have to be based on looking out for our own health and that of everyone else in this country.

I know we are all somewhat afraid because we have never been in this situation before – or anything similar.

Many of us have found our income severely curtailed by COVID-19, not least all of those in the travel industry. Although words are cheap, the truth is that you aren't alone.

For all of us, the next months – and I have no idea how many – are going to be difficult. They are going to challenge our resolve. There are going to be days, possibly weeks, when we might not remember how easy things were in 2019.

All the more reason to pull together as a family, as a community, and as a country. We can't do this alone. If we dare to ignore the strict guidelines regarding coronavirus, we risk getting infected and infecting others who are way more vulnerable to it.

As a community, we can get through this. We won't do it holding hands, but we can guide, help, and support one another.

We can follow our leadership who led the way in making the tough changes to our lives. Let's lead. Let's be a light unto the nations.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

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Under lockdown, Israel focuses on creating a government



**DATELINE:
MIDDLE EAST**

Paula Slier

Israeli coalition talks have begun in earnest. On Monday, Benny Gantz, the leader of the centrist Blue and White Party, was tasked by President Reuven Rivlin to try and form a government after he received the backing of 61 members of Knesset (Parliament).

This is a razor-thin majority in the 120-member parliament. In the coming days, the former army chief will soon understand that 61 doesn't always mean 61. There may be 61 MKs committed to getting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu out of office but it doesn't automatically mean there are 61 MKs ready to form a coalition with Gantz.

He has three options: he can establish a narrow government with the active support of Arab parties; enter a broad government with Netanyahu; or send the country to a fourth election.

By comparison, Netanyahu has only one option: another election. In spite of the fact that he won the most votes earlier this month, he can't cobble together 61 mandates. A fourth election will allow him to remain prime minister until October when the next polls, coronavirus permitting, will be held.

For Gantz, his best chance at forming a coalition and getting Israel out of the impasse of three inconclusive elections in less than a year is to establish a minority government with the Arab Joint List. But this is also his main obstacle. Comprising 15 seats, the Joint List made history last September when all its parties except for the most extreme – Balad – recommended Gantz for prime minister.

It was the first time they had supported a candidate since Yitzhak Rabin in the early 1990s. This past Sunday, they made history again. All the parties in the bloc – including Balad – recommended Gantz.

They told President Rivlin that "for us, the most important thing is to remove Benjamin Netanyahu from power".

These are parties that don't think Israel should be a Jewish state. They think any Israeli presence beyond pre-1967 lines – including the Western Wall – is illegitimate. They oppose Israeli strikes on Gaza, no matter how many rockets Hamas or Palestinian Islamic Jihad fire at Israeli civilians. And their MKs have uploaded Facebook posts praising terrorists who attack Israelis.



Benny Gantz

Balad's decision to endorse Gantz to form a coalition government came as a surprise to Arab Israelis who appear to be divided on the move.

While many welcomed it, others expressed disappointment over Balad's change of heart and accused it of hypocrisy.

Balad has argued that Gantz is part of the traditional right wing, and that his "views on the occupation aren't far from Netanyahu's, even if they're less extreme than the settlement project Netanyahu tries to

advance". The party also keeps pointing out that Gantz was chief of staff during the 2014 war in the Gaza Strip and led the Ground Forces Command in the Second Lebanon War in 2006.

So why did the party change its mind? Analysts say it's a mixture of pressure from other Arab politicians and the realisation that it might not get a chance like this again.

Balad officials insist that the removal of Netanyahu from power and the integration of Arab Israelis into society is their first priority.

But it's not just support – or lack thereof – from the Arabs that keeps Gantz awake at night. Another key component of his coalition is former defence minister right-winger Avigdor Lieberman's Israel Our Home party. Lieberman and the Arab Joint List are bitter foes, and Lieberman has repeatedly vowed that he would never sit in a coalition with Arab legislators. But he seems to have forgotten this as he recently laid out his demands for Gantz to accept – which the latter did.

These included raising old-age pensions, letting municipalities decide if buses can run on Shabbat, passing a law regarding the drafting of ultra-Orthodox yeshiva students, and allowing for civil marriages.

Should Gantz manage to put together a coalition with Lieberman and the Arab parties, it would be shaky to say the least, and in the first moment of crisis, is likely to fold.

The only other option Gantz has is to enter into a broad government with Netanyahu. But should he do so, it could tear his Blue and White party apart. The Yair Lapid-led Yesh Atid Party, which makes up about half of Blue and White, would probably not agree to it – unless it decides that coronavirus trumps everything else, which so far looks unlikely.

Netanyahu has proposed a six-month unity government that he would lead to manage the response to the pandemic. He's also offered a four-year arrangement with a rotating premiership that would result in the two leaders splitting the job of prime minister

equally. Gantz has consistently refused to serve in any government led by someone facing criminal charges, and Netanyahu has been formally charged with bribery, fraud, and breach of trust.

So, at this stage, it seems that Gantz is caught between a rock and a hard place. He is vulnerable on all sides. If he becomes prime minister, he remains dependent on Arab votes, including from political factions that despise everything he stands for, to appoint ministers and approve budgets. If a

crisis erupts with the Palestinians in Gaza or the West Bank, any such coalition will unravel at the seams.

On the other hand, Gantz is keenly aware that if he isn't able to put together a majority coalition, Likud will use his dependence on the Arab parties against him in its next election campaign. It will also point out Lieberman's hypocrisy in forming a coalition with Arab legislators. Gantz's back is against the wall. If he doesn't win this round, the chances are he never will.

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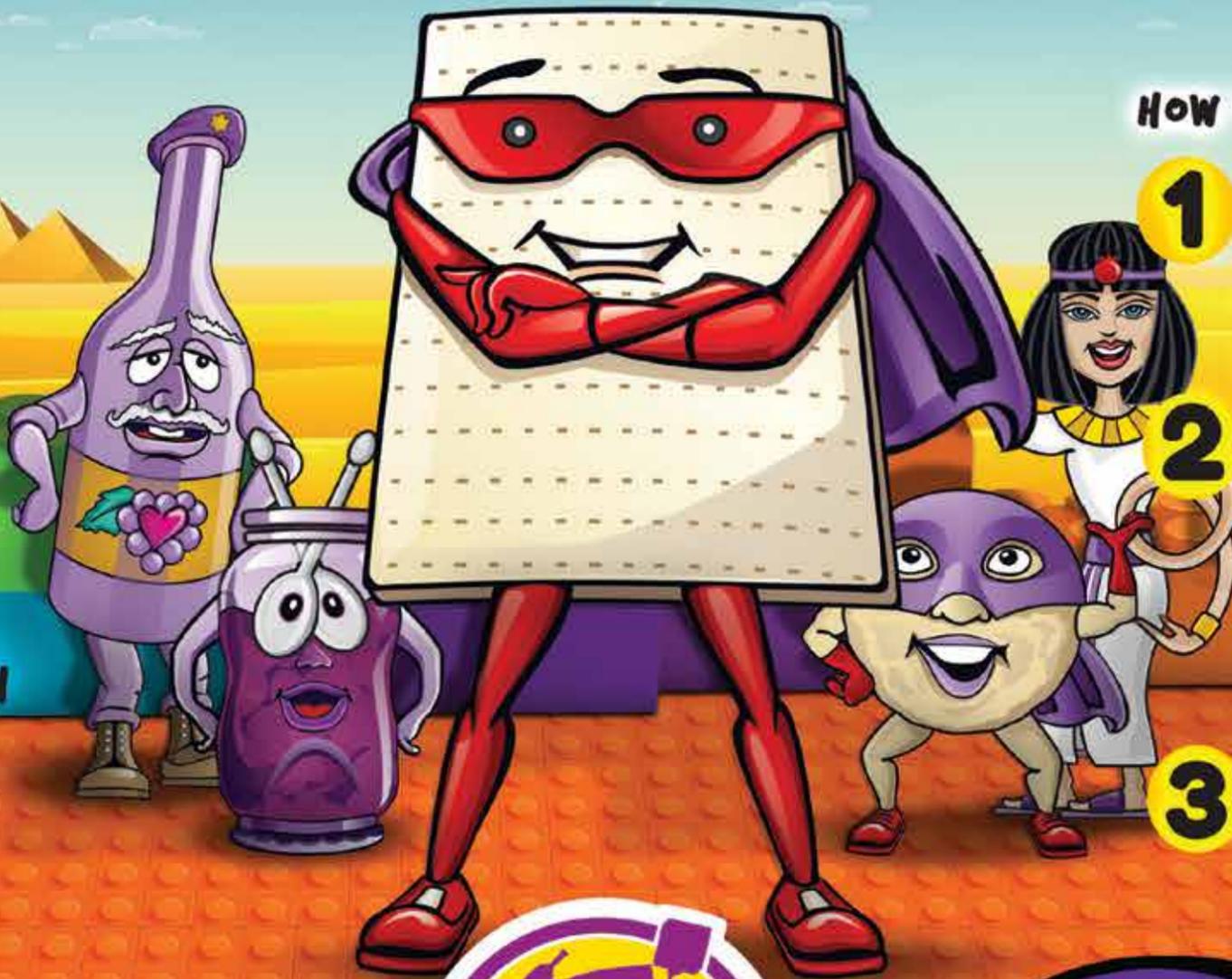
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Coronavirus wrecks Israeli Apartheid Week amid BDS rebrand

OPINION

STEVEN GRUZD



Maybe there is a small silver lining around the Covid-19 cloud.

Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions South Africa (BDS-SA), the so-called human-rights movement calling for sanctions against Israel, has had to suspend its polarising, hate-inducing “Israeli Apartheid Week (IAW)” on university campuses across the country due to coronavirus.

Meant to run from 15-21 March, IAW has collapsed as people practice social distancing and universities shut their gates. This year, there are just a handful of events worldwide when once there were hundreds.

So, for now, Jewish students have been spared the anti-Semitic harassment that has plagued IAW for years. But Israel’s supporters should guard against complacency.

On 12 March, BDS-SA crowed that after “an incredible decade of ... victories in South Africa”, it would be “rebranding and broadening [its] mandate”, to now be known as Africa For Palestine (AFP).

Why the change? “It appears there has been a factional split within the BDS movement in South Africa,” said Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation. “A group calling itself the South African BDS Coalition has formed with an allegiance to the international BDS movement,” suggesting serious discord.

“Ultimately, both organisations will continue to carry out their singularly anti-Semitic agenda against the Jewish state, driven by an irrational hatred for Jews living freely in their own sliver of land in the Middle East.”

“Personally, I think they [AFP] are weaker with scandals [like Muhammed Desai being accused of sexual harassment] besetting them,” said Professor Hussein Solomon in the department of political studies and governance at the University of the Free State. “Also, I think the gains they previously made have been reversed. Think about the African National Congress downscaling ties with Israel. It’s two-and-a-half years later, and we are still here. The University of Cape Town was supposed to cut ties with Israel, and then it didn’t. Across the Arab world and Africa, we see inroads being made by Israel. BDS is weak. It knows it. So now it rebrands itself to portray an image of strength.”

On Monday, the “old-wine-in-new-bottles” AFP said it had “made a difficult decision to cancel several of its planned public events for the next 30 days amidst the spread of coronavirus. This measure is taken in line with the position adopted by several African government’s [sic] to discourage large public events ... It’s also irresponsible not to follow containment measures.”

The global IAW campaign website said, “This year, activists are not only faced with oppression and attempts to silence them; the measures put in place to contain the coronavirus are paralysing communities and restricting freedom of movement and association all over the world ... It’s very clear that in this context, it’s difficult if not impossible for a lot of groups to mobilise, organise, and bring people together. We are trying to organise online solutions to keep



Israel Apartheid Week 2019

spreading awareness about Palestinian rights and the BDS movement.”

AFP urges its supporters to use the #africaforpalestine hashtag for social media posts, and offers a range of one-sided material for viewing. Oh, and for good measure, it also takes an erroneous swipe at Israel for taking too long to issue Covid-19 warnings in Arabic, saying, “This is comparable to apartheid South Africa during an epidemic in the 1980s issuing official updates only in Afrikaans.”

The South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) also announced

the postponement of its “Israel Awareness Week” that for the past few years has countered BDS propaganda during IAW.

“This year ... we were doing a positive education campaign to show how Israel has contributed to humanity,” said Gabi Farber, SAUJS chairperson at the University of the Witwatersrand. “Despite all the hard work and preparation, SAUJS decided to postpone, and we are reallocating our efforts and resources. BDS is continuing its campaign online, while we are rather choosing to focus on

ways to help [stop] the spread of Covid-19.”

One reason given for the change in AFP’s focus is to “push back against Israel’s creeping infiltration into our continent”. It is an indication that Israel’s overtures to African countries are really starting to rattle the anti-Israel lobby. Note that the phrase “creeping infiltration” feeds into ancient anti-Semitic tropes of Jews as treacherous vermin.

