



South African Jewish Report

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Keep your distance and stay at home, plead communal leaders

NICOLA MILTZ

Jewish communal leaders pleaded with certain members of the community to cease weddings and private *minyanin* (prayer quorums of ten men) in a desperate bid to halt the spread of the deadly COVID-19 virus – to no avail.

In spite of couples having been warned over the past two weeks of the dangers of communal gatherings, many went ahead anyway, flouting strict social distancing measures and, according to communal leaders, endangering the lives of others.

While they may have cut back on their wedding guest list dramatically and moved to smaller venues at the last minute, it's understood that celebratory dancing still took place. In the past two weeks, there were at least four weddings in Johannesburg.

Zev Krengel, the vice-president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) lambasted people for attending private *minyanim* and couples for hosting small wedding parties, however scaled down they were, which he said violated the strict measures put in place to halt the spread of the virus.

"This is not a time to be happy while hundreds of people die every day from this virus. I begged couples to party only when the nightmare is over, but they went ahead anyway. It's disgusting. I pleaded with men not to attend private home *minyanim*, but they thought they could anyway."

"This is a war. The enemy [the virus] loves *simchas*. That's where it lurks. It loves rogue *minyanim* – that's its breeding ground. It's beyond belief that people still don't get it," he said.

Dr Richard Friedland, the chief executive of Netcare and retired virologist Professor Barry Schoub were asked by the board to explain the severity of the disease in an urgent memorandum issued on

Monday urging people to comply with the regulations. This was done after it emerged that a guest at one wedding had tested positive for the virus.

A message sent by the bridal couple to their guests read, "We are sending this message to all guests who attended our wedding on 15 March. We firstly wanted to thank you all for being there to celebrate our *simcha*. And secondly, in the interests of transparency, we wanted to let you know that one of the guests has tested positive for coronavirus."

Dr Friedland told the *SA Jewish Report*, "We are entering a critical phase of this pandemic in South Africa. It's up to every one of us to take co-responsibility. This is the plea, this is the cry we are making."

"When people behave irresponsibly, it has devastating, far-reaching consequences. Social distancing is the single most important factor in flattening the curve and preventing the pandemic from spreading. The global precautions and recommendations are based on sound scientific epidemiological expertise."

He said people who were asymptomatic were still capable of spreading the virus. "This is the big danger and concern, and that's why we have a lockdown."

"When people say we are over-reacting and the measures are too strict – draconian even – I tell them that even if we save one life, then all of this would have been worth it. That one life could be your loved one."

It's understood that a further three weddings are taking place in Johannesburg this week, making it just in time before the nationwide lockdown which begins on Thursday night.

Thankfully, said Krengel he understands that these weddings are following strict protocols and couples are being extra vigilant, having scaled down the events completely to the bare minimum of guests including only immediate

family.

Chuppahs are being conducted via video conferencing app Zoom, followed by a very small dinner with strictly no dancing or elderly people.

"It's difficult to postpone a wedding from a religious point of view, this is understood," said Krengel. "But you don't need pole holders, a retinue, and guests to get married. You need a rabbi and two witnesses, then go home and party when the pandemic is over."

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein told the *SA Jewish Report*, "Let us all pull together as a community at this time. It's so important for each of us to take personal responsibility to respect and comply with the president's regulations designed to prevent the spread of coronavirus."

"One of the highest Torah values is the protection and preservation of life – doing everything in our power to protect ourselves and others from harm. "Therefore, adhering to the stipulations of the lockdown isn't just a legal responsibility in terms of the laws of the state, it's a

sacred duty in the eyes of G-d. It's our *mitzvah* [commandment] at this crucial time."

At the time of going to press, South Africa had 709 confirmed cases of the novel coronavirus. Two members of the community are currently in intensive care on ventilators. Their names are known to the *SA Jewish Report*.

This week, the *Jerusalem Post* reported that a quarter of Israelis who have contracted the coronavirus in Israel have been infected through contact with another infected person in a synagogue. These figures were released by an advisory group to the health ministry on Tuesday.

According to the data, the most common place to contract COVID-19 in Israel is synagogues, where 24% of all infections to date have occurred, with another 5% contracted in yeshivas.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Moshe Freedman, the Rabbi of the New West End Synagogue in Bayswater, London, this week said those attending private *minyanim* during

the coronavirus lockdown are "idol worshippers" and he would deny aliyah to anyone who attended one.

Friedland and Schoub said in a joint statement, "As health professionals and experts in the field of infectious diseases epidemiology, we cannot underestimate the unprecedented danger which the current epidemic of COVID-19 virus represents for our community and country as a whole."

"Scientific studies in South Africa have shown that the country is nearing the tipping point of more than 100 local transmissions of the virus, which would trigger an outbreak of a 100 000 cases in less than a month and thousands of deaths."

Said Krengel, "No matter how much explaining has been done, people still like to look for loopholes. They still want to have 20 people at the seder. This is a matter of life and death. By the time we realise our error, it will be too late. This isn't the time for *simchas*, *sederim* or *minyanim*."

Kindness goes viral



Rabbi David Masinter on Wednesday handed out sanitisers at Johannesburg taxi ranks and to Jewish senior citizens who might not have access to them. "Something small can help make the tough days ahead a tiny bit better," he said. "Kindness does that."

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Keeping us together

OPINION

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



We are living in unprecedented times. The entire world is hunkered down. People aren’t at work, children aren’t at school. Our daily lives have been disrupted in the most profound and unsettling way. There are many people suffering physically and financially, many whose lives and livelihoods are at risk.

This week, our president acted bravely and resolutely to mitigate the situation. And, as a community, we’ve done so too, right from the beginning. To help get a handle on

the situation at an early stage, we made the agonising decision to close our schools and shuls. We consulted with the foremost medical and healthcare experts, and issued mitigation measures and guidelines. This week, during Yom Kippur Katan, we prayed and fasted in complete solidarity, imploring Hashem to bring healing to the world.

And now there’s something else we can do, something to mitigate the sense of dislocation we feel, something to relieve the unease. It’s something that can restore some stability to our lives, something we can hold fast to in a world that is so turbulent and so unpredictable. Something to keep our lives together. Shabbat.

Shabbos has held the Jewish people together throughout history, since G-d gave it to us more than 3 300 years ago. It has been a source of comfort and strength through our greatest challenges and hardships. It has always been there for us. And in the midst of this crisis, Shabbat is

there for us again.

The essence of Shabbos is peace. That’s why we say, “Shabbat shalom”. It brings peace into our lives, peace among our family, friends, and community, peace within ourselves, peace with G-d. *Shalom* (peace) is derived from the word *shalem* which means to be whole. On Shabbat we become whole. We put away our phones, we set aside our work, we remove from our lives all the distractions, and we connect. We eat together, daven together, sing together, share words of Torah, of insight and inspiration. We talk. We bond. We live – really live.

In these turbulent times, Shabbos can be a real haven of light and strength, of faith in G-d as our loving parent who is with us through everything. On Shabbat, we remember what’s truly important in our lives. In a world turned upside down, it can keep us the right way up.

We read in the Torah how in the time of the great flood, Noah, his family, and the animals were protected by an ark – a haven in a world that was drowning. Our sages say that Shabbos is that ark. A refuge for us to draw strength and

renewal from. A place where we can breathe.

Shabbos is our ark in this crisis. It can help us weather the storm. We all know that famous slogan from World War II which boosted British morale in the midst of the blitzkrieg – “Keep calm and carry on”. Again the world is at war, only this time with a virus. Perhaps we can repurpose that slogan for our times, “Keep calm and keep Shabbos.”

As a community, perhaps more than any other community, we are familiar with the joy, peace, and connection of Shabbos. We know the power of “keeping it together” – how Shabbos keeps our lives together.

Now is the time to keep our lives together. This Shabbos, let us all keep Shabbos, with Jews all around the world. Let us enjoy the calmness and respite it brings us, the sense of rootedness in a world that is spinning. Let us draw comfort, strength, and inspiration from Shabbos. Let’s keep it together.