AFP notes that its members undertook visits to southern African countries in 2019 to drum up support for their cause. “In the course of this work, we became acutely aware of the need for Palestine solidarity work to expand into the African continent,” AFP said. “Africa for Palestine will seek to build alliances and partnerships across the continent, reinforce direct support for Palestine, and assist the Palestinian diaspora.”

As Ben Cohen wrote for JNS.org, “Where Israel offers technology and material assistance, from clean-water supplies to AIDS prevention, from post-natal clinics to higher education, the local allies of the Palestinian cause offer ideology – and nothing more.”

He also said AFP’s

“understanding of what constitutes Palestine is displayed in its logo, which shows a Palestinian keffiyeh (scarf) carefully folded into a map of the entire territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the River Jordan.” No place for Israel then.

It remains to be seen whether the “Israeli-apartheid” canard has as much resonance north of the Limpopo River as it has in South Africa.

In the coming months, the struggle for hearts and minds will move to new battlefields in Africa. Israel’s accomplishments on the continent will be more fiercely challenged if AFP gets its way. Israel and its supporters must be alive to this shifting emphasis, and not let up on countering fake news and half-truths. Those who love Israel must prepare for a fight on familiar and unfamiliar terrain.

• Steven Gruzd is an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg.

Time to cut employees a little slack

OPINION

MICHAEL BAGRAIM



A lot has been said about the workplace during this pandemic. Much of it is impractical and when advising employers, most of the advice is applicable to large corporations only.

As members of the Jewish community, and following halachic guidance, it’s important for us to remember throughout this plague that our employees rely on their daily wage which can’t be withheld from them.

It’s trite to say that we are all governed by the Labour Relations Act and Basic Conditions of Employment Act. Most employers fully understand that sick employees are entitled to paid sick leave if they receive a medical certificate for more than two days sick leave. In order to qualify for the sick leave, the employee has to be sick, and has to receive the certificate from a qualified practitioner. Furthermore, this sick leave is finite, and calculated on the basis of a sick-leave cycle over a period of 36 months.

During this period, the employee is entitled to the amount of paid sick leave equal to the number of days that that employee would normally work during a period of six weeks. For instance, if working a five-day week, the employee would be entitled to 30 paid sick-leave days, but there must be proof of incapacity. This doesn’t help us when asking people to go into quarantine who might not yet be sick. Employers have been asked to be lenient in these circumstances, and have been asked to have more faith in their employees. Obviously, there will be those who immediately grab at the benefit and take off, even if they have had no exposure and display no symptoms.

Long-term illness over a week could warrant a claim to the Unemployment Insurance Fund, but again, this will require documents and proof. Furthermore, employees could access family responsibility leave for a sick child, and might even volunteer to take their outstanding leave during this period. The Department of

Employment and Labour has not published any specific guidelines beyond the law, and as currently advised, when all the various categories of leave have been taken, the employee would be out of the workplace on an unpaid basis.

In a situation of forced closure, some businesses might be able to access short-term agreements in terms of their bargaining councils, and others might be able to negotiate with their trade unions in order to avoid retrenchments. Already I have embarked upon dozens of programmes for dismissals for operational requirements. Many industries, such as tourism, will not survive the next few months if they don’t embark upon wholesale retrenchments.

In smaller businesses we are, as a people, expected to display a certain amount of *rachmonis* (pity). The Mishna emphasises that the employer can be trusted to pay wages at the end of the day. Obviously, if the employer can afford to at least

immediate effect.

If work still needs to be done, it’s the employer’s duty to ensure that employees aren’t exposed to harm. Policies can be put into place to avoid exposure to the virus, and healthcare services should be available at all times. All sorts of special needs might have to be accommodated and at the very least, employees, customers, and suppliers must be exposed to education and every single measure possible to disinfect the environment. Infection-control practices must be introduced into the workplace, and all people must be monitored and managed without eliciting fear and anxiety. All rumours and misinformation must be squashed immediately. There are literally dozens of guidelines and practices which can be modified and put into place which will help you curtail direct contact with the public and others.

We must understand that many of our workers are loyal and hardworking, and this is the time for us to rise to the occasion. Clearly, we can’t put the business at risk, and so we must carefully manage the situation. This pandemic will not last forever, and as long as we steer ourselves carefully through this employment crunch, it should be business as normal by the end of the year. Each case must be evaluated on the basis of its unique circumstances, and having a unionised environment might make it particularly challenging. All of us have to mitigate the effects of the downturn in the economy which is unfortunately made worse by load shedding.

I have recommended to my clients that they do away with the need for medical certificates, and explore every way in which employees can work remotely and look at accessing any type of leave possible.

• Michael Bagraim is an attorney specialising in labour law, and advises nationwide on the restructuring and management of labour forces. He is also a Democratic Alliance member of parliament.



keep the job open and still try and pay something for the period of no work, it would be the moral thing to do.

Employers are to explore all sorts of other avenues such as working from home, staggered work hours, shorter times, even wage cuts. Many businesses are faced with no income at all, possibly even liquidation. In these circumstances, obviously an employer has to embark upon dismissal for operational requirements with

Keep calm, and carry on, doctors say

JORDAN MOSHE

As the number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise in South Africa, respected Johannesburg pulmonologists Drs Anton Meyberg and Carron Zinman have called on the community not to panic.

Though they can't predict what will happen, they believe that the measures put in place by President Cyril Ramaphosa will give the medical system time to prepare.

They are confident in both the health department and National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), saying that they have upped their game, and are equipped to deal with the situation.

"Yes, it's a pandemic," they say. "It's severe, but not devastating. The instructions that are being given are grounded in science and need to be respected. This country is unique. We have a certain population that's immunocompromised, and we don't know what this virus will do to them. That's the main reason we need to be so careful."

On the whole, the Jewish community will be able to self-isolate and access the necessary supplies, they say, stressing the importance of keeping the virus away from the most vulnerable members.

Zinman and Meyberg remain calm and vigilant while being inundated with calls from fretful patients and members of the community, all seeking medical advice in the wake of the spreading outbreak. Their message remains the same: keep calm and carry on.

"The last 72 hours feel like 150," Meyberg told the *SA Jewish Report* on Tuesday. "We're getting harassed, though not in a bad way. People are concerned, and we have an ethical responsibility to help."

"It's our job to tell people not to panic, to remind them to stop and breathe. There's no time for mass hysteria."

They believe the president behaved responsibly in declaring a state of disaster in his national address on Sunday night and implementing strict measures to curb the spread of the virus, though it sent some people scrambling for supplies.

"Ramaphosa addressed relevant points, implemented crowd control, and established a screening process. Everything he has put in place has far superseded what we expected," said Meyberg. "It makes us feel confident going forward."

Said Zinman, "He has done the best that can be done at this time, and implemented a protocol that will slow down transmission and improve containment. People around the world are saying that we need to take the explosive peak and spread it out so that the healthcare system can work. He has enabled this."

"Most people are adhering to the distancing guidelines, but I've seen people ignore the no touching rule," Zinman said. "It's stupid. At the moment, you have to use whatever means you can to prevent

transmission. The bottom line is that most people will get the virus in a mild form, and will develop immunity. But you don't want older people getting this."

Meyberg agrees. "It's easy for us to



Dr Carron Zinman

quarantine. We just stay in our houses," he said. "For someone who lives in a small shack without lights or water, however, it's a major problem. They can't quarantine themselves there. This is why the health minister is suggesting institutional quarantine, and it probably will have to be done."

Younger people who might be immunocompromised are less of a concern, said Meyberg. "They're otherwise healthy. It's when one is over the age of 65 and suffers from high blood pressure, emphysema, or a weakened immune system caused by medication (such as for diabetes or rheumatoid arthritis). Those are the people who are at risk."

With misinformation spreading like wildfire, he and Zinman outline the basic practices that are essential to maintaining not only good health, but some much-needed sanity.

"Cleaning surfaces which are often touched at home is a good hygienic practice, but one cannot become paranoid about it," said Zinman. "If you go neurotic, you'll destroy your fingers and every surface in your home."

"Be practical. You don't have to rub a switch every time you use it. Clean the table before and after meals, wash your hands after interactions, and follow basic hygiene practices. You can drive yourself mad if you're not sensible about this."

As simple as it seems, handwashing is a crucial practice that requires nothing more than normal soap and water. "Just wash your hands," said Zinman. "You can use normal hand soap, as long as you wash for long enough. You don't have to use disinfectant soaps nor scrutinise labels for high alcohol content."

They point out that it's not practical to wipe down every item you buy at the supermarket. Excessive washing should be avoided, as it can risk changing the integrity of the good bacteria needed to fight the bad.

While there's no need to stock up on chronic medications, Meyberg and Zinman caution that there is a need to avoid taking certain medications such as cortisone and anti-inflammatory medications as they have the potential to aggravate the virus.

"These should be avoided for infection treatment by those who may have the virus," they say. "If you've been taking it as chronic medication, it's fine, but you shouldn't start taking it now."



Dr Anton Meyberg

"Antibiotics don't work against the virus, and antiretrovirals aren't a treatment for it at this point, nor is Tamiflu," said Meyberg. "People mustn't stock up on it, as it may end up causing resistant influenza."

While it won't prevent or cure COVID-19, flu shots should be had as soon as possible, and should be available by the end of March.

"Forget about coronavirus," said Meyberg. "We're expecting a bad flu season as it is. The Americans had a terrible one, with 18 million people coming down with flu. The weather has changed lately as well, and people are going to get fluey now. It's normal and to be expected."

Both doctors expressed their confidence in the measures being taken at our hospitals, saying that at Linksfield Hospital, Netcare protocols were being strictly adhered to.

"We have plans in place that enable staff to tackle everything and protect everyone, including doctors, patients, and cleaning staff," said Meyberg. "We have screening measures in place at casualty to avoid possible infection. Yes, it uses an honour code, but we have to trust people."

It's this sense of trust and professional camaraderie that they believe will help see us through.

"South Africans are resilient," says Zinman. "Doctors can band together in times of crisis. If we must move in here and work around the clock, we'll do it. We'll be there for everyone."

Said Meyberg, "We're ready for it, and will attack it as a team. Though we're not G-d and don't know what will happen, we're prepared."

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A medical miracle for Rachel

JONATHAN ANCER

Just before noon on 20 February 2015, my wife Jean and I were at a coffee shop. I was taking advantage of the free Wi-Fi. I'm a freelance journalist and freelance journalists are free-Wi-Fi-seeking missiles. Jean was on leave, and came to hang out with me.

Her phone rang.

"It's Dr Wicht," she mouthed.

Dr Wicht was our daughter Rachel's paediatrician. We had taken Rachel, who was then six years old, to see him because she had been pale and lethargic.

"She's anaemic," Dr Wicht told us at the first appointment. He took some blood to test.

Anaemia didn't sound serious. I was sure we would be told to get her some iron supplements and perhaps we'd have to make weekly trips to Nando's for iron-rich chicken livers. Maybe I'd even be able to claim Nando's on medical aid.

So, when Dr Wicht called to give us the results of the blood test I only half listened.

"Yes," Jean said.

"Ok," she answered.

"When? Right now?"

And then Jean said the word that grabs you by the scruff of your neck and demands you pay attention, "oncology".

Oncology? I asked when she ended the call.

Jean nodded.

We were being referred to G1 – the oncology and haematology unit at the Red Cross Children's Hospital. But first, Rachel needed more blood tests, and they needed to be done at once.

We raced through the city to fetch Rachel from school and take her to the hospital. As we made our way through Cape Town, I remember thinking that it seemed like such a normal day, with normal people doing normal things, going about their normal lives, yet our lives were being turned upside down, inside out, and back to front.

Rachel was a typical little girl. She rescued shongololos (millipedes), gave them names, and made sanctuaries for them, and never went anywhere without Fuzzbot – her trusted teddy. She loved butterflies and fairy princesses, and one of her ambitions was to take part in a princess rap battle against Snow White. She was also a whizz on the monkey bars.

After innumerable tests, her team of doctors at the Red Cross led by Dr Marc Hendricks told us she had an extremely rare bone-marrow-failure disease. They didn't know what it was, and said we shouldn't be fixated on a diagnosis. One day, however, we saw the words "Pure Red Cell Aplasia" (PRCA) written on her file. The words seemed harmless, but later that day – at work – I typed them into Google. I wasn't prepared for the results. I made the horrific discovery that the life expectancy for children with PRCA was 10 years. Rachel was six. I vomited.

The best brains in paediatric medicine in South Africa and all over the world puzzled over Rachel's condition, but how and why she got this very rare disease was a mystery.

I went on another Google binge and discovered an obscure academic research paper that found that some cows in India who ate bracken fern



Rachel with flowers from the South African Bone Marrow Registry

had got pure red cell aplasia. We have some bracken fern in our garden so I put two and two together, and reported my findings to Hendricks, who promptly banned me from Google.

While we didn't know what caused her condition, what we did know was that Rachel's bone marrow wasn't making red blood cells – the blood that carries oxygen to all the organs in the body. Her bone marrow had gone on strike. When her blood levels dipped to dangerously low levels, she became tired, stopped eating, and sleeping, and her heart beat dangerously fast. Her body shut down, and if she didn't have a blood transfusion she was at risk of going into heart failure.

The Red Cross became our second home. Rachel had four bone-marrow biopsies and more than 50 blood transfusions. She was pricked, prodded, and poked. The intervals between transfusions became shorter and shorter. In December 2015, Hendricks told us that Rachel had become transfusion dependent, and needed a bone-marrow transplant. This would be like rebooting her bone marrow. The South African Bone Marrow Registry (SABMR) started to look for a donor.

The odds of finding a donor are one in 100 000 and in 2016, there were only 70 000 people on South Africa's registry. There was one possible candidate, but after more testing, this person wasn't a match. The SABMR searched the millions of people on international registries, but after a year's search, there were no matches. We didn't know it at the time, but her doctors were beginning to give up hope of finding a match. And then in January 2017, we were told that a 10/10 match for Rachel had been found.

For us, it was a miracle. It was also the first step in the next part of our journey – a scary and stressful one. On 4 March 2017 – a sunny Sunday morning – I drove Rachel to the transplant unit at Groote Schuur Hospital. Rachel was admitted to the isolation ward where she underwent an intense course of chemotherapy and was given immunosuppressants so her body didn't reject the donor's bone marrow. But with zero immunity, she was vulnerable to all kinds of infections, so had to be quarantined. When we visited her, we had to get dressed into hospital scrubs and de-germ ourselves.

On 13 March, the day before the transplant, Jean and I sat in the isolation ward and wrote a letter to Rachel's donor. We told her how grateful we were that her DNA had given us hope. "There's an unspoken bond that parents will do whatever it takes to look after our children. You

have allowed us to keep our promise to Rachel," we wrote.

Last Saturday (14 March) was Rachel's third rebirthday. Since her life-saving transplant, she's become a new child, and not only because she carries her donor's DNA. Her transformation has been remarkable. From a translucently pale, listless little girl with blue lips and a heart that beat like a machine gun as it tried to pump oxygen around her tiny body, to a healthy

11 year old whose eyes twinkle with mischief, who walks with a bounce, and who is full of beans and jokes.

At her doctor's appointment in January, the wonderful Hendricks took one look at her cherry-red lips and rosy cheeks and said there was no need for a blood test. He could tell her blood levels were normal (I love that word). This was the first time since we took her to the Red Cross a bazillion doctor appointments ago that Rachel didn't have a blood test.

After a wobbly start in which it took her new bone marrow about six months to get with the programme, she has reached her new normal. She's at school, and has caught up about two years of work she missed. She participates in sports days and galas. She has besties, friends, and frenemies. This wouldn't have been possible without so many people – like the calm and wise Dr Marc, Sister Brown, and the rest of the dedicated team at Red Cross's G1 unit, Prof Novitzky, Dr Madurai and Super Sindi at the Groote Schuur Transplant Unit, Terry from the SABMR, Rare Diseases South Africa, the Sunflower Fund, Rachel's teachers, our family and friends, and so many

generous people we never knew who held us and lent us their good wishes and prayers.

Most of all, it wouldn't have happened without Rachel's donor – her genetic twin, her 10/10 DNA match – who lives 14 300km away in Poland. Last month Magdalena's company held a bone-marrow donor drive for its employees and interviewed her about her experience. She had never thought about registering, but a friend wanted to sign up and so Magdalena decided to accompany her friend to the centre.

She wrote, "At the last moment, I thought that maybe it was me who was supposed to be there ..." and she signed up. I've read that sentence a thousand times. It's been three years, and I still don't have the words to thank Magdalena for what she has done and explain to her what her selfless act has meant to us. We dedicate Rachel's rebirthday to Magda and all the other donors.

I still don't have the words to express how grateful I am to Magda for giving us our little girl back. But I will keep trying. The world is desperately seeking a medical miracle right now, and Rachel is proof that medical miracles do happen.

Life in the red zone of Italy's COVID-19 outbreak

TALI FEINBERG

Erica Brown and Nicolas Samet live in the "red zone" of Italy's coronavirus outbreak. They say the most frightening aspect is the "feeling of isolation, the fear of always wondering if we're next".

Erica is South African and Italian, and was born in Durban. Nicolas is Italian-born to Polish Jewish parents. The couple have lived in Milan for 13 years, and also have a home in Cape Town.

"I'm 59, and Nic is 71, so it comes quite close to home when at-risk age groups are discussed," says Brown. "We've been under 'quarantine-like' conditions for a week now. At this stage, there's no understanding of how long it will last, with the fear that it could be a question not of weeks but months. Also, we haven't experienced a 'peak' yet, with contagion numbers still growing each day. The feeling is that besides abiding by contagion rules, there's very little one can do, and we are somewhat helpless."

She also finds it frightening to see such a vibrant city "dead quiet", and to see that "even with our advanced medical structure, the hospitals are overwhelmed, there are no beds, ICUs are full, and they are running out of ventilators".

Quarantine-like conditions means "we are allowed to go to the grocery store and pharmacy. But we have to enter individually, and keep at least a metre from one another. We can't have friends and family visit."

Looking back on the moment she realised Italy and Milan in particular had been hit by the coronavirus, Brown recalls, "I think the reality struck when news reports confirmed the incremental rate of contagion only days after the first case; seeing the spread of gloves and masks in everyday situations; and when the 'red zones' were created just outside of Milan." She says that initially, the "red zone" was the term used for the number of towns across the north of Italy where the virus first broke out. "Before any cases arrived in Milan itself, a *cintura* (ring) was set up to close off these towns. Entry and exits are controlled through one corridor, and they

are allowed only for essential services. This is managed by the police.

"Our regional government has been extremely pro-active in broadening this to include Milan, which is in the region of Lombardy. First by closing schools, all public gatherings, museums, cinemas and so on, and restaurants and bars had a curfew. We had to get used to this new way of life over a period of a week. Italians are very social people, and spend a lot of time in close proximity to one another. It was a tough call for them as a community."

She points out that the term "red-zone" is now almost obsolete, as a week ago, it was decreed that the whole of Italy would be under lockdown. "This was self-imposed, not from outside pressure, but obviously one saw the immediate effect of international airlines stopping flights to and from Italy. Now all shops (excluding pharmacies and supermarkets) are closed – even parks. It's a ghost town, with the silence being tangible. All bars and restaurants have been shut down. You have to carry an auto-certificate to state why you're on the streets.

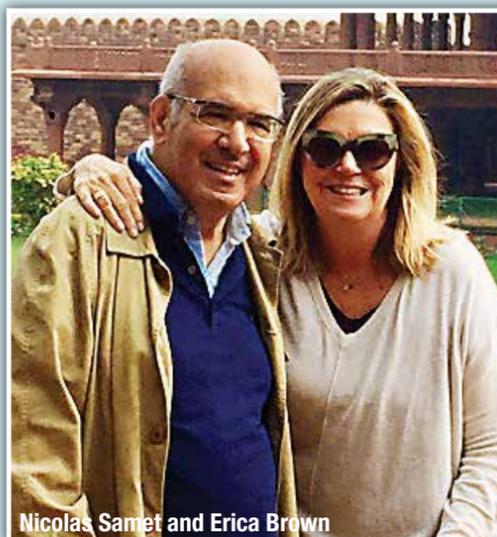
The couple don't know anyone infected at this stage.

For them, the most uplifting aspect of living under lockdown has been the community spirit.

"At noon on Saturday, we all gathered on balconies and open windows with massive city-wide applause for the medical staff battling harsh conditions. And now, at 18:00 in the evening, again we throw open the windows and spontaneous musical performances take place and popular songs are sung. The number of volunteer efforts to help the elderly and retired doctors and nurses turning up at hospitals to shore up numbers has been inspiring." Their message to the South African Jewish community is, "Listen to advice, take heed, try not to panic, but don't diminish the risk. There will be an impact on Pesach, for sure, and for a while, we won't be able to gather for our best tradition – Shabbos dinner. Accept that there will be an impact on community life."

The most important thing we should do to stop the virus spreading is, "Wash your hands, and don't sneeze or cough without covering your mouth. Stay safe, be aware, and don't put your head in the sand anywhere in the world. Take care of each other."

They believe Jewish history can show us how to survive under difficult circumstances. "We will come out of this eventually. Our families have survived the horrors of the Holocaust and world wars. This too will pass."



Nicolas Samet and Erica Brown

Cakes and canards: J. Lyons family story makes gripping reading

JORDAN MOSHE

What do bombs, biscuits, and business-savvy have in common? They're all synonymous with a small tobacco factory that rapidly grew to become the largest catering company in the world: J. Lyons.

Though this British giant is no more, its 150 year-long history features triumph, trauma, and perhaps almost predictably, a sprawling Jewish family at its heart. This is the story of Legacy, a captivating account of how Prussian Hebrew scholar Lehmann Glückstein and his family escaped the pogroms of Eastern Europe, made their way to London, and found themselves at the centre of one of the most powerful business empires in the world.

Written by acclaimed British author Thomas Harding (himself a descendant of Glückstein on his mother's side), it's a story of tremendous success, shattering loss, and great deal of food in between.

"I grew up knowing my dad's side of the family," Harding told the *SA Jewish Report* last week. "They were German-Jewish refugees who came over in 1936. We spent most holidays with them and that was the family I knew. As for my mom's side, I knew my grandparents and an uncle, but that was it.

"I have a vague memory of driving past various buildings in London as a child and being told that they were connected to our family.

"When I was about eight, my grandpa took me to one of the most famous spots, The Carvery. I was amazed by the plush red velvet chairs and the white starched linen tablecloths. The dessert trolley captivated me, piled with trifles, cakes, pies, puddings, and ice creams. My grandfather said I could have as much as I wanted. What he didn't tell me was that he was the chairman of the company that owned the place and several others."

This empire had been forged from nothing. From the moment they arrived, Glückstein's family took Victorian-era Britain by storm, growing a family tobacco shop into a chain and later partnering with impresario Joseph Lyons to form the iconic catering sensation. A multitude of tea shops, a variety of quality edibles, and a glut of entertainment spectacles characterised their growth across the decades, making Lyons a household name in a very short time.

"J. Lyons was a cultural phenomenon," says Harding. "It employed millions, and created new work opportunities. It was the first space women could eat safely in public in the 19th century, and millions of people appreciated its products, from coffee to swiss roll."

Even South Africa felt the impact of Lyons through the arrival of the Wimpy restaurant chain, a dining innovation piloted by the company.

"It had its faults, but it was extraordinary in terms of cost and quality," says Harding. "This was a place for anyone, offering a good, reliable meal at an affordable price, and so much more."

As a descendant of the acclaimed family, Harding set out in 2016 to capture this rich history to share it with the world.

"I was curious," he says. "How did this enormous catering empire come about? Who was behind it? What can we learn about history through it?"

The journey introduced him to unheard of relatives, all of whom agreed that the time was right for such a project after years of anxiety and secrecy. With access to the family and state archives, Harding worked through a mass of letters, memoirs, family trees, and interviews to put his family's story together.

Rather than feel overwhelmed, however, Harding was in his element. "Put me in an archive and I'm happy as Larry," he laughs. "I love opening the doors of the past, and there as so many doors I can walk through. I like holding letters, talking to the people who remember what happened. For me, it's total joy."

His journey has given him glimpses into the lives of his ancestors, many of them unique personalities

World War II.

"I had no idea," laughs Harding. "They made cakes and Turkish Delight!"

"But the fact is that they were experts in manufacturing. They knew how to make in bulk – on time, safely, and on budget. Making bombs isn't really different from making chocolate cake. You have to follow a recipe. Obviously, there are safety issues involved, but they successfully set up a bomb factory, and by the end of the war, they produced one seventh of all bombs dropped on Germany."

Central to the narrative is the family's Jewish identity. Although they assimilated over time, their business success resulted in the recurrence of anti-Semitism throughout the family's history, Harding says.

"The family was scared to share the story for a long

time, and the anti-Semitism they experienced has a lot to do with it. Old canards about slippery Jews in business were common, and in each generation, they were accused of something."

He continues, "Imagine you've been in a country for 100 years, you've become part of the establishment, your children are fighting in the army, and yet you're still seen as an outsider. It's upsetting and emotionally difficult, even for me."