And may this Shabbos truly be a Shabbat shalom.

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AUTO AFRICA

SA Jews step up to the plate

TALI FEINBERG

A crisis is a time when many people only look out for themselves, but as lockdown loomed over South Africa, many South African Jews saw it as their duty to help others. These are just some of them.

When Bradley Stern heard President Cyril Ramaphosa addressing the nation on Sunday, 15 March, the president's message that those who have resources must look out for the weak and vulnerable stood out for him. With a marketing agency that works with the department of basic education in schools, Stern knew that nine million children rely on national school feeding schemes across the country, but with schools closing, they wouldn't be fed.

He and his brother, Jared Stern, quickly set up a “Cans with Purpose” campaign to generate donations to buy canned foods. The response was overwhelming, and they raised more than R100 000 in just over a week. All donations are now going through Afrika Tikkun, which looks after 9 000 underprivileged children and their families.

Chabad House's Rabbi David Mazinter handed out sanitisers at taxi ranks to the underprivileged, saying, “There are



Liwa Primary School pupils in Cape Town get foods from Cans With Purpose

such small things one can do that can make such a substantial impact on others who are feeling desperation and panic. Something as small as distributing a few hand sanitisers, or even mielie meal or rice, can really help someone to get through the hard days that lie ahead of us.”

Cadena South Africa and the South African Friends of Israel with Pastor Allan of the Be Blessed Church handed out information and hand sanitisers in Thokoza,

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Torah Thought

Who is the ultimate winner of coronavirus?

Coronavirus has three winners: the makers of sanitiser and masks, pharmaceutical companies, and the third isn't so clear.

The third is hopefully you and me, and anyone who applies their intelligence to what's happening.

It's well known that the Jewish response to difficulty is to introspect and re-evaluate. This opportunity has thrust itself upon us. There are limited distractions now. That's the coronav spiritual mindful lesson #1 – to recognise that it's a time for thoughtful consideration about life.

As Rabbi Manis Friedman explained, through coronav, we have been forced to change our habits – which have been to work and play, work and play. Is that my life? Is that playing out my purpose? These are healthy questions which can lead to a much greater depth and maturity. So, a corollary to coronav lesson #1 is to pursue “the questions”.

Coronav is transmitted through interaction with a carrier. Spiritually there is a lesson here. The Torah teaches that we are social beings, and people influence one other in different ways. While it's difficult to close a door, it might be necessary to do so to avoid being negatively affected by a friend or colleague who is a bad influence. Turning inward, we can ask ourselves if we are being a carrier of bad influence, and can curb and change that, becoming carriers of good vibes and positive energy. This is coronav spiritual mindful lesson #2.

Did anyone laugh when they saw someone wearing a mask. If they did initially, they soon stopped and maybe even joined the wearers when they realised that the mask has great value, protecting the wearer from potential hazardous particles and transmissions. From the mask wearer's point of view, it doesn't matter whether Joe Shmo is laughing at him for wearing the mask as he realises its importance. Coronav spiritual mindful lesson #3: as Jews, we are given the pride of wearing a *yami* (yarmulke) and *tzitzit* (tassels), *tefillin* (phylacteries), and *talit* (prayer shawl). To wear it is to induce spiritual connective energy with Hashem and

Rabbi Ilan Herrmann, Soul Workout Shul & Community Centre, Glenhazel

with our soul, which is healthy. Who cares what the world thinks and if it laughs? In fact, when we do wear them, people eventually respect and admire us. So wear “Hashem-wear” with pride and certainty.

Lastly, who are the heroes of coronav? The moms and dads handling the kids at home, and of course, the kids behaving well in spite of being restricted to the home. Well done! The other heroes are the medics who have been responding, going into the line of fire, bringing health and healing to those affected.

When this is over, the biggest lesson – coronav spiritual mindful lesson #4 – particularly as Jews who have been given the light of Torah, is to bring light into darkness, and health and healing to a fractured world through Torah *mitzvot* and acts of kindness.

So who is winner number three of coronav? Hopefully all of us.



Jewish elderly do a *mitzvah* for those in mourning

JORDAN MOSHE

Johannesburg resident Molly Paikin was devastated when her sister, Sarah Schneider, passed away this week in Florida in the United States, but even more so when she heard her nephew, David, wouldn't be able to say kaddish.

The funeral took place on Tuesday, and because of shul closures worldwide due to the spread of COVID-19, David is unable to join a *minyan* (a quorum

levels of care and precaution, allow residents to gather three times a day to *daven* together. Because of this, the congregation can undertake to say kaddish for anyone who needs it.

"It was a need that had to be filled," says Rabbi Jonathan Fox, group rabbi of the Chevrah Kadisha. "At this time, people are rightly determined to be compassionate, and this is an expression of that."

When the shielding measures were put in place, Fox realised that the

anniversary of a person's death). Both needs are met by residents.

"Kaddish matters to people," says Fox. "Many are so careful to say it, and it's very special to them. For them to know that someone can recite it in a *minyan* when they're stuck at home is a huge relief.

"We offer the service throughout the year for those who find themselves unable to say kaddish for any reason or have no male relatives who can say it," he says. "Now that almost no one can get to shul, it's important and special."

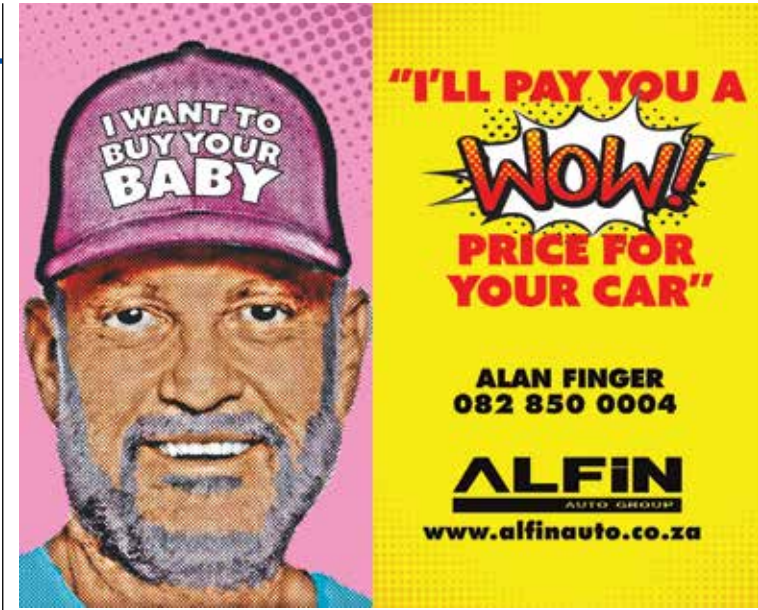
While kaddish requires the presence of a *minyan* to be recited, the actual recitation is being done by two particularly devoted congregants, Jeff Klein and Shabsy Mayers. These committed men share the responsibility, each day reviewing a list of names for whom they need to say kaddish.

"I do it because I want to," says the 84-year old Mayers. "It's a genuine privilege for me. It's an opportunity to perform a *mitzvah* in the spirit in which my late father brought me up.

Mayers, a former committee member of Emmarentia Shul, has always been a passionate Jew. When he first arrived at Sandringham Gardens, he asked to be shown the shul before being taken to his room.

"Shul and *mitzvot* are who I am," he says. "I grew up involved in the shul environment, and maintained my involvement as an adult, no matter what. My life is in the shul - the Torah and Gemarah are part of me. I've done these *mitzvahs* all my life, and I don't intend to stop now.

The commitment of people like Mayers and Klein has had a profound



Sandringham Gardens resident Shabsy Mayers says Kaddish for a list of people

of ten Jewish men) as he begins mourning for his late mother.

Paikin reached out for help, and she got it from a most unlikely place, Sandringham Gardens. As the only place that still has a legal *minyan* in the country, the elderly gents there have taken to saying kaddish on behalf of Jews locally and internationally.