Still, the company went from strength to strength for decades, always at the forefront of innovation and service excellence. Sadly, however, Lyons didn't survive Britain's economic collapse of 1976, with the last of the tea shops closing in 1981. The loss was significant, says Harding, not just for Britain but for the wider business world.



The Lyons coffee shop in Piccadilly decorated for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953

Photo: Heritage Image Partnership Ltd

who were often all too human. Among these are Lehman's grandson, Monte, and his sister, Lena.

"Monte was the Steve Jobs of the family," says Harding. "He moved the family from tobacco into catering.

"Lena was a force of nature. She negotiated all the contracts, found the properties, and was prudent with money. She never bought new clothes for herself, even by the time they were all wealthy."

Harding recounts an anecdote in which a family member apparently told Lena that she ought to replace the hat she often wore. "When she visited the milliner to replace it, however, he simply tuned it around and told her that she had been wearing it back to front. Seeing that the hat now looked different, Lena decided there was no need to buy another."

Beyond the joy of watching historically accurate characters develop, Harding says that he also discovered much about his family that he (and even living relatives who had experienced the phenomenon themselves) never thought possible. This includes the fact that Lyons had been involved in making bombs for the British government during

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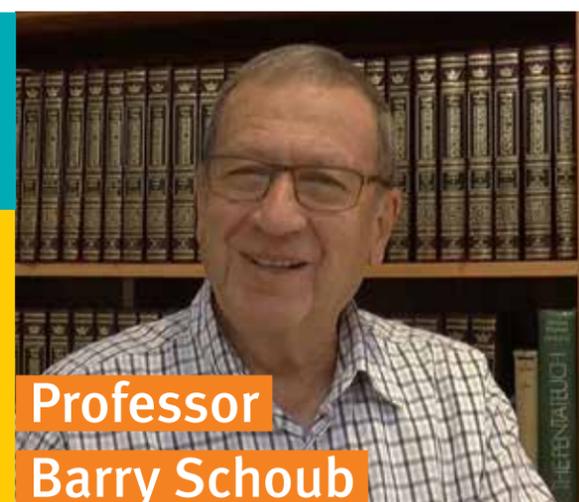
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Professor Barry Schoub

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Life under lockdown: how to stay sane

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

With social distancing, self-quarantining, and isolation becoming the new normal, the prospect of life under lockdown has many worried. As we fight to “flatten the curve” and contain coronavirus, panic pervades. How do we keep things in perspective?

Social isolation is mooted as the best way to slow the virus’ spread so that fewer people will require treatment simultaneously. But what do these isolation measures mean for our psyche?

“Many of us thrive on physical contact and face to face interactions,” says clinical psychologist Liane Lurie. “Isolation in itself can breed panic as you begin to live in your head, and have no one to bounce your ideas off. It’s in these instances that we can be grateful for technology and the many platforms we have for connecting with one another.”

Yet while technology and social media is a blessing at this time, allowing us to connect and share coping strategies, it’s also potentially a curse. It can either offer community comfort or simply fuel panic. “We have to limit consciously the amount of time we spend playing Doctor Google and filter out which articles create awareness and empowerment as opposed to generating hysteria and fake news,” cautions Lurie.

This is new territory for everybody, says counselling psychologist Dr Robyn Rosin. “The best way to handle this is just to take one step at a time – as something arises, deal with it. It’s so easy to get caught up in the chaos and hype of everybody’s survival response, so step back a bit. The problem is that we’re dealing with an unknown. We all have the most catastrophic outcomes in our own heads.”

That may explain why many people are panic buying, according to educational psychologist Sheryl Cohen. “When one feels helpless, there’s a tendency to defend against this feeling by doing something more powerful,” she says. “This might, on an emotional level, explain why people are tending to buy and hoard. It’s trying to gain what psychologists call ‘psychic equilibrium’. By gaining control over one’s grocery cupboard, there’s a feeling of gaining some control over the helplessness that prevails. This is when the stocking up behaviour is over the top ... and probably relates more to an emotional reaction than reasonable practical need.”



Many aren’t just hoarding, they’re also fearful of contact with others. “COVID-19 has unleashed its own form of panic,” says Lurie. “Mundane day-to-day tasks like grocery shopping or visiting your local pharmacy have become filled with hypervigilance and a “get in and get out as quickly as possible” mentality. We no longer stand directly behind a person in a queue and view strangers as potential germ-carrying enemies. It has sadly created a culture among many of ‘each man for himself’ as we worry about our own well-being.”

Yet while social distancing is something

we have to accept, it doesn’t mean forgetting about what it means to be a loving and decent person. In fact, checking in with loved ones or helping others at this time will go a long way to helping us handle life in isolation. “Many have stepped up to help those not as fortunate, and equip them with the basic necessities that in the past we’ve taken for granted,” says Lurie. “Remembering our common humanity and vulnerability is an exceptional antidote towards far-flung panic.”

While it’s undoubtedly difficult, there can also be many benefits that come with stepping back from the busyness that characterises 21st century living. “Maybe if we just change our thinking, the panic will calm down,” says Rosin. “See it as an opportunity, and realise that it won’t last forever. Essentially it’s slowing our lives down to a pace that our bodies are actually designed to handle. We’ve structured our lives in a way that we have to cope with so much that our bodies are crashing down around us.”

This can, in fact, be a time of self-growth, especially if you live alone. “This will be a time when you have to move from the external to the internal world, and really explore that,” says Rosin. “It might be a good time for some silence and meditation, and to do some introspection, something most of us don’t have that much time for. Look to the future. What would you still like to achieve in your lifetime, what do you regret not doing? Keep a journal.”

Being prepared and having things to do like playing games, listening to music, or reading are also advisable. We need to get out of our heads in such times. It’s all about finding a balance.”

Lurie agrees that it’s best not to dwell continuously on our inevitable worries. “It’s important to maintain a sense of humour, and to give yourself permission to experience moments of lightness and engagement, albeit brief,” she says. “In otherwise frenetic weeks, we often may not have the opportunity to be present at the dinner table or to have time to be present for precious moments with our children. This forced ‘down-time’, while underscored by anxiety and valid concerns about health, can also lend itself to quiet moments. Reading together, watching movies as a family, exercising in the comfort of your own environment, using learning apps to discover a new language, are all examples. It’s important to keep communication and conversation open with your family. Be

honest with your children about what’s happening, and explain things to them in age-appropriate language.”

As much as we should try and see the positives, it’s also important to be honest with yourself about how you’re really feeling. “Isolation

and panic can lend itself to feelings of despair, questions of ‘why me?’, helplessness, hopelessness, and even depression as the future seems uncertain and the course of the virus unclear,” says Lurie. “If you begin to feel that you’re truly not coping, reach out for help. Phone your general practitioner, helplines like the South African Depression and Anxiety Group or Lifeline, or speak to friends and family. When your isolation ends, you ultimately want to be in a space of mental and physical resilience. We all deserve as much support as possible during this difficult time.”

How to explain the virus to your kids

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

There’s no school, we can’t see our friends, mom and dad are worried, and it’s all because of something called coronavirus. At the very least, most kids know that. How much more should we, as their parents, tell them?

We’re navigating uncharted territory. Protecting our children doesn’t mean shielding them from this reality, especially at a time when we all have to take precautions. Minimising their anxiety means managing our own, says parenting coach, Laura Markovitz. “It’s important to start with ourselves, to find ways to manage our own worries and fears so that we’re not freaking our children out.”

Sheryl Cohen, an educational psychologist and the mother of four, agrees. “Children often deal with an issue in accordance with how their loved ones deal with it around them,” she says. “This means that if parents are able to model a calm, responsible, and reasonable approach to coronavirus, it will go a long way to containing children’s anxieties.”

This means watching what you say around your kids. “Be aware of what your children are exposed to verbally, visually, emotionally, and behaviourally,” says Cohen. For example, returning from the shops and telling your spouse that the shelves are empty because people are going crazy is ill-advised when kids are in earshot.

“We need to be cognisant of the things we

Differentiate between fears and facts, says Cohen. “Some fears aren’t based on fact. These can be called “crooked thoughts” or “what-if worries”. Externalising the fear might help children to isolate and contain it. Encourage your child to “talk back to the worry”. This, too, is a way of giving children the opportunity of gaining greater mastery over their anxiety rather than becoming overwhelmed by it.

Don’t make false promises, says Markovitz. Don’t tell them they’ll never get the virus, or that things will go back to normal next week. “It’s rather about meeting them and saying, ‘Yes, these are worrying times. It’s not nice to feel worried, and this all does feel really weird’. At least if you give them the space to express that, they can process it a little better, moving through feelings rather than getting stuck in them.”

We need to give our kids age and stage-appropriate information, says Cohen. “Information is a good way to contain anxiety. Children need to know that the adults around them will do whatever it takes to keep them safe. Reassure them that there are people who can help such as professional doctors, nurses, and hospitals.”

Remind them of the times they’ve been sick and have got better in the past, says Markovitz. Go to their fears, hear their concerns, and tell them we’ll all take care of each other. When it comes to tweens and teens who can access their own information via the internet, teach them to be critical of what they’re reading, to understand what fake news is, and not believe everything.

Direct them to credible sources.

Realise that kids will also be worried about the people in their lives like their grandparents or great grandparents as the virus is more dangerous for the elderly. “We’ve got to talk about how we’re handling that, how we’re making sure that granny and grandpa have what they need, and how we’re all checking

in with each other,” says

Markovitz. “Contain information to what they need to know, keep it simple, and don’t over-explain.”

In terms of getting children to take precautions, make it a part of their day. “Routine is helpful in containing anxiety,” says Cohen. “Create the routine of washing hands, for example when you walk inside the house, before meals, after toilet time, and so on.” When washing hands, get kids to sing songs they love as they wash to extend the duration and make it fun.

Creating a routine around this time might also assist in containing anxiety and boredom, which are intrinsically linked to one another. “This is because whenever there is an empty space, one tends to fill it with negativity,” says Cohen. “For example, if you don’t hear back from a friend, you wonder if they’re angry with you. Likewise, if children are bored, especially anxious children, they can begin to ruminate about all their worries and the things that can go wrong. This doesn’t mean parents have to work 24/7 to keep their kids busy, but it does mean that there needs to be a plan on how to manage the days and weeks ahead.

“Change for everyone has both loss and gain,” says Cohen. “For some, there is more loss and for others, more gain. The key is to find emotional balance. Try and edit the experience with both in mind. Term one has come to an abrupt end. It’s a sudden change. Maintaining a balanced perspective gives us a more resourceful way to respond, emotionally and behaviourally.”



Photos: Ilan Ossendryver

can contain to help our children get through this without feeding the panic,” says Markovitz. “Allow your family to talk about other things without just focusing on the virus,” says Cohen.

Once we have a handle on our own reaction, it’s important to communicate openly with our kids.

“We often worry that by speaking to our kids, we’re going to put worries into their heads,” says Markovitz. “But they’re hearing and seeing things, their schools have shut down, and they’re not oblivious to what’s going on. So, instead of letting them have these worries going around in a loop in their heads, we have to give them the space to talk about it.”

Whether they’re feeling scared of the virus or excited by not having to go to school, they need to verbalise it. “Regardless of any excitement, school being closed is also leaving kids feeling somewhat unanchored, so our role as parents is to try and find ways to anchor them,” says Markovitz. “The best way to do that is to talk to them.”

First, ask them what they know about the virus, and what they think is going on, suggests Markovitz. “That’s a good way to gauge what they actually know and what they think they know, and it’s often also where you’re able to find the worry.” This is often more effective than asking them about their concerns more directly. “Our tendency as parents is to try and fix things for our children. We jump to tell them not to worry and start rationalising things away, but we really have to give them the space to feel whatever they are feeling and express that so that we can respond accordingly.”

Ramaphosa walking a tightrope, says Steinberg

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

President Cyril Ramaphosa's priority must be to go into battle with the public sector and win, Jonny Steinberg told a Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies breakfast gathering last Thursday.

"Not only must he win, but win and come out looking more powerful than he is now. There is a danger that he wins the battle, but comes out scarred and less powerful. That's a serious problem."

Steinberg, a writer, Rhodes Scholar, and professor of African Studies at Oxford University, was discussing Ramaphosa's options and the next few years in South African politics.

The African National Congress's (ANC's) core constituency was sheltered from the global financial crisis in 2008 by employment in the public sector as national and provincial public servants. Between 2011 and the present, the public-sector wage bill increased by 40%, he said.

"So you have a stagnating economy and in the middle of that, a bubble protecting a huge amount of people from economic slowdown. Their lives were protected, but it's now reached the point that it's out in the open that it's unaffordable," he said.

The question is what happens next, according to Steinberg. "If Cyril does a Margaret Thatcher on the public service, if he downsizes it, if he implements wage freezes across the economy, that bubble would burst, and I think he would lose power."

"Ramaphosa has a hugely difficult job on his hands," he said, referring to the "very difficult balancing act between the integrity of public finances and the maintenance of the key social base of support not just of his regime but necessary for democracy. There could well be a big public-sector strike coming up." This is because the unions are "clearly unhappy" about the latest budget, and for the sake of their integrity in the

eyes of their members, will have to fight it.

Steinberg suspects that in the event of a strike, Ramaphosa would win, and the unions would buckle. This is because it would involve essential services such as teachers, police, and healthcare workers, resulting in a quick loss of public sympathy. The public would also not support it if it turned violent, "and there almost certainly would be [violence]".

"But I don't think the strike would

minority position – whether it's a good or a bad thing. There are very bad people on Ramaphosa's side, and if the only bad people who ended up in prison were his enemies, I'm not quite sure what the political consequences would have been for him."

Praising Finance Minister Tito Mboweni's "very brave" budget, which included bringing down the public-sector wage bill, he said it acknowledged for the first time that we need state expenditure to work in a way that stimulates growth.

While economic growth isn't totally dependent on us but subject to global factors – coronavirus for example – we now have a budget that recognises its importance.

Asked whether he was pessimistic or optimistic about the country's future, Steinberg replied: "Honestly, neither. What are the chances that in a decade we're going to be living in a 5% growth economy, where growth is sufficiently distributed geographically to make up for the past few years?"

"I'm doubtful. This is a hard, hard place. The politics here are intractably hard. It's possible we'll have this flourishing economy, but I don't think it's likely. But is it likely that we're going to fall apart?"

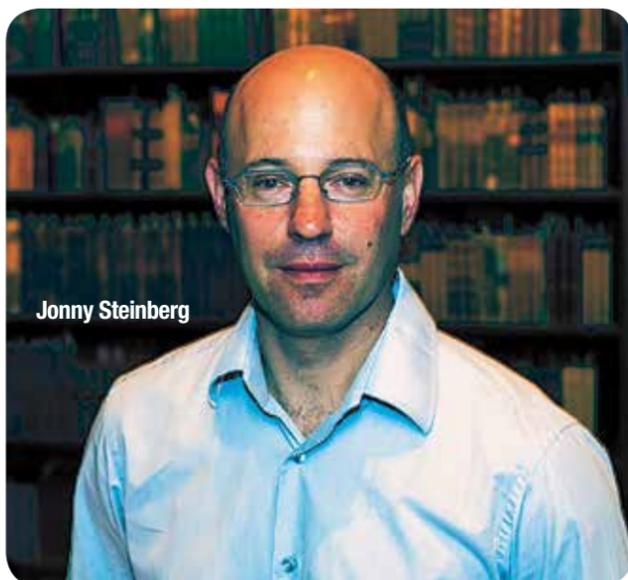
"We've been talking about falling apart since the Union of South Africa began in 1910; in 1948 when Verwoerd came to Parliament; Thabo Mbeki saying that if white people don't wake up, there's a ticking bomb in this country that's going to explode. It's hardwired into our system that things may end tomorrow and they may – who knows – this is a fragile place, but it's probably not true."

"My sense is that over the next 10, 20 years we grind on. It's not a flourishing place, it's not falling apart, but it is a place where with all its imperfections, people like us can be quite happy – with all the worries, anxieties, and uncertainties that come with a place that only grinds on."

Ramaphosa needs to work "much quicker", Steinberg said. "He has been

slow in getting key institutions in the state to work properly, quite simple things, from visa regulations to allow tourists to come here to mining regulations to allow a

declining sector to stop the decline. He's paying almost no attention to the police, and it's a very, very important institution and a very weak, wounded one.



Jonny Steinberg

be the catastrophe or Armageddon a lot of people talk about. Labour would lose the strike and lick its wounds, and we would start the next budget cycle with a smaller wage bill."

On the criticism that Ramaphosa is moving too slowly, Steinberg said the president was "acutely aware of the fragility of his power in the ANC and the country at large. He is aware that he could overstep the mark at any minute."

On the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), Steinberg said Ramaphosa had assumed it could get going with a few good people in charge. "He discovered to his shock that it was badly broken and that he had inherited an organisation that was in paralysis."

"Prosecutors might be thinking, 'If we go with him, what if he's not here in two years' time – we're left unprotected,'" Steinberg said. "Cyril thought he'd have a genuinely independent NPA – it's one of the plans that hasn't happened."

"I wonder – and again this is a

Board looks at alternatives as public events cancelled

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

South African Jewish communal organisations have cancelled all scheduled events and restricted others over the next four weeks as a result of the spread of COVID-19.

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) told the SA Jewish Report on 17 March that it had cancelled the annual Yom HaZikaron and Yom Ha'atzmaut events "due to coronavirus concerns".

"This doesn't mean that there won't be opportunities for us to commemorate and celebrate these important occasions, or that they will go unnoticed in South Africa," the SAZF notice said. "Our communal love for Israel and proud Zionism will never waver. Over the coming weeks, we will be working on innovative ideas and alternate plans for these two events."

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) confirmed that its International Refugee Shabbat (next weekend) and Yom Hashoah would be cancelled.

SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn said, "We are busy arranging an innovative alternate online programme for Yom Hashoah."

Kahn said that the implications of the cancellations/postponements were "devastating", but wherever possible, the board would try to find creative new ways to hold the events. She said the events were cancelled well in advance, so no financial outlay had been made.

The Cape SAJBD has also cancelled communal gatherings, social functions, and events.

It has closed the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre, South African Jewish Museum, and the Gitlin Library until further notice. And it's enforcing strict access control at the Jewish residential homes Highlands House, Glendale, Astra (Rosecourt), and Oranjia.

In Johannesburg, the Chevrah Kadisha has since 13 March closed access to all its residential facilities, including Our Parents Home and Sandringham Gardens, to everyone except residents, staff, and service providers.

The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre has suspended public events and large groups of visitors until 20 April. The organisation said its permanent and temporary exhibition, "Through the Eyes of Youth: Life and Death in the Bedzin Ghetto" would stay open with "heightened hygienic measures, including hand sanitiser stations and the continuous cleaning of surface areas".

All shuls will be closed, and all kosher restaurants are required to observe strict access control including restricting access to those who have travelled abroad over the past 14 days or who are displaying flu-like symptoms.

Jewish communal leaders have reminded the community that other than the national guidelines, they should also avoid unnecessary public and social gatherings, and limit attendance at funerals and *simchas*.



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Jeppetown's Jewish past a neglected history

STEVEN GRUZD

In Sesotho, Maboneng means “place of light”. This is the name of the rejuvenated, gentrified, and trendy district in Johannesburg’s city centre. Along with neighbouring Jeppetown, the area hides rich Jewish stories, past and present. It also reveals how we have dishonoured our history.

I took a walking tour recently led by the irrepressible Ishvara Dhyana through the colourful history of Johannesburg’s newest and oldest suburbs.

Due to “crime and grime”, the Johannesburg central business district (CBD) suffered “white flight” and steadily decayed from the 1990s. Derelict buildings were eventually abandoned and occupied by migrants, with intolerable living conditions.

However, in 2008, young developer Jonathan Liebmann saw potential for the CBD to reinvent itself. He followed in the footsteps of countless Jewish property moguls who have helped repurpose and revive the inner city. Liebmann’s Propertuity company bought up many bargain-basement-priced buildings. These he renovated into avant-garde, arty stores, watering holes and eateries, galleries, cinemas, and hotels.

“But Maboneng got too big too soon”, said Dhyana. In 2019, many of its buildings were auctioned off as Liebmann ran into financial trouble.

Dhyana believes that Maboneng is now more genuinely rooted, with its hair salons, African art stores, and bars. It’s catering for the surrounding community rather than just tourists and hipster fun-seekers.

In Maboneng’s spirit of turning darkness into light, Jewish artist Kim Lieberman has transformed a polluted sewer into a striking, soulful, three-dimensional artwork. There are rust-covered giant silhouette sculptures of many of Maboneng’s founders and local artists, including William Kentridge and Lieberman herself. The figures are joined together by wires and webs, characteristic of Lieberman’s fascination and experimentation with lacework.

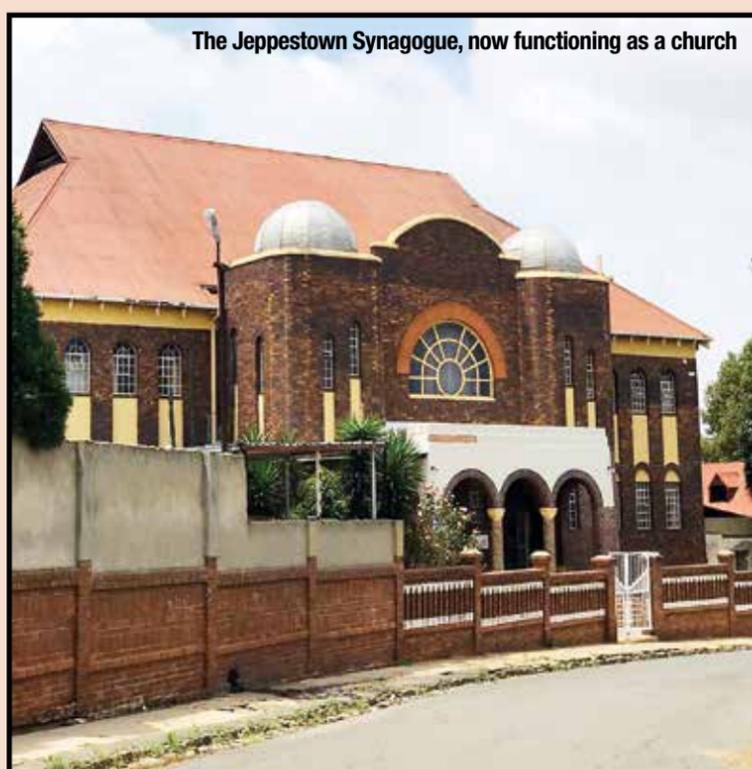
Moving back in time to the 19th century from the 21st, we walked through the busy streets of Jeppetown, amid car carcasses and spaza shops with large burglar bars and live caged chickens.

While there is no definitive proof that the suburb’s founder, Sir Julius Jeppe, had Jewish roots, it’s entirely possible that he came from an assimilated German-Jewish family.

“Jeppe was so influential in the early days,” said Dhyana, “they should have named the city ‘Jeppeburg’. He contributed more to the development of Joburg than any other human being.” Schools, roads, and suburbs today bear his name.

In a side street, the Jewish influence is unmistakable. The filigree or “broekie lace” decorations on second floor balconies incorporate Stars of David. This indicates that the shops below would probably have had Jewish owners. On the corner is the CH Jankelow building from the 1960s.

A nearby community centre celebrates the selflessness of Bertha



The Jeppetown Synagogue, now functioning as a church

Solomon, who opened soup kitchens for the poor in the 1930s, for Jews and non-Jews (mostly white people in those days).

Not far away stands the oddly-shaped Stonehenge masonry and marble factory. It looks like a slice of cake has been cut from its front. This building housed Johannesburg’s first Lithuanian shul from 1903, catering for the recent Jewish immigrants (the devout “Litvaks”) who joined British and German Jews (known as “Yekkes”) in

the city. But by 1926 it was in the path of a new railway line – hence the sliced-off look – and so Jeppe built a new shul a few hundred metres away.

Combining Byzantine-style domes and buttresses, classical columns, and a typical Lithuanian pitched roof, the Jeppetown Synagogue, opened on Purim in 1926. It still stands. The well-known business and philanthropist Lubner family was among its congregants – a small plaque indicating the seat of “Mrs B. Lubner” is still visible in the women’s section upstairs. It was sold by former Johannesburg Mayor David Neppe (almost half of the city’s mayors were Jewish) for a paltry R200 000 in 2002. Neppe died mysteriously in a hotel in Bruma a week later.

Like the Great Synagogue in Wolmarans Street, it was bought to become a church. The Jeppetown Shul was bought by the Assembly of G-d Pentecostal Church Ministry of Ebenezer in South Africa, made up mainly of Portuguese-speaking Angolan and Mozambican immigrants.

We entered the shul through the Ebenezer Sponge Car Wash. A stained-glass Magen David

window is set slightly askew. “Urban legend has it that it was installed by someone still drunk from Purim,” said Dhyana. The original pews rot in the parking lot, having been replaced downstairs by plastic chairs.

The oldest bimah in Johannesburg now stands in the church’s sound booth. According to research on Jewish Johannesburg by Rose Norwich, it was imported from Kassel, Germany, in 1888. It first stood in the President Street Shul, which was disbanded because of conflict between the Litvaks and the Yekkes. The bimah then moved from the first to the second Jeppetown Shul. Imagine how many Jews – famous and forgotten – have stood on this bimah.

“And now no-one wants it,” lamented Dhyana.