For many, the most important *mitzvah* (good deed) they can perform for a loved one who has passed away is to say kaddish. However, it requires the presence of a *minyan* to be recited. The Chevrah Kadisha has made an effort to ensure that Sandringham Gardens shul is the only one in the community that continues to have regular *minyanim*.

Measures such as early shielding, regular screening, and the highest

home's isolation from the community enabled *minyanim* to continue not only three times a day, but on Shabbat as well.

"We recognised that many in our community would be unable to say kaddish, and saw a need for the service," he says. "We approached the chief rabbi about it, and he felt strongly that it was a *chesed* [kindness] that people really needed."

A notice about the service was put out last Friday, and the response was immediate. More than 250 people have already submitted requests for kaddish to be said on their behalf. While some of them are in the *shiva* (mourning) period (needing daily kaddish to be recited), others require only a recitation for a *yahrtzeit* (the

impact on the community.

"It was a huge relief to find out that the Sandringham Gardens *minyan* was offering a service to say kaddish," says Paikin. "To know that people are saying kaddish for us is such a blessing and relief. I'm grateful."

When Robbie Brozin heard that someone could say kaddish for his late father, Max, he started sobbing. "Kaddish connects me with my late dad, and gives me comfort," he says. "Knowing it's being done at a unique time when I can't say it by such special people brings me extra comfort and confidence."

Brozin says the way we behave towards each other in times like this will define our legacy for future generations, something this initiative has made clear.

"This is the most exceptional, comforting, and brilliant initiative for the time. The speed at which it was initiated and the brilliance of it gave me confidence in the leadership and management of the Chev. In every problem, there is a solution. You just need to look for it."

Hugh Bauer, the former chairperson of the Chev's Helping

Hands outreach initiative, observed that the roles have been reversed, with the community now reliant on the residents of Sandringham Gardens to say kaddish on their behalf.

"Too often we forget the role that our aged play," he says. "We forget we are standing on the shoulders of giants who built this community. This is a timely reminder of how grateful we should be to them for the role that they are playing, and the role they have played in the past."

"There is an irony in this reciprocal relationship between the community and our residents," says Saul Tomson, the chief executive of the Chev. "The community is staying at home to protect our elderly which allows our residents to *daven* for them in a *minyan* when they can't do it themselves."

"Hashem has turned the world upside down. Please G-d, he will reward our efforts and bless us to continue with this *minyan*."

• Names for kaddish recitation can be submitted at <https://bit.ly/33wnyTs>

SA Jews step up to the plate

>>>Continued from page 2

Gauteng. Anna Shevel has set up a National Civil Response Platform called www.onelovesa.com that matches care with need. Organisations in need can be mapped so that individuals can support them with volunteering or donations.

Organisations that assist animals will struggle under lockdown conditions. Yael Fialkov is a co-founder of African Tails, an organisation that saves street dogs. "African Tails hosted a pet-food drive on 25 March. This was distributed to the local communities we serve to help them to continue to care for their pets at this time."

The organisation has had to cancel its adoption and sterilisation drives. "We encourage all our supporters to reach out to the needy in their community and assist where possible, as the strain on the animal welfare sector in

general will be tremendous. Our plea is for our supporters to continue to donate goods, money, and share the animals in need of homes on social media," says Fialkov. "Please also spread the word that there is no evidence that the virus can be spread between domestic animals and humans."

Many other Jewish community members assisted with packing food parcels and delivering them to those in need, fundraising, organising volunteers, and co-ordinating efforts.

Jewish change-makers network, Mensch, is working closely with formal organisations and informal initiatives, and has created a list of them on its website. "Now that the shutdown is upon us, the best way to help vulnerable communities is by financially supporting the organisations already set up to serve them," says Mensch founder Gina Flash.

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REAL LIFE

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Rebellion and resolution as services shut down

TALI FEINBERG

When Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein last week called on South African Jews to *daven* (pray) at home on their own without a *minyan* (a prayer quorum of 10 men), and said shul services could no longer take place to safeguard the community from COVID-19, a handful of shuls stayed open.

Some saw this as a rebellion, but those concerned said that that wasn’t the case.

“We stayed open not in an act of defiance, but because we are a very small shul of ten people. It wasn’t a compulsory closing, but a recommendation,” one senior Johannesburg rabbi told the *SA Jewish Report*.

However, the chief rabbi said, “The decision taken to recommend closure of all our shuls was the most painful one I’ve even been involved in. It was done, as the halacha stipulates, on the medical advice of experts, in this case Professor [Barry] Schoub and Dr [Richard] Friedland.

“It was clear from my letter to the rabbis that the decision was made to save lives, which is the highest halachic value, which we are all committed to. It was clear to all shuls from my letter what they needed to do from a halachic point of view.”

Said the senior rabbi, “We felt that as a small shul, we could implement stringent [social distancing and hygiene] measures under the supervision of a doctor – even more stringent than what was recommended. However we have since decided to close.”

Another senior rabbi with a small shul gave a similar reason for continuing services. “We had services from Thursday 19 March [even though the chief rabbi made the recommendation to suspend services on Wednesday 18 March]. There was no decision, it was just a recommendation. The members of the shul decided to stay open, and I didn’t see

as lives are re-shaped in the reality of lockdown, community members are coming to terms with shul no longer being a defining feature of their daily reality. While people may still be *davening* (praying) at home, the loss of routine, a sense of community, and a space to mourn or celebrate is a major blow.

“The very moving announcement that all *minyanim* (prayer quorums) must cease in South Africa for the time being is heartbreaking,” wrote Adina Roth as she attempted to process the new reality. “My father is a daily *minyan*-goer, and I’m suddenly filled with deep sadness and empathy for our community – our men specifically – for whom the *minyan* is a source of so much community, *chavershaft* (camaraderie) and ritual.”

“Not being able to go to shul from one moment to the next has been really hard,” says Joshua Poyurs. “The routine of waking up and going in the morning and then returning in the afternoon is a way of framing and grounding your day. I also saw my dad at shul every day. In the morning before work, it allows you to think about your values and connect with people. It’s been really disruptive, but it gives you an appreciation for having a separate space set aside for *davening*.”

Says psychologist Ruth Ancer, “For many people, shul gives their lives a feeling of predictability, a sense of support, and a sense of belonging. The fact that they suddenly don’t have access to this may come as a huge shock. People may experience a big loss and gap in their lives, and a sense of disorientation. They need to find ways to tolerate that uncertainty, which will be difficult but important. Even though it’s a major shift and disruption, we need to remember that it’s temporary. People need to look at what’s missing, and try to compensate for it. We must still try find ways to connect spiritually and emotionally.”

Roth agrees that Judaism’s strength lies in the physical gathering of the community. “Our community witnesses all the life cycles in our lives, and holds joy and sorrow with us. Community is present at a *bris* (circumcision) and *simchat bat* (celebration of the birth of a girl), at Barmitzvahs and Batmitzvahs, at weddings, and G-d forbid, funerals, and during the *shiva* period. Without going through these rituals with community, we are stripped of something – in some ways the power of the ritual is undermined because we do it alone. I wonder whether we will need post COVID-19 Jewish rituals to celebrate *smachot* that happened at these times, and to cry with our friends and family who, G-d forbid, may have experienced loss.”

For Sarah Sassoon, “Our new *minyan* is our family. This is such a hard time. Whilst doing the right thing is important, it’s also important to grieve the very real challenge of

upside-down lives.”

“Going to shul for Shabbos is a routine we struggle to change – even for a Barmitzvah or event at another shul,” says Monica Wolfson.

Says Maurice Oskowitz, “The suspension of *minyanim* is a compromise made with courage. This fortitude reflects leadership’s certainty in uncertainty. It does trigger fear, but ultimately restores hope.”