As we left the shul, the new owners had displayed a large wooden board on the ground, inscribed with the gilded names of the shul’s donors, in pounds, shillings, and pence.

“We should have a Jewish museum in Johannesburg to preserve this heritage,” said Dhyana. “History has been severely neglected in Johannesburg. Jews were so invested in this city, and we have done nothing to honour and remember them. Cape Town’s Jews don’t have half the *Yiddishkeit* (Jewish way of life). Jews contributed less overall to the development of Cape Town, but we have no museum. It’s not for lack of money, I don’t think. The Lions Shul in Doornfontein is a good example that we can do it.”

• If anyone is interested in purchasing and preserving the donors’ board or bimah, or to enquire about tours, email ishvara@africansecrets.co.za

South Africa’s shuls close to stop spread of coronavirus

>>Continued from page 1

anyone in quarantine or who is vulnerable and elderly. Community members will be able to arrange individual times to collect *siddurim* (prayer books), *chumashim* (printed Torah books) or *tallises* that they can borrow from the shul.

Rabbi Adrian Schnell of Bet David Progressive Shul in Sandton says the shul will run services and study sessions online, offering links and additional sources on its website.

Cape Town Hebrew Congregation’s (Gardens Shul’s) Rabbi Osher Feldman says, “We have launched a Gardens ‘CoronaCare programme’ with three pillars – spiritual, emotional, and practical.” The shul has rolled out WhatsApp groups for specific age groups to provide essential updates. Using Zoom, a pre-Shabbat online service will be held on Friday, and will include interactive *kabbalat Shabbat* (welcoming Shabbat) singing led by Choni G and a *droscha* (sermon) by the rabbi.

The Gardens shul’s fathers’ and sons’ Barmitzvah course, pre-Pesach learning programme, and regular *shiuurim* will also be online on Zoom, and the shul will host online social events and guest speakers.

The Shul on the West Coast in Cape Town’s Rabbi Osher Deren says the shul will have regular morning *davening* and learning open to all on Zoom. There will be a WhatsApp chat room for the whole community, and social events on Zoom. “We aren’t closing down,” says Deren. “We are just

moving from our current location into your living room.”

Meanwhile, the Small Jewish Communities Association’s and African Jewish Congress’ Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft will continue his work in far-flung communities, although he is travelling by car not by air. “All the country communities are aware of coronavirus,” he says. “We all know about the elbow greeting, and are being very careful.”

Goldstein will be involved in efforts to maintain the spirit and spirituality of South African Jewry.

“I want to be there for the community, and I’m going to be working on initiatives to give people access to learning, *mitzvot*, and inspiration,” he says. “All the rabbis in our community will be involved. We’ll be working closely to provide the community with the upliftment we need at such a time.

“This difficult and heart-breaking decision highlights how seriously we need to take the question of precautions to prevent the spread of disease. The shul is just one place of interaction. We interact in so many other areas, and we need to be vigilant wherever we are.

“We need to be strong and courageous, to deepen our faith, and lean on Hashem and each other.”

• Chief Rabbi Goldstein has set up a community WhatsApp group to stay connected in real-time and offer guidance, inspiration, and support. To join the group, go to www.chiefrabbi.co.za/updates

New reality for community as pandemic takes hold

>>Continued from page 1

shame, and stigmatise all possible victims of the disease in a bid to find a scapegoat.

This initial ugliness prompted communal leaders – who had already sprung into pandemic-preparedness mode – to a call on the community to unite, and act with kindness.

Krengel urged people to help each other during this stressful time.

“Don’t scapegoat or blame anyone. We are here to help and preserve not only the South African Jewish community, but greater society. We will be judged in the future by how we as a society, as a people, and as South African Jewry look after each other. This can be our finest hour if we work together and stay united, or it will be our darkest hour if we turn on each other and don’t help one other.”

He said that in a remarkable display of commitment and co-operation, all communal and civic structures had come together to fight the spread of the disease.

It took less than 48 hours to gather the

entire communal leadership including Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, all communal structures, community organisations, and experts in the field of infectious diseases, to discuss the way forward.

“We’ve never worked this closely together on anything before,” Krengel said. “Sure, there were some who didn’t behave nicely by sending vicious voice notes and WhatsApp messages to possible victims, but those responsible have been told that this behaviour isn’t acceptable, and doesn’t help,” he said.

“Overall, we’ve never seen this level of unity in our community before. This could be our finest hour yet.”

Communal organisations are being advised by experts like Professor Barry Schoub, the founding director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, and Dr Richard Friedland, the chief executive of Netcare, with guidelines being updated daily.

“While there has been a dark side,

and some have been unfairly accused of acting selfishly or have been stigmatised, the majority of the community has been unbelievably supportive,” said one victim who also preferred to remain anonymous.

COVID-19 is a fast-moving global story which has left the community in a bizarre state of limbo while the country slowly grinds to a halt.

While the pandemic continues to spread beyond anyone’s wildest imagination and South Africans continue to panic purchase at the shops, the words of Dr Hans Kluge of the World Health Organization ring true when he said this week, “There is quite simply a new reality.”

At the time of going to press, the number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 in South Africa was 116.

• Those who have tested positive for the virus and haven’t given permission for their names to be used are being kept confidential.

How do we care for our old and vulnerable?

With the COVID-19 virus having the greatest impact on the elderly, infirm, or medically vulnerable, the *SA Jewish Report* sent questions to **Saul Tomson, chief executive of the Chevrah Kadisha**, about the organisation's containment strategy.

If you have an elderly parent or parents living with you, what are the obvious steps you should take to safeguard them?

The government of the United Kingdom has put all people over the age of 70 in quarantine for four months, and the Israeli health minister has banned people from visiting aged facilities. Clearly, the elderly, frail, and immunocompromised are at most risk. We need to suspend individual niceties to look after broader communal necessities. Elderly parents should be encouraged to stay home. Many shuls internationally have suspended their services. This virus spreads, as everyone knows, by inadequate hand hygiene and mucous droplets on hands and surfaces. The closer we are to people, the more risk we have of infecting them. So be careful not to touch, kiss, or hug your elderly parents. Grandchildren can draw pictures and send messages. In this wonderful age of technology, there are a number of safe options. In some cases, very vulnerable people have gone into total isolation to avoid contact with people, even family.

Closing establishments for the elderly and vulnerable in the community (from visitors) seems a drastic measure. Why did the chev do this?

The chev has adopted the mantra of "speed over perfection", and we are attempting to be ahead of the curve. We have dedicated researchers who constantly monitor international trends and best practice in nursing and aged homes around the world. What became clear is that we needed to take quick, strong, and decisive action to protect our residents. We weren't looking to do

what was popular, rather what was right.

While it may seem a drastic measure, these are the most vulnerable and as such, need to be the most protected. We would have loved to have waited until after the weekend when we could have planned it better. However, the data clearly showed us that every day matters when it comes to a virus that spreads so quickly. Our residents and community have responded well.

How do we protect our elderly and vulnerable at institutions that haven't done this?

The chev has been asked to take on a national role of co-ordinating Jewish facilities. We have set up a communication group, and are sharing all our documents, research, and protocols – anything we feel will be of value to them. And we are strongly encouraging other aged facilities to follow suit and restrict access.

Aren't the precautions the government and medical fraternity outlined for everyone enough when dealing with the elderly and vulnerable?

The chev has instituted a policy of "shielding", which is different to social distancing. It's about protecting the most vulnerable. In implementing this, we have created three bubbles around our people. Bubble #1 is our outer perimeter, which doesn't allow anyone aside from staff and contractors to enter the facilities. Bubble #2 is at our receptions at the various facilities, which ensure that people on the inside of bubble #1 who have no reason to be there, can go no further. And bubble #3 sits outside every frail-care unit and is manned by

a qualified nurse blocking access until staff are screened (for a second time) to ensure no one who shouldn't have access can go inside.

How do we know that the people working with the elderly and vulnerable aren't going to spread the virus?

Everyone has to be cautious. We have instituted a rigorous policy of staff screening at our first bubble. This protocol has been developed in association with the private sector to ensure that no one who is potentially a risk will have access. Non-medical or care staff who have no reason to be inside our aged and frail facilities won't be permitted access.

About 400 of our residents are extremely vulnerable and frail. As such, they require intense nursing and assistance with the activities of daily living such as being changed, bathed, turned, and fed. We can't manage without staff. We have also doubled down on our cleaning rituals to meet the highest levels of infection-control. Given the size of our facilities, cleaning all handrails, surfaces, food trolleys, lift buttons, and door handles multiple times through the day requires that we hire many additional cleaning staff members.

What's being done in these institutions closed to the outside world to ensure that the residents aren't lonely and bored?

Baruch Hashem (praise G-d) we have the most wonderful activities in our facilities. One just needs to walk around our various campuses to see that there is a thriving programme. We have movies, exercise classes, shiurim, entertainment, and more. Life continues

normally for those onsite, and we are doing everything we can to maintain Shabbat services and programmes without our visitors. The gardens are beautiful, and the Nosh Café and Tea Garden are busy, social, and active. Residents sit outside enjoying the sun and feeling safe and protected.

Is there anything else we need to know in this regard?

Because family and friends are barred from visiting our residents and we understand how difficult this can be for everyone, we are setting up an e-visiting system via Skype and WhatsApp which can be arranged through 063 212 4193. We are also offering free flu vaccinations to all residents, staff, and chev community welfare beneficiaries. Although this isn't a corona vaccine, a generally healthier community is needed at this time.

People are encouraged to show love to the elderly. Send drawings, drop off care packages with loving notes that we can distribute to them, be creative, make videos with performances and messages from your family to ours, and we will play them. Drop off magazines, crossword puzzles, and books. Bake cakes for our security guards, they have a tough job at the moment.

I have received many calls offering assistance financially at this extraordinary time – it's just a sign of how giving this community is. At some point, we may call upon the community to volunteer and assist us. If we do, I have no doubt knowing this remarkable community that we will get a positive response.

My fellow community members

In the coming weeks we may be tried and tested in so many ways. There is so much that is unknown – so much that is beyond our control.

One of the only things that we can try to ensure is how we react – whatever comes our way. As we distance ourselves physically, in our best efforts to flatten the curve of infection and protect one another, let us use every other way we have to support one another.

To this end, I have set up a [community WhatsApp group](#) to connect in real-time and offer timeless guidance, inspiration and support.

To join the WhatsApp group go to
www.chiefrabbi.co.za/updates

I have been overwhelmed at the coordinated and swift efforts of our leadership. It has been so affirming to be part of a dedicated team, including the Rabbis, shuls, Board, the Chev, the schools, Hatzolah, CSO and CAP, who are so dedicated to our community's well-being.

At this crucial time in history, let us do everything we can to spread love, support and the spirit of community that we know so well to all of humanity.

Above all, let us have faith and trust in G-d, Who, no matter the circumstances, is always there for us.

Stay safe and G-d bless



CHIEF RABBI

Warner Goldstein

Friendships reignited through Facebook



Belinda Rabbie and Melissa Wener Stonehill

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

For people who connected before the dawn of social media, losing touch generally meant saying goodbye forever. Yet decades later, they can reconnect to forge meaningful reconstructions through Facebook.

When Lori Osrin and Nicolene Holthausen reconnected on Facebook, they hadn't seen each other for almost 15 years. Initially introduced by a mutual friend, the two house-sat together for three weeks, forged a strong bond, and then lost touch. "We were very young, and just took separate paths," says Osrin.

They later reunited on Facebook through that same mutual friend. But tragically, it was upon his death that the two made plans to get together. "Nicolene came to visit me one weekend, and she's basically never left," says Osrin.

Aside from rediscovering the bond they'd initially built, the women were astounded by a new unlikely connection. "Nicolene was involved in a car accident 11 years ago and suffered a traumatic brain injury," says Osrin. "I live with an acquired brain injury. Now we work together. We're both living with these brain conditions, but we help each other function. She's not Jewish, but she's reformed my faith in G-d. She's been such a blessing in my life. It's amazing how we reconnected. We missed out on so much of each other's lives, but we're so similar."

Susan Olswang is also in awe of the power of social media after having just tracked down a woman she hadn't seen for 50 years. The two met in Canada when Olswang was just 10 years old and reeling from the death of her father. "His death was such a shock to both my mom and I," she recalls. "In her wisdom, my mother took me out of school for six months, and we travelled the world to help us get away from our grief." Olswang's father was South African, while her mother was born in Estonia.

"Part of our trip involved visiting my mother's Estonian friends who were living around the world," says Olswang. "One of the families we stayed with was that of an Estonian school friend of hers who was living in Toronto with her husband and two daughters. We stayed with them for six weeks." After her mother's passing 13 years ago, Olswang lost her link to this family but thought of them often.

When Olswang shared this story, another Estonian friend told her about an Estonian genealogy group on Facebook. He invited her to join, and Olswang posted all the details she had in the hope of reconnecting with one of the family's daughters.

"I only knew their first and maiden names, I assumed they'd married, and that their parents had died. Just a few minutes after I posted my story, a woman said she thought she'd been to school with one of the daughters, Mailis. Less than half an hour later, Mailis herself answered, and said, "It's me." When she replied, I started crying, in fact I'm crying now, thinking about it again. Fifty years down the line, we've reconnected."

The fact that Mailis even saw the message was a small miracle. "She's actually on holiday in Mexico at the moment with a bad Wi-Fi connection, and said she hadn't been on the group much while away," says Olswang. "If she'd checked a day or two later, I imagine my post would have moved down the page, and she might never have seen it. But she did see it, and now we've started writing." The women plan to phone one another after Mailis's holiday, and hope eventually to travel to reconnect in person.

With both their mothers having passed away, the two value their reconnection that much more. "Mailis was, in fact, named after my mom," says Olswang. "Our mothers' bond was very strong, and I've often wondered as the next generation if we could form some kind of

long distance friendship. Mailis has lost her sister too, so for her to have a connection to an important part of her childhood is important to her too. I'm blown away."

Belinda Rabbie and Melissa Wener Stonehill also hadn't seen one another for decades when they reconnected on Facebook. "We grew up together. We were such good friends," recalls Rabbie. "I have memories of Melissa, of going to

States and made a new life in San Francisco.

"That was 30 years ago, so obviously there was no email or cell phones," laughs Rabbie. "We kept in touch by writing letters to each other. We also used to record our news on a cassette tape. I initially got one and recorded a long "voice note" with all my news. She'd receive the tape from me, listen and then record over with all that was happening in her life. We'd send it back and forth in those brown envelopes." Yet over the years, life happened, and the two lost contact.

Decades later with the advent of Facebook, the two reconnected. "We filled each other in on all of our news, on our husbands, kids, and lives," says Rabbie. "Recently, she sent me

a message on Facebook, saying that she was coming back to South Africa because her husband was offered a position in Pretoria."

Upon visiting Cape Town this December, Rabbie found a photo of herself, Wener Stonehill, and a few other kids at her birthday party blowing out candles. They came full circle last month when they took a photo at another party – this time held for Wener Stonehill's two-year-old son.

"Melissa invited me and another school friend," says Rabbie. "It was like a mini reunion after not seeing each other for about 30 years. Although it was a bit weird after so long, it was so nice to see her. Her parents were also visiting from San Francisco, and I remember them so well. It was wonderful to reconnect again." The women plan to get together again soon to reminisce properly.



Nicolene Holthausen and Lori Osrin

her house, and playing and spending time with her family. We went to primary school together in Cape Town." Yet when the girls were 10, Wener Stonehill and her family emigrated to the United

Sajac – a home away from home for Saffers

TALI FEINBERG

When South African Jews leave the community and move overseas, they often feel a deep sense of loss. Organisations like the South African Jewish American Community (Sajac) have been created to deal with this transition, and keep our expats connected.

Tamara Kahn moved with her family from Johannesburg to Texas when she was very young. She lost her accent, "but maintained a slight sense of estrangement due to different traditions or the pronunciation of words".

She later moved to San Diego, where she says, "I was surprised to hear even more South African accents than I could have imagined. It made me feel at home, but it was the good fortune of stumbling upon Sajac that made me start feeling part of the community."

Sajac helps South African Jews integrate into American society while maintaining strong connections to each other and their roots.

The organisation was founded by Leah Levin in 1987. "The South African Jewish community was the fastest growing group in San Diego county, but newcomers weren't integrating into the general community," she remembers. "With this in mind, I called a meeting at my house which included concerned members of the South African community. After much discussion, it was agreed that human contact wouldn't only speed up the absorption process, but a community group like Sajac would be a platform for dialogue and integration with all Americans.

"At our inaugural meeting, we were overwhelmed by 300 attendees, and our first braai attracted 450 people. We all believe in the richness, vibrancy, and spirit of our South African heritage and all it could offer to the community that has become our home," says Levin.

Sajac offers numerous events, gatherings, and resources to its members, even a fund to help South African Jewish expats in financial difficulty by providing interest-free loans. It has a magazine, babysitting services, a business directory, access to a genealogy database, an annual gala dinner, and meetings with South African performers like comedian Barry Hilton and the late Johnny Clegg.

The organisation's current president, Pamela Nathan, says it has become her passion. "Our heritage is a very important part of who we are today. My long-term goal is to have a cyberspace resource where future generations will be able to access to information about our community including where we came from."

As soon as a South African Jewish family emigrates to San Diego, Sajac is there. "We deliver welcome baskets and have a newcomer's brunch to introduce new members to each other and those who have lived in San Diego for a longer time. The newcomer's basket contains our directory so that they are able to identify anyone they may know. We also call them to find out what their needs are.

"Everyone joins Sajac for different reasons – a sense of community, feeling of belonging, or wanting to stay in touch with others who came from the same place. Thirty-two years ago people were a lot more reliant on Sajac for social integration. Now, there are lots of people who have family and friends in the community," says Nathan. "Transition is different for each person. It depends on their personal circumstances, their feelings about leaving, their responsibilities for kids and parents, the extent to which they have left family in South Africa, and how quickly they make friends in San Diego."

The organisation exists only in San Diego. "We've changed the bylaws of our non-profit status to permit nationwide membership, and we have a few members from other cities," she says.

"At the moment, we are interested in documenting the genealogy of our members. We are investigating software that uses geographical information as the basis of connection among members. Many of the families originated in Lithuania, so it's a unique triangle: Eastern Europe to South African to Southern California."

Dr David Cline, a history professor at San Diego State University, is conducting an oral history research project on the emigration of South African Jews to Southern California. "He has interviewed many of us, and will continue to do so in 2020. He is fascinated by our history," she says.

While some may think that an organisation like this makes South African Jews feel separate, Nathan emphasises that its aim is integration. "Sajac's mission statement includes helping our members to integrate. That's our intention. At the same time, we do have a very unique history and certainly an upbringing in South Africa that contributes to who we are today.

"South African Jews living in San Diego are especially noteworthy because of the large numbers who are involved in all aspects of Judaism in the community," she says. "They are involved in schools, shuls, many different Jewish organisations. You name it, and you'll be sure to find an expat on a board or who will volunteer their time. They have also spearheaded certain organisations, and many expats have ties to a variety of African organisations. We're proud of our heritage, and welcome being in touch with the South African Jewish community," says Nathan.

"Like most people, I feel like less of a misfit when I'm around those that share some experience, background, values, even humour. I'm proud to be South African born and assisting in holding onto my heritage while appreciating and contributing to all the United States has to offer, says Kahn. "I hope to share this with my children so they, too, know where they came from, and why they have a granny and a gogo."



Sajac president Pamela Nathan with community member Tova Galgut

Be still as the universe resets

Whereas I'm no coronavirus expert, I have been a hypochondriac for some years. I'm also a radio talk-show host, author, and social commentator, which perhaps qualifies me in some way to speak about the social impact of this illness.

There have been some pivotal moments in my lifetime: the falling of the Berlin Wall, 9/11, and now Covid-19.

All of these events changed the world. In each case, the world looked different afterwards.

Prior to coronavirus, our lives and planet had begun to spin faster and faster.

Smartphones, social media, and social-base businesses such as Uber and Tinder meant that everything had become instantaneous. International travel was as common as getting on a bus. Hook-ups had become the norm, and climate activists screamed about the end of time.

The Yeats poem, *The Second Coming*, perfectly captured our state of being. "Turning and turning in the widening gyre; The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold."

Indeed, things have fallen apart.

On Friday on my morning show, I spoke to a friend who lives in Venice. She and her family live in a small apartment. They are in isolation. Each day is a challenge, and she takes quarantine day by day by day. The essence of her advice was profound. She repeated it numerous times, "Just be still."

It's difficult advice for us to adhere to in 2020.

It's counter to everything we have come to know. Our need is "to do". That's the reason we rush out to buy toilet paper. It's why we run to fill our homes with the things we don't need, and why we obsessively gather and share information.

In many ways, the world is being reset. It's like G-d has hit the reboot button, and we need to be patient while we come back online. In the meantime, travel has paused, and

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



factories have stopped. And families have to retreat into their homes and units.

It means not going to bars, clubs, movies, restaurants and schools and functions. It means not rushing anywhere. It means not shaking hands but rather turning inwards and focusing on who we are, not what others are.

Remember the time when we would write a letter to a friend. We would do this by hand, and then go and mail the letter. The recipient would wait until the postman trudged up the road slowly and delivered mail from house to house.

We aren't going back to that. We don't need to, but we need to learn some lessons from that time. We need to be still.

I'm not, of course, speaking of the incredibly brave souls who are at the frontlines of fighting the disease, researching it, or supporting the rest with medical care, food, and essentials.

If we aren't one of them, then we need to do what's expected of us.

We need to be still for long enough so that we can experience joy in the small things again, the things we have stopped noticing around us. The sound of birds in the garden, the pets in our homes, our spouses, children, and time itself.

The universe has slowed us down. And we need to slow down with it.

There is G-d in the pause. There is G-d in the space. And there is space for us in it as well.

The message of the virus is clear and uncomplicated: the only way to deal with it is to retreat, isolate, and wait. There is nothing to be achieved by fighting it. The answer is more simple than we imagine. It's just to "be still".

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Banding together to stay ahead of the curve

The unprecedented events of the past few weeks have turned the world as we know it upside down. To get through these difficult and stressful times, we will all need to be resilient, patient, flexible, and, where necessary, innovative. Above all, we must be united. Coronavirus affects everyone, and to minimise its impact on our country, everyone needs to work together, co-operate, and wherever possible, help one another.

As the representative umbrella body of South African Jewry, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies has been working closely with all community organisations to develop strategies to counteract the Covid-19 threat. To that end, last Thursday, we co-ordinated a meeting of the national leadership of major communal bodies around the country together with Professor Barry Schoub, the founding former director of the National Institute for Infectious Diseases, and Dr Richard Friedland, the chief executive of Netcare.

Schoub and Friedland are both experts in the field of communicable diseases, and all decisions were taken following extensive consultation with them. The recommendations agreed on are preventative measures to minimise the spread of the virus. Sectorial clusters dealing with specific areas, namely welfare, education, and religion were created, with each cluster defining guidelines in their particular areas. Ongoing engagement is taking place as the situation develops.

In view of the inevitable rumours, red herrings, and misinformation that is doing the rounds, it is a priority to establish channels of communication that allow easy access to reliable

ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



sources of information. One of the results of the meeting was to set up a Covid-19 Jewish community platform to inform and engage the community in the days to come. This interactive platform provides regular updates, with Schoub addressing issues of concern.

A series of nine "facts not fear" podcasts presented by Schoub has been uploaded, people can send questions to him on the platform, and you can also receive regular updates and recommended guidelines on our Facebook page. The guidelines will be constantly reviewed and adapted to take into account changing circumstances. We urge all community members to regularly refer to this site, either by signing on to our Facebook site, or going to our website (www.sajbd.org).

The extent of the impact of the coronavirus on this country and community ultimately hinges on how individual members conduct themselves in the weeks to come. As Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein has emphasised, the important thing is that each of us take personal responsibility to create the safest environment for all. What has been most inspiring is the level of co-operation and co-ordination between all our communal organisations. In this time of crisis, we have really banded together to ensure that our community remains ahead of the curve.

• Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Jewish Board Talk, 101.9 ChaiFM, every Friday from 12:00 to 13:00.

This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

How to laugh at what scares us

How long does it take a global catastrophe to turn into humour? In the case of coronavirus, not long. The online world is replete with hilarious songs and vignettes concerning the terrible threat this world faces.

American satirist Randy Rainbow with his refrain "someone could develop a cold" parodies a song from the Broadway musical *Guys and Dolls* and United States President Donald Trump's evasive response to the virus. Israeli band Jam and Joplin has produced a darkly funny version of The Knack's 1979 song, *My Sharona*, as *My Corona*, where everyone is masked. All these works have the sole intention of relieving some of the stress we all share in these difficult times.

Is this humour offensive or necessary? Gallows humour is often the only way one can respond to catastrophe. Falling apart is never a solution.

And then, there is a cultural response. Flash mobs of people singing from balconies and streets – ordinary people living in apartment blocks in Italy, Israel, and elsewhere – are testimony to the human spirit in a state of quarantine. Historically, some of the greatest works of art have their roots in human struggle, from Shakespeare to Charlie Chaplin.

In South Africa, while many theatres and arts festivals have glumly closed their doors, others are creatively rethinking their format to meet coronavirus head-on. The organisers of the National Arts Festival said on Tuesday that rather than cancelling the festival in Makhanda, they would do something bold. The festival will go completely online for the full 11 days from 25 June to 5 July so that it can continue to share its magic and hope. Organisers call it "an opportunity to connect when we are being asked to distance ourselves from one another".