Juan-Paul Burke who attends the Pretoria Hebrew Congregation said that his first Shabbos without shul services “inspired personal growth. I prefer to *daven* alone rather than joining virtually. For me it’s an opportunity to *daven* at my own pace and sing from my heart. *Davening* at home was a happy experience with my family.

“This is a time to strengthen family relationships, reconnect with my deepest self, and act from there. In groups, I find myself caught up in what others think and hide my true self. I hope my true self will be strengthened to not try to impress others. It’s a humbling time, as if Hashem is saying ‘get rid of arrogance’. I still attend the rabbi’s daily shiur, now on Zoom. This helps to give structure to my day as it’s just before mincha, so I *daven* straight after as usual. We are bringing the honour of Hashem into the home.”

Says Tammi Forman in Cape Town, “Our shul, Beit Midrash Morasha, had an amazing community *mincha* and Kabbalat Shabbat service on Zoom pre-Shabbat. Today, I enjoyed *shiurim* via the World Mizrahi Facebook page. I feel sad but grateful for the practicality. It would be senseless to meet physically in these times. Our shul community is in contact daily via various platforms including supporting those members who are alone or in need. I’m so grateful for it.”

Ancer advises us to take a proactive approach to filling the space in our lives without shul. This could range from sticking to a similar *davening* or learning routine as before, or reaching out to the more vulnerable in the community. Attending virtual services and *shiurim* with the same people at the same time as usual will help fill that gap.

“But we must acknowledge that this gap can’t be filled completely – and that’s okay. It’s about holding that space, and tolerating and managing that uncertainty. It’s important to remember that this is temporary, and the community is still there to support one another. While we may be physically separate, we are all in this together.”



a reason to stop them. Their argument was that if they were going to work, coming to shul was no less risky. The services continued on the basis of those who wanted them to continue.”

He said about 15 or 16 men came to shul. Women didn’t attend, allowing the men to spread out into the women’s section to allow social distancing. Most members didn’t attend. Those that did ensured that they abided by strict hygiene regulations. However on Monday, 23 March, this rabbi decided to suspend services.

In a letter to congregants that he shared with the *SA Jewish Report*, he wrote, “The rapid increase in the number of COVID-19 cases, particularly in Gauteng, gives cause for halachic reassessment. Such risks shouldn’t be taken for non-obligatory activities, and I’m therefore instructing all members [who aren’t already staying away] to *daven* all three daily *teffilos* [prayers] at home until further notice.”

A Johannesburg doctor told the *SA Jewish Report* he had assisted the shul he attends to implement medical protocols to ensure that congregants were safe if the shul stayed open. He said the decision to open or close a shul was the jurisdiction of rabbis, not doctors. But, in the event a shul remained open, doctors had to ensure that the environment was safe for all congregants.

He agreed to do this only because he was a member of the shul, and was there to oversee the safety protocol three times a day. He also worked closely with another medical expert.

“The decision taken to recommend closure of all our shuls was the most painful one I’ve even been involved in. It was done, as the halacha stipulates, on the medical advice of experts...”

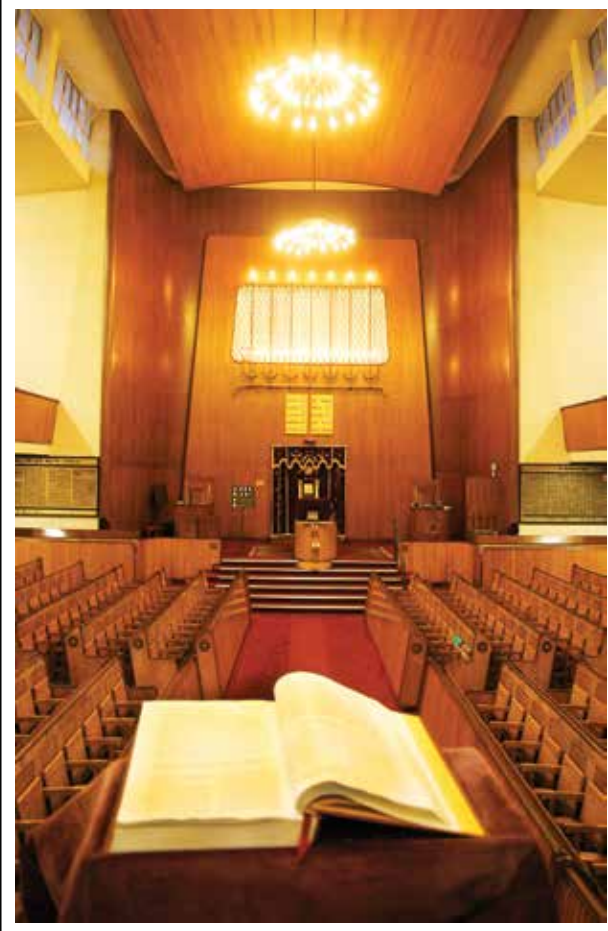
“Nowhere did I say the shul must stay open, but if it was to remain open, these measures were to ensure it was completely safe,” he said. Although he was approached by other shuls to assist in implementing similar measures, he refused to do so as he wouldn’t be on site to oversee them.

The issue was resolved on Monday, 23 March, when a letter by Goldstein expressed concern that services were continuing in shuls and homes. “The continuation of these shuls and *minyanim* is posing a direct risk to life. It is therefore a halachic imperative that all of these *minyanim* cease with immediate effect. We are calling on all rabbis and members of the community to abide by this instruction to close all *minyanim* to help ensure that we can keep our community safe,” the letter said.

An attached document by medical experts Dr Richard Friedland and Professor Barry Schoub said, “Unfortunately there are still some shuls which have remained open. These *minyanim*, no matter how they justify this with efforts at social distancing, are endangering the lives of people in our community and the population at large. ‘Private *minyanim*’ in houses are an even greater threat.”

Following these letters, the shuls that tried to go ahead with *minyanim* finally suspended services. Hours later, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that the nation would go into full lockdown.

• The *SA Jewish Report* (SAJR) knows the names of the shuls, senior rabbonim, and doctors involved, and isn’t yet naming them in the interests of unifying our community. However, after this crisis is over, this newspaper and the board of the SAJR believe that the community should hold them to account.



The passing of the ‘Sun King’

MIRAH LANGER

Legendary hotel magnate Solomon ‘Sol’ Kerzner was known around the world as a brilliant business visionary, but when he died, he was surrounded by what he considered his greatest accomplishment – his family.

The larger-than-life South African icon died on 21 March at his Leeukoppie homestead in Cape Town at the age of 84 following a battle with cancer. Family, friends, and associates spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* newspaper this week to pay tribute to Kerzner.

“Now, at the end, the blessing for Sol was that every one of his children and grandchildren was there with him,” said Theo Rutstein, Kerzner’s nephew and himself famed for the founding of Teljoy.

He says that growing up, while Kerzner’s family might have started out with little money, Kerzner’s father always declared himself a millionaire. “He would say to me, ‘I’m a multimillionaire.’ And he pointed to all his children and grandchildren, and said, ‘These are my millions.’ This was the sort of love that emanated from him, and Sol grew up with it.”

In 2018, when Kerzner was awarded the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards Lifetime Achievement Award, he paid tribute to his parents. “My father managed to get out of Poland. He came here and then took a few years to bring my mother and sisters out. I was born in South Africa. My parents worked seven days a week, and my elder sister took care of us. In spite of my folks working so hard, we were a close-knit family with good Jewish values.”

Rutstein said this solid family foundation stood Kerzner in good stead his whole life. “As demanding as he was on business people in that environment, so was he accepting from a family perspective. He didn’t try to rule anyone; he let them get on and live their life the way they wanted to.”

Entertainment business guru Hazel Feldman, a long-time associate of Kerzner’s, also recalls that while Kerzner could be tough in business, personally, he was deeply caring. Describing him as a “visionary” and a “game changer”, Feldman said that “for all of his brashness and profanity, if you could crack through in a personal sense, he was mush! He really was!”

She recalls how when working for him, he would have “no qualms about calling you in on a Saturday or Sunday or the middle of the night to do this or come in for a meeting. But one time, when he called me in on a Saturday, I had a sick child and I came in and said, ‘Sol, if we are going to be long then I’ve got to get back because my child isn’t well...’”

“So he looked at me and said, ‘What the f*** are you doing here then!’” she remembers wryly. He sent her straight home, and later checked in on how her child was doing.

Ian Douglas, who served as Kerzner’s right hand man for more than 20 years, recalled that when the occasion demanded it, Kerzner wasn’t afraid to cross over his roles as family patriarch and hotel dynamo.

He recalled how at the opening of the Beacon



Isle Hotel In Plettenberg Bay, “the workforce decided on opening night to also get involved in the party. They had a few drinks themselves, and they were pretty useless as a consequence.”

At the time, Kerzner’s children were with him, “so he had his whole family washing dishes, making sure the place was functioning exactly as it should”.

Kerzner was always the consummate professional, said Douglas. “He had this amazing ability to grasp the vision, yet grapple with the details.”

The moment that illustrates this best was the opening of Sun City, “where a few hours before the launch, Kerzner was out front with a big broom sweeping”, said Douglas.

He reiterated that while Kerzner was a “tough taskmaster” he was also “always very fair. If he shouted at you one day, it was over the next – and he always shouted at you for some reason”.

Melanie Millin-Moore, who worked in public relations for Kerzner, laughingly concedes that Kerzner was almost infuriatingly always right. “Even though there were rows and rages that at times were really hectic, number one: he was never wrong. He’d say to me, ‘Stop overthinking things. Sometimes simple is better’, and he was right.”

If Kerzner did get angry, she said, “you could challenge him, and if anything was wrong and you screwed up, you could go to him and tell him, but you would have to make sure that you had a solution”.

Millin-Moore spoke of Kerzner’s great sense of humour. “He would get a twinkle in his eye and this little boyish smile, and people would just be captivated by him.”

She recalls how when they were travelling overseas, planning for what would later become the One&Only Resorts, they met a prestigious branding professional in London. “This top guy comes and says, ‘So, I’ve got it all planned out, and I think One&Only is the best name’.”

“And Sol said, What nonsense is this! It’s too terrible. I’m not going to use that. You come up with other ideas.

“Well 50 ideas later, we were all fatigued, and somebody says, ‘Well I think maybe we could go with [a particular idea] now that we’ve gone through everything...’”

“And then Sol gets that twinkle and that smile, and says, ‘Guys, you know what, I’ve decided that One&Only is a great name!’”

She said as funny (and frustrating) as the experience was, it also revealed one of his core strengths, that behind every decision, no matter how seemingly spontaneous, was a precise and careful deliberation process.

Long-time friend, celebrity psychologist Dorianne Weil also noted the wonder of the razzle and dazzle of Kerzner’s life, and the depth beyond it. “The opening of the Beacon Isle, Sun City, and then the entertainment centre, The Palace, the Nedbank Golf Challenge, the Miss Worlds, the week on the Sea Goddess, the Monte Carlo party interspersed with those languid and sometimes raucous lunches at Leeukoppie...” she

recalled in a letter directed to Kerzner.

“Hi Frank! How’re you doing Elton? Loved you in *Cabaret* Liza! Fantastic night Shirley! Oh look – there’s Michael! Ivana and Joan please join us ... Yes, there were hot and cold running stars, edge-to-edge celebrities, and amidst the fireworks, caviar, champagne, and more and more jungle juice, there was us, your friends!”

Yet there were also “family times, meaningful times, shared, celebrated, and commiserated”.

Weil mentioned the death of Kerzner’s wife, Shirley, as well as his son, Butch, who died in a helicopter crash at the age of 42, as two particular tragedies with which Kerzner had to contend.

“You have demonstrated resilience and [the ability to] bounce back. You have taught us the true meaning of determination, focus and ‘never give up’ – not ever.”

Rutstein said that while Kerzner enjoyed the glamorous parts of his work, his real strength emerged in more difficult times. “It was absolutely clear that he would roll with the punches and ride with the waves. He stood up to absolutely every challenge resolutely. He never offloaded on anyone, but you would see him contemplative and thinking.

Both Weil and Rutstein said that Kerzner’s loyalty to his loved ones was his ultimate legacy. “Your generosity, not only materially, but of spirit has no bounds. Your actions define friendship with depth and loyalty,” said Weil.

Rutstein said that ultimately, it was “no wonder that Sol was a great hotelier. He dealt with the hotels in the same way as he dealt with his home. When you were a guest in his home, nothing was too much trouble; everything must be provided. He carried that same sense of generosity throughout.”



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Let’s work together, and stay at home

As we step into three weeks of national lockdown, I pray that we all take this seriously and stay home and away from each other.

We are entering a reality we have never experienced before in this lifetime – not in South Africa at least.

We have never been told to stay home and away from friends and extended family. We have never been told not to hug, kiss, or dance with one another. We have never been told we can’t make a minyan (prayer quorum) and pray together.

We have also never been as united a country as we are now, simply because this invisible enemy called COVID-19 is chasing after every single one of us. We are effectively at war with it.

By observing this lockdown fully, we have a chance to change the course of this extraordinarily contagious virus.

It seems that every day, I’m hearing about another person I know having contracted the virus. It’s mostly people I would never have expected to do so. But that’s just it. This isn’t a virus that’s aimed just at the elderly or any specific type of person, and the rest of us are immune. Neither is it a virus that’s going to stay away from us if we are blissfully happy at a wedding and dancing the horah. It won’t even avoid us if we are in the middle of praying in shul – even if we are the most observant and devout of people.

In fact, Israel’s health ministry revealed that 24% of coronavirus infections in Israel were contracted in shuls, according to the Jerusalem Post this week.

This virus isn’t keeping its distance from you or me if we ignore it, nor if we wish it away. It’s clear this message has infiltrated deeply into the community, not least of all because our communal leadership acted so fast. We were undoubtedly the first community to close schools, and the first to put our elderly and infirm under lockdown. We were ahead of the rest.

The leadership of the community, including the chief rabbi and South African Jewish Board of Deputies among others, did us proud in battening down the hatches very early on before the rest of the country woke up to the depth of this crisis.

However, not everyone is taking it quite so seriously, and that’s a major problem. As has been made clear around the world, this virus will dissipate only if we all – as a nation – stay home and away from each other.

If you ignore it or try and buck the system, you will defeat the purpose and scupper the massive effort being made around the country. By doing so, it will prevent us from eliminating or at least flattening the curve of the pace at which this coronavirus is spreading.

“I can’t survive without picking up my daily cappuccino.”

“How dare anyone tell me I can’t have Pesach with my extended family? I need to be with my folks. So, watch me!”

“I will be a part of a minyan – nobody can stop me.”

“I have planned my wedding for six months, don’t tell me I can’t go ahead.”

Yes, we have all heard this. For some, it’s simply bravado and they will – when the lockdown is implemented – take it seriously. For others, who can tell?

The point is, one person you might somehow pass the coronavirus onto might not make it or might become extraordinarily sick. And if one person in your defiant group gets sick, what happens to the bravado then?

How will any of us feel if we knowingly try and defy this coronavirus and fail, and because of our actions, someone dies?

It hasn’t happened yet, but it can.

In Italy, the virus has gone beserk, and people of all ages and backgrounds are falling ill. Could the country have caught it early and prevented more than 6 820 deaths (on Wednesday)? The medical fraternity believe it could have if it had only gone into complete lockdown early.

Our own president has done us proud. He has taken extraordinary measures to try and stem the spread of coronavirus. It’s early days, and we still stand the chance of achieving this – that is, if we all play ball, and do what we need to do.

One of the quotes I will always hold dear about the closing of shuls last week, which applies to the national lockdown as well, was made by Rabbi Yossy Goldman. He said, “We are in uncharted waters. There have been times when we haven’t been able to daven [pray] together because of anti-Semitism and hate, now it’s because of love.”

This, for me encapsulates all the reasons why we need to move into quarantine in our homes willingly, and not try to buck the system. We are doing it for the love of our families, our friends, our community, our country, and our world.

Whatever we choose to do will have implications for a long, long time.

So, yes, this period of time, which I hope won’t need to exceed 21 days, will be difficult as nobody wants their homes to become prisons. But it’s simply a matter of perspective. If you look at it as a time to spend with those closest to you, a time to rediscover what matters to you, or just simply quiet time, in some ways it’s a gift, a privilege we don’t usually get in the hustle bustle of our lives.

I wish you all strength in this difficult time, and know that we, as a newspaper, will be there for you.

When you go out to buy your food and groceries, you will be able to pick up the *SA Jewish Report*. If you aren’t sure which retail outlet will have it, please look at our website, sajr.co.za, in the top right-hand corner. On the website, you will also be able to download a digital copy, if you prefer it or can’t get to the right outlet.

Every Thursday, we email a newsletter that points to the wonderful stories you will find in the paper. On our website, there is a button (also on the top right hand side) you can press to add your email address so we can ensure you get this newsletter. We will be printing a special Pesach edition next week, so be sure to get it.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost Maunder
Editor



Israel to go on full lockdown



I write this hours before Israel goes into a full lockdown (on midnight, Wednesday 25 March). Still, it hasn’t been easy living under a partial one until now. Restaurants are closed, but you can walk or drive to one for takeaways. Soon that will stop, and only home deliveries will be possible. There’ll be no public transport, although the trains already ceased working days ago.

Yesterday I couldn’t take it anymore. Israeli apartments are small, and there’s only so much time one can spend at home. I went to buy groceries – the only legitimate excuse for leaving one’s abode.

I drove past the beach. Several families have moved into caravans, and were sitting drinking and enjoying themselves on the seafront. There was a small number of people running on the beach. Not for much longer.

From Wednesday night, that will be forbidden. We’ve been told the “ocean is banned” and beaches are to be cordoned off. Transgressors will be fined more than \$1 000 (R17 500) and/or six months in prison. We won’t be allowed more than 100 metres from our houses – just enough to take the dog for a walk.

“**Transgressors will be fined more than \$1 000 (R17 500) and/or six months in prison. We won’t be allowed more than 100 metres from our houses – just enough to take the dog for a walk.**”

I drove past the large Yarkon Park. Usually bustling, it was empty aside for a police van breaking up a group who had been sitting on the grass. You can’t venture out in more than a pair. There are pockets of people defying the orders, and police vehicles roam the streets.

I drove past outdoor playgrounds with police tape around them to stop children from entering. A few people were walking their dogs, and a young man was using a stop sign to balance against as he did press-ups. It was quiet. There are cars on the road, but nowhere as many as usual. I never thought I’d say this, but I miss Tel Aviv’s traffic jams.

I drove past my favourite book shop. Until now, street shops of all kinds, including fashion, toys, and furniture, have been allowed to be open as long as operators keep to the anti-crowding laws that mandate no more than four customers for every working till and a two-metre gap between each person. From tonight, they will be forced to close.

When I arrived at the supermarket, there was a long queue outside. A limited number of people can enter at any one time, and people were waiting patiently. I gave up and returned home. The government has promised that for now, food shops will remain open, so there’s no panic buying. Tomorrow is my birthday. I’m debating how to celebrate it – in the living room,

DATELINE: MIDDLE EAST

Paula Slier

balcony, or kitchen.

As of Wednesday morning, nearly 2 000 Israelis have tested positive for coronavirus with the vast majority of cases mild. To date, four patients have died, and 28 are in a serious condition. More than 75 000 Israelis are in home quarantine. The Israel Defense Forces says soldiers will assist the police. Already eight battalions – more than 2 000 – have been earmarked, with the potential for more.

Most worrying is the increasing unemployment figures. More and more businesses are collapsing under the tightening restrictions. There are now more than 600 000 newly unemployed people – about 19% of the population. That figure is expected to reach one million by Passover early next month. Most have been placed on unpaid leave.

According to the health ministry, almost a quarter of Israelis who contracted the coronavirus did so at synagogue. Until now, synagogues have been allowed to remain open although gatherings of more than 10 have been prohibited. Many religious leaders have asked congregants to pray at home, though some, especially in the ultra-Orthodox community, have continued to congregate in quorums of at least 10 men.

The Israeli Supreme Court has sanctioned a new app unveiled this week by the health ministry. It follows a person’s location and compares it with the information the ministry has regarding the location histories of confirmed coronavirus cases during the 14 days before their diagnosis. The idea is that if your path crossed with someone who has the virus, you’ll be notified and ordered into a two-week quarantine. Talking to Israelis, most support the app, but it does raise questions of privacy. The ministry has promised users that the information is secure and won’t be used for other purposes.

Like elsewhere, the most susceptible are the elderly and people with chronic health conditions. Already last week they were advised not to leave their houses at all. All nursing homes and assisted living facilities in the country are on lockdown, and a few volunteer initiatives have been set up. People are encouraged to phone old people who live alone to check on them daily. Also, volunteers have been transporting food to people in isolation. It’s not clear how much longer this will be allowed.

If there’s one thing that’s flourishing, it’s humour and online communication. My favourite at the moment is, “Today’s drink special. The Quarantini. It’s just a regular martini, but you drink it alone in your house.” If there’s one good thing to come from all of this, it’s that we’re in it together. I just hope I won’t lose my sense of humour in the process.

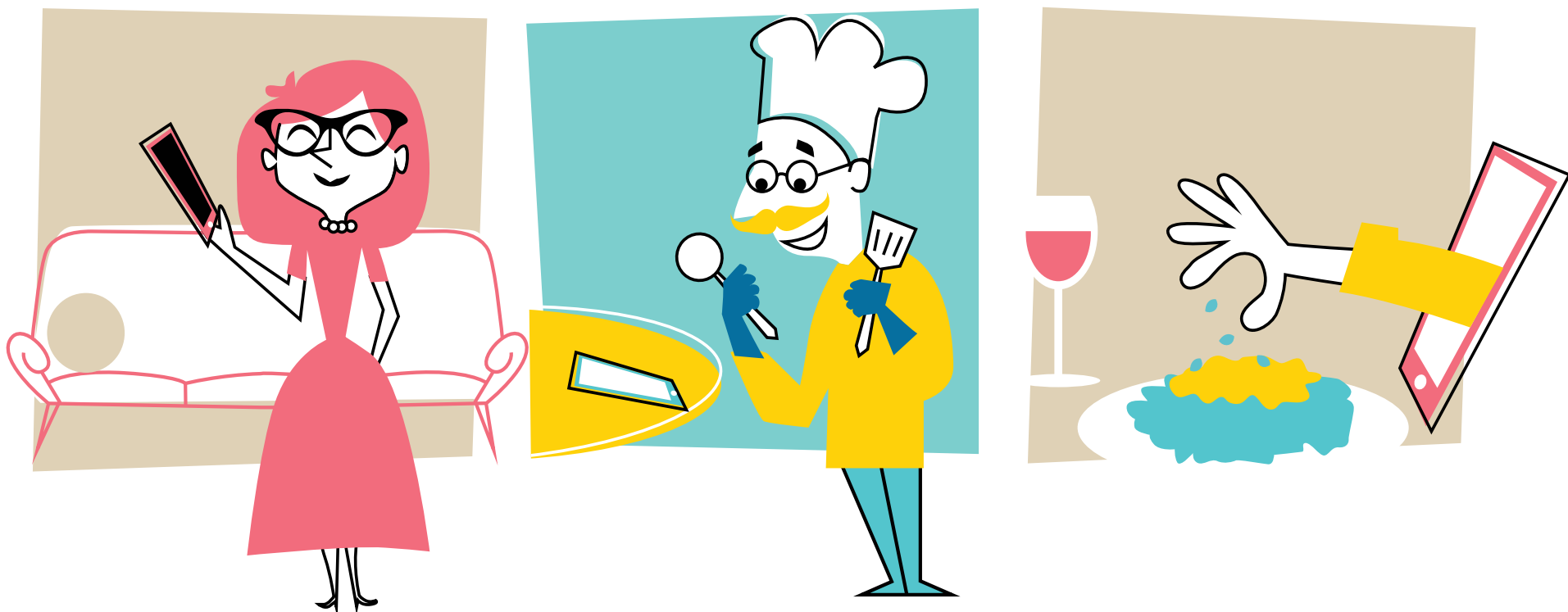




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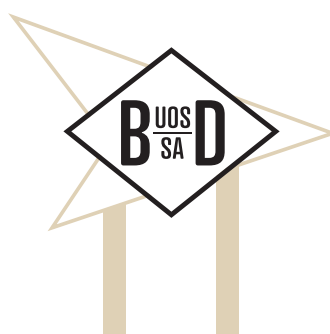
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The good news is that you can order delicious takeout from all your favourite kosher restaurants. Help support the restaurants who have served and catered for us by giving them and their employees the support they need to survive this. Keep an eye out for special deals and lunchtime specials.

Go to giveandtakeaway.org.za



Businesses in survival mode

TALI FEINBERG

In the face of worldwide lockdown, South African Jewish-owned small businesses have had to shut up shop. From the loss of dreams to the loss of income, it’s been a struggle, but many small business owners believe they will emerge stronger from the crisis.

“There is an unreality about it. We have been a busy little place, a home-from-home, the centre of something. Now, we are like a vacuum, an empty space with everything in place but without life,” says Simon Godley, the owner of kosher cafe Frangelicas.

Like many small-business owners, life for Godley changed forever from one moment to the next. “President Cyril Ramaphosa’s address on Sunday 15 March 2020 was the starting gun for the effect on our business. All functions and table bookings were cancelled, and sit-down customers gradually reduced to almost none. We are now totally reliant on take-away and retail-shelf sales – roughly a 70% reduction.

“There was a further reduction of sales on Monday [23 March], and we will have to close on Thursday for three weeks, which means we won’t have any sales at all. But we have also been busy putting plans in place to keep us ticking over, looking after our staff however we can, and considering our options – even if it means “mothballing” Frangelicas for a time. We do believe we’ll come out stronger,” he says.

There have also been positive aspects to this uncertain time. “Numerous customers are supporting us in different ways, which we are extremely appreciative about. The Beth Din kosher department is launching an exciting initiative in support of us, as well as waiving fees. Our takeaways have increased dramatically. Our staff have been great – and they have the most to lose.”

Where to from here? “We have to manage our way as best we can as things unfold. We are fortunate in having an excellent management team and staff. We have an optimistic approach that we’ll be okay, but of course, it’s the national picture that worries us,” says Godley. To other small business owners, he says, “I’m sure we’re all thinking along similar lines. It’s not a great situation, but the alternative is far worse. The community has already supported us so much, and we know that it will continue to do so, where and when it can.”

Indeed, Rabbi Dovi Goldstein of the Kosher Desk says, “Over the past week, the kosher department has been hard at work to find ways to help kosher restaurants in real terms. Therefore, we have approved a payment holiday for all SME [small and medium-sized] food services [excluding supermarkets] for the month of April. This will mean we won’t be charging any fees to kosher restaurants at the end of this month except for the direct *mashgiach* [kashrut supervisor] and label costs if required. We will be monitoring the situation closely, and evaluating the needs on a month-to-month basis. We have also been working with a marketing company to provide an online platform to advertise kosher

restaurants’ products, menus, and specials which we will promote to our community online.”

Cherie Milosevich, an independent travel agent in Cape Town, says, “It’s been a disaster. Overnight, basically, all bookings were cancelled. Everyone wants their money refunded ... [there is] lots of lost remuneration to agents and airlines. Independent travel consultants have been hit really badly – no work, no pay. It’s times like these when people who have used the internet [to book trips] that they need us agents. It’s better to be able to talk to a travel agent than call centres. I have tried to help whoever has needed help, even though they didn’t book the original ticket with me. Most of my clients have reassured me that they are definitely going to start travelling again. I can only be hopeful that this will happen in the not too distant future.”

Photographer Nikki van Diermen says, “Things escalated very quickly. I had a wedding booked in Italy in May. The bridal couple went from being cautiously optimistic that the wedding would proceed, and one week later, the wedding was postponed. About a week after that, all my local wedding

bookings were postponed. All weddings for the rest of the season have been postponed until next season, as have all my smaller scale lifestyle sessions for the next two months.

“It all seems surreal. I feel like the actual financial and emotional implications are yet to be felt properly. I’m managing the obstacles one day at a time. I encouraged all bookings to be postponed as opposed to cancelled, thereby ensuring that I have some sort of future cashflow to plan around,” she says. “At this stage, it’s all so unpredictable. I will be using my time in lockdown to build my skills as a photographer, but also to focus on how I can be a better wife, daughter, mother, and friend – and to count my blessings daily.”

For other small-business owners, the closing of essential institutions means the end of the road for their businesses. Kevin Koz, the owner of Nutty Scientists South Africa, says that the impact was immediate. “I’ll never forget that Sunday night [15 March] when the president

A usually bustling Sandringham Strip



said that schools must close.” His company is a leading provider of interactive programmes for children of all ages related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) learning, and it needs schools and events to operate.

“That night, in about three or four phone calls, all my work for the upcoming months was postponed or cancelled. Financially, I have forgone all bookings for March, April, and May. This includes contracts with the Rand Show for R180 000 and school workshops to the value of R150 000. Fortunately, my overheads are low as they are directly linked to events. I

pay staff only when they are required on a contract basis.”

For him, it has also been the loss of a dream. “It was my passion. I built it up for five years and more than 250 000 children have done our workshops and seen our shows. I always wake up in the morning excited about my work and hands-on science.”

He may revive the business in future, but for now is looking at other options. And in the face of it all, he still feels the lockdown is the right move. “As a community, we need to stick together by not sticking together,” he says.

Where there’s change, there’s opportunity for business

STEVEN GRUZD

“There is going to be a huge opportunity to innovate for many businesses” during the coronavirus outbreak, said Allon Raiz, the chief executive of Raizcorp, a small business incubator founded in 2000. “Remember, there is always demand in an economy, the demand will just change in nature Lots of gaps are going to be created for entrepreneurs to fill.”

In President Cyril Ramaphosa’s second address to the nation on Monday, he announced several initiatives to support small business. The global COVID-19 pandemic has already hit these South African companies hard, exacerbating pre-existing problems in a fragile, growthless, listless economy with unreliable electricity.

What can entrepreneurs do in these tough times, and how can they be assisted? The *SA Jewish Report* spoke to experts in the field for suggestions and solutions.

“The effect of COVID-19 has been catastrophic as there was little time to prepare,” said Helene Itzkin, the head of ORT Jet. “For those on the verge of losing a business, it can be traumatic. The most vulnerable industries are service industries – the entertainment, hospitality, and restaurant industries, educational institutions, beauty salons, and gyms.”

“COVID-19 is going to be devastating for many small businesses who were marginal to begin with,” said Raiz, “But some will thrive in this market ... some sectors will recover slowly, some rather quickly, and others won’t recover.”

Included in Ramaphosa’s announced initiatives, the department of small business development has made more than R500 million available immediately to assist small and medium enterprises in distress via a simplified application process. The tourism department has earmarked an additional R200 million to support SMEs (small and medium enterprises) in the tourism and hospitality sector under pressure from travel bans.

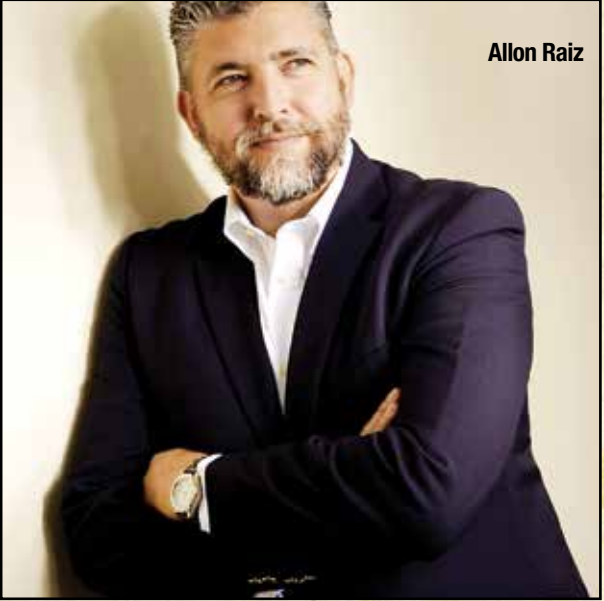
Some employees will receive wage payments through the Temporary Employee Relief Scheme to stave off retrenchments. The government may also have to dip into the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) to assist workers in SMEs faced with loss of income and whose companies cannot provide support. Tax-compliant businesses with a turnover of below R50 million will be allowed to delay 20% of their pay-as-you-earn liabilities over the next four months and some of their provisional corporate income tax payments without penalties or interest

over the next six months. Contributions to the Skills Development Fund and UIF may be temporarily suspended.

A debt relief fund to help all SMMEs (small, medium and micro enterprises) in South Africa will become operational, on the www.smimesa.gov.za portal, if firms can show an impact or potential impact of the coronavirus on their businesses.

Institutions such as the Small Business Initiative have called for government also to double social grants to stimulate the economy, postpone liquidations, and lower petrol prices.

The watchwords are flexibility, opportunism, and agility. Itzkin offered practical advice for small businesses. “Spend your time getting in the money owed to you. If possible, cut costs, not staff. It will be very costly to rehire and retrain. Negotiate rentals with your landlord until your business recovers. Use online platforms to look for new clients for when this is over. Take orders or offer ‘specials’ that you can pursue once everyone returns to work. Don’t disappear off your client’s radar. Nothing will be the same, but you may have uncovered a better, more efficient more profitable way of working in the



Allon Raiz

future.” Raiz proposes the following coping mechanisms: “Conserve cash. Change direction if you can – and you can. Keep positive and calm, and look for gaps in the market. Reach out for support. Read as much as you can about management through crisis. Don’t give increases until further notice. And don’t employ unless necessary.”

We must not cower, we must not step backwards, we must not bow. We, as entrepreneurs are used to handling existential moments in our businesses. As entrepreneurs, we have the ability to adapt much quicker than corporates. In this time many will fall, and many will rise. Make sure you are on the right side of that equation by being alert and action orientated.”

Pandemic a danger and an opportunity

OPINION

DORIANNE WEIL



Life happens. No-one is immune. Most of us have experienced unpredictable challenges or even crises. Sometimes the initial response may be, “It’s not fair, why do bad things happen to good people?” But here’s the truth, Life is fair, because it isn’t fair to everyone. The difference is that this time we’re all in it together! We’re living in an unprecedented time of uncertainty and disruption. The global pandemic of coronavirus doesn’t discriminate.

Nothing connects people more immediately and pervasively than a shared emotional event – good or bad. Remember the feeling in the country during the transition in 1994, or even most recently when South Africa won the World Cup? The sense of community generated by this challenge is palpable. It’s all people talk about, and understandably, it’s completely dominating the media. There is a minimisation of differences – which may have been seen as obstacles only a couple of weeks ago – to a collective sense of co-operation.”

This is manifested by many stepping up, wanting to assist, and displaying an appreciation and kindness that says, “We are all members of the human race.” The indignation, righteousness, and understandable anger that spills out towards those who are seen as uncooperative in playing their part in flattening the curve comes from the belief that at the moment, it’s all for one, and one for all, and if you don’t do your bit, you are disregarding all of us.

Paradoxically, there is the potential for another side of human nature to emerge, which hopefully can be contained by the correct response now. As we have learned from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, safety and survival are paramount. When resources, whether they be financial or medical, become really scarce, heart-warming co-operation

can quickly turn to aggressive competition and the sense of belonging gives way to “me, myself, and I”. Sometimes this leads to an almost xenophobic reaction – even politicisation and blame – as “my brother” morphs into “my rival” when there’s no food on the table.

One response to this global pandemic is the forced realisation that the future is now, today, and not tomorrow. “One day when” becomes more and more inappropriate when the rug is pulled out from under your feet. A new sense of urgency emerges that reminds us that this isn’t a rehearsal.

When the chips were down and many people could make just one phone call before they lost their lives in 9/11, the research highlights that they all said the same thing!

Self-isolation often generates self-audit. Instead of responding to external demands on the treadmill of life, we have a chance to listen to our own inner drumbeat and ask, “Where have I been? Where am I going? What’s important to me? How do I want to spend my energy from now on? Am I really feeling fulfilled in being a part of this rat race?”

Often, there is a wake-up call and priority shift which mostly involves valuing the relationships that may have been there, but were somewhat taken for granted.

When the chips were down and many people could make just one phone call before they lost their lives in 9/11, the research highlights that they all said the same thing! Clearly we don’t and shouldn’t

live our lives as if we are in a crisis, but we are reminded in monumentally tough times about what’s important.

During this time of self-reflection, people speak of the recognition of the power of support and connection. You aren’t meeting your business colleagues, friends, or family face to face, and you may miss this contact. The fact that you do, also serves to underscore the fact that we are wired for connection, and you may want to be more proactive than you have been in the past in reaching out. Appreciation of the “How are you doing?” call generates an awareness of the importance of behaving in the same way.

Contact and care is just as important as content concerning advice and information.

With the loss of control comes re-evaluation of the balance of self-responsibility and self-direction, with the harsh realisation that there are external influences way beyond our control. It’s pretty humbling! Much of our focus these days is on being in the drivers’ seat of our life, and strategically manipulating circumstances for our personal and business benefit.

As Jordan Belfort says, “Successful people are 100% convinced that they are masters of their own destiny, they’re not creatures of circumstance. They create circumstance. If the circumstances around them suck, they change them.” Well, if anything challenges that, the coronavirus pandemic does!

Let’s not forget, however, that we can direct our responses.

These range from denial of the real impact and seriousness of what we are facing to unbridled panic. In some ways, the range of responses is almost like a huge Rorschach test. Personality traits are enhanced. People who tend to be anxious will panic, people who are emotionally unexpressive will appear to be almost infuriatingly and unrealistically

calm and dismissive.

The expression of fear and anxiety is a normal reaction to the traumatic situation that we are living through. Emotional intelligence is the recognition of emotions, what triggered them and why, and then dealing with them intelligently. It’s a combination of head and heart, never privileging one over the other. Hence, considered factual information is extremely important as are, indeed, the odd touches of humour which serve not to diminish the seriousness, but give tiny breaks to lighten the load.

During social distancing and staying at home, it’s advisable to exercise some discipline in not obsessively looking at your screen or TV 24/7. Of course, information is paramount, but so is giving yourself some downtime and distraction.

Certainly, we are forced to learn patience, like it or not. But, together with an inability to accelerate the process comes renewed appreciation and gratitude. Simple things like the beauty of a flower previously unnoticed, hopefully the health of your family, the smile of your child, become blessed gifts, and once again may generate a new resolve to leave this challenging time just a little different.

What helps immeasurably in seeing us through is undoubtedly an optimistic world view. We aren’t talking about being unrealistic or overly optimistic, but having the belief and a knowledge that “this too shall pass”.

Of course, in these times, no-one will ever say, “Thank you, Lord, for this amazing learning opportunity”, but perhaps the Chinese were correct when they combined the symbols for danger and opportunity.

• Dorianne Weil or Dr D is a recognised practicing clinical psychologist dealing with individuals, couples, and families.

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Infection prevention