Similarly, while facilities for the elderly are in lockdown, cutting people off from their families, the staff of old-age institutions like Pretoria's Jaffa Jewish aged home have posted happy videos on

TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



Facebook of residents at lunch and recreation for their loved ones to see. Communication technology enables connections beyond physical spaces.

Two types of leaders, whether political, community or otherwise, have emerged from the coronavirus scenario. One is motivated to recognise the harsh reality yet take action to make it better, saying that there's always something that can be done. The other sees only gloom, and passes it on to others.

President Cyril Ramaphosa's address to the nation on Sunday, eloquently imploring South Africans to resist panic while declaring coronavirus a national disaster, was the first type – statesmanlike and inspiring. It contrasted with other high-level figures such as Trump, who in the beginning blustered as usual, insisting that the virus was under "tremendous" control when his own experts said it wasn't.

Ramaphosa said South Africa faced "a grave emergency". But if everyone acted together, decisively, coronavirus would be beaten, echoing US President Franklin D Roosevelt's famous phrase during the Great Depression: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Fortunately, the response from major South African figures and organisations, Jewish and others, has been to follow the spirit set by Roosevelt in 1933 and now by Ramaphosa.

Real leadership will be needed in the coming weeks or months, or however long it takes to defeat the virus. An urgent warning is necessary to people in political parties, factions of the African National Congress and others, who have spent many years stabbing each other in the back: your squabbles may be useful material for satirists, but your power-grabbing is neither heroic nor useful for the country. The virus will be defeated in spite of you.

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HOD gathers for 44th biennial conference



HOD Grand President Avron Krasner, Hila Rose Fridman and Grand Secretary Stan Klaff

South Africa played host to the Hebrew Order of David (HOD) International's 44th biennial conference at the HOD Centre in Orchards, Johannesburg, last weekend. Fraternity delegates from the United Kingdom, United States, and Israel as well as local lodges in Cape Town, Durban,

East London and Port Elizabeth attended, participating in extensive deliberations, project planning, and the investiture of new office bearers. It culminated in a sumptuous Sunday lunch attended by special guest Hila Rose Fridman, the deputy Israeli ambassador designate.

KDVP wowed by family stories



Adam Lapidus with his family and KDVP Primary School Director Rabbi Ricky Seeff

Parents, grandparents, and siblings were in awe of the amazing projects created by Grade 7 students at King David Primary School Victory Park for the My Family Story exhibition on Wednesday, 4 March. The

projects display the history and heritage of students' families. Congratulations to Aimee Shull and Adam Lapidus on being selected to enter the international exhibition that will take place in Israel later this year.

KDVP kids snap up three junior-council positions

Aerin Cohen (Grade 11) has been elected incoming mayor of the Johannesburg junior council and Paris Obel (Grade 11) chairperson of the arts and culture committee. The school also recently announced that Ben Obel (Grade 7) was selected deputy mayor of the mini council, so it's a double celebration for the Obel family.



Aerin Cohen

Dan Obel

Paris Obel

Outdoor classroom for Torah Academy



Torah Academy Nursery School teacher Morah Chana Rivka Lewin has created a new outdoor learning space for pupils under a tree. The area is large enough to seat a class, with little benches and shapes in a semicircle for blackboard learning. The outdoor learning classroom is a concept which is trending world-wide. "It has great value for the overall development of children," says Lewin.

Entrenching a new tradition

Around 50 women, all in fancy dress for Purim, participated in the women's megillah reading at Greenside Shul on Tuesday 10 March. This is the third year in a row that the Greenside Shul have held a women's megillah reading, and the second year it has happened on the bimah in the main shul. The reading was led by Adina Roth.



Leanne Zabow, Adina Roth and Nina Cohen

Letters

WHAT THE SHPIEL TELLS US ABOUT KING DAVID

King David regretfully informs you of our business-lounge closure. Although the comfort of our precious scholars has always been important, we feel their health is paramount. It's one thing to walk a mile in someone else's Louboutins, but you won't get many Discovery steps in quarantine.

Howard, the consensus among your many young Instagram followers is that you are a man of depth and wisdom beyond your youthful half a century plus. We must read the underlying message that reveals itself once we sanitise the surface (with no less than 70% alcohol GF). So we did just that ...

And we take the compliment. What you were basically saying is:

We are revolutionary – this we are. We pride ourselves in being a top IEB (Independent Examinations Board) school offering diverse and cutting-edge education.

We prioritise our students.

We attempt to raise *mentshen* (people with integrity), but we can't be responsible for what happens once our alumni enter the big bad world.

We are a school that teaches *chesed*

(compassion), and love for our fellow man.

We strive only for the best for our learners.

We do, however, reserve our right to say that although vaping may be legal in over 18s and marijuana has now been decriminalised in that age group and over, we have imposed a campus-wide ban on engaging in risky, illegal, or health-altering behaviour. The only substance we will allow on campus is alcohol – although only in 70% form, and exclusively for sanitation.

At this point, we are working with relevant health officials on managing a more pressing issue than the lounge closure. Thankfully, due to our phenomenal leadership, we are working on a Covid-19 management plan.

In order to assist our pupils with the possible closure of said business class lounge, we have offered both your residence and Gidon Novick's hotels as suggested venues should any Covid quarantine staycations be required.

Belated happy Purim

Yours in sanitisation – **Proud KD parent**

SUPPORT FOR CHINESE COMMUNITY A WORTHY EXERCISE

When I first heard about the visit of a delegation from the South African Jewish Board of Deputies to China Mall, I was apprehensive about its motives, but when I learned that it was, in fact, to show support for this Chinese community, I was deeply appreciative.

As the architect of China Mall, I have worked closely with these people for the past 15 years, and have come to admire their work ethic and integrity.

We mustn't forget that when Jews were

fleeing persecution in Germany and Austria in the late 1930s, and when most countries closed their doors to Jewish refugees, Shanghai opened its doors to receive about 30 000 Jews who settled there and built a vibrant community.

Some of them remain there to this day. Also, I have never been aware of any anti-Semitic sentiment coming out of China. In fact, China and Israel have a close working relationship. As Jews, let's remember that.

– **Ivan Schlapobersky, Johannesburg**

SAJBD'S CHINESE OVERTURES MAKE ME PROUD

Give the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) a Bell's! With reference to last week's article, "Chinese touched by Jewish hand of friendship", (*SA Jewish Report*, 13 March), the SAJBD truly showed that our community is and always must be a light unto the nations.

As Jews, we should be at the forefront of combatting racism and intolerance, having been the victims of some of the worst racism and intolerance throughout our history. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case.

However, after reading last week's article, and hearing about the SAJBD's gesture on 702, it made me proud to be part of this remarkable community!

– **Dylan Berger, Johannesburg**

KING DAVID STORY WAS A LAG

Just wanted to say well done for the article. Was brilliant! Had a good *lag!*

If people couldn't identify it as a prank, they are fools.

I had two kids go through the King David system, my wife taught at the Victory Park campus, and we all had a laugh about the article.

Love your paper. Read it every week. I never comment, but this deserved one.

Well done. Keep it up.

– **Roy Friedman, Johannesburg**



Sports Page

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Sports people weathering the coronavirus period

LUKE ALFRED

Harry Shapiro, a much-loved Joburg cricket coach, sees a silver lining in the dark cloud that is the COVID-19 pandemic. With schools throughout the country closing on Wednesday, Shapiro is already experiencing an upsurge in phone calls from parents asking if their sons can get one-on-one coaching in the now empty days before the end of the month.

"I'm discovering that parents aren't that worried about individual sessions," says the Parkmore-based Shapiro, a coach who has been a feature of the Joburg scene for nearly 50 years. "Everyone, myself included, is staying away from groups and clinics, and I have just cancelled a trip to the Boland, but I'm seeing an increase in one-on ones."

Shapiro's attitude reminds us that behind the headlines invariably lies a human story. This is true in sport as it is in other walks of life, with South Africans relying upon their usual hardy ingenuity to make the best of a frightening and dynamic situation.

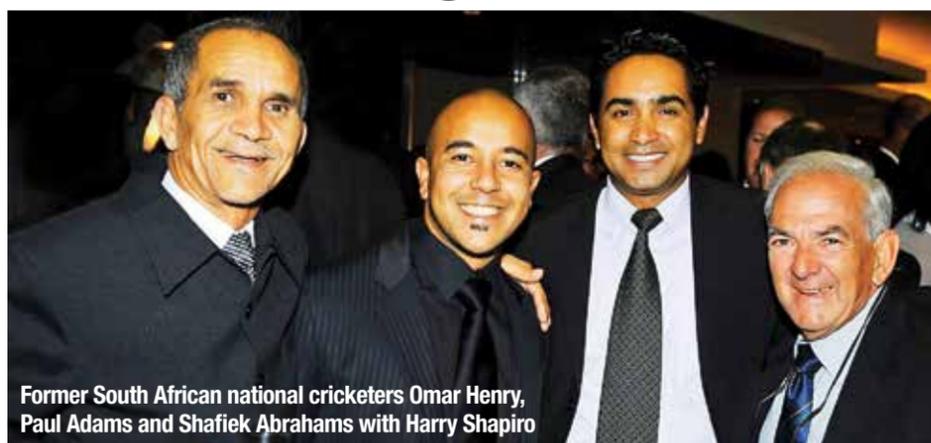
Shapiro's commitment to hearing the richly re-assuring sound of bat on ball is all the more remarkable when one discovers that he turns 80 this coming Wednesday. He's already cancelled his birthday luncheon scheduled for Sunday, not wanting to have friends and relatives around the same table, but he's carrying on coaching the game he loves regardless.

"Look, one of the reasons I keep on working is that I have to work, even at my age," he says wryly. "But, secondly, I love the work. I love spin bowling and working with kids, so I'm going to continue with individual sessions for the time being."

Shapiro, who once opened the innings for a Transvaal Invitation XI with the inimitable curmudgeon, Geoffrey Boycott, is no different to many of us in that he's adopting a prudent wait-and-see attitude in the coming weeks.

He's not going to do anything stupid, but he believes that it's economically and emotionally important to keep active, a simple human fact often lost in these hysterical times. "Unless things get a whole lot worse, I'm pretty much going to continue with coaching," he says with mettle.

Maurice "Maish" Rosen faces an altogether different sporting problem. As a marathon and ultra-marathon athlete, the past week has concentrated the mind. As someone who was planning on running both the Two Oceans and the Comrades, Rosen's options are



Former South African national cricketers Omar Henry, Paul Adams and Shafiek Abrahams with Harry Shapiro

either to keep on training in the hope that upcoming events continue, or to curtail his stints on the road in the knowledge that big events are likely to be postponed or cancelled entirely.

In the event, his hunches have been proved mostly right. He thought the Two Oceans marathon was going to be cancelled (it was cancelled on Sunday night), and he's now cut back entirely on his training regime in expectation that the Comrades (scheduled for 14 June) will also be cancelled.

That hasn't happened yet, with organisers saying that cancellation is premature. Matters, they say, will be monitored, and a decision on the race's future will be made on or before 17 April.

For Rosen, though, the writing is on the Comrades wall. "It would be a miracle if it happened this year," says the man who would have run in his 37th Comrades were it to go ahead. "There are 1 900 foreigners running Comrades, and they all need to get here," he says. "All in all, there are 15 000 or 16 000 athletes. I'm absolutely sure it isn't going to happen."

Given that Rosen runs several times a week and combines those runs with two strenuous weekend training runs before Comrades, he's probably going to get severe withdrawal as he cuts back on his exercise through March and April. This said, there's his new grandson, the 10-month-old Logan, to think about, and Rosen would much rather play it safe and stay out of trouble. "I'm 66 – I'm not bulletproof – there's a bigger picture to think about," he says.

The organisers of the Comrades have been the exception to the norm in saying that it's too early for blanket cancellations of a bedrock South African event that has a long and proud tradition. In so doing, they have attracted some negative comment, with participants arguing that their training regimes have been compromised, so even if the event does take place, many athletes won't be as well-prepared for it

there are no bi-lateral sporting fixtures or sports meets.

The Premier Soccer League shut down its programme on Monday, with its board of directors discussing the way forward on Thursday as this newspaper was going to print.

Cricket has been similarly affected. The playoffs of the Momentum One-Day Cup were meant to be played this week, with the Proteas arriving back in the country after their cancelled three-match ODI series. A planned press conference to see in their safe return to the country was also canned.

The story is the same in Israel, with the cancellation of both the national basketball and football leagues until further notice, according to the *Jerusalem Post*.

as they should be.

Elsewhere in the country, organised sport has all but ceased. School closures mean that

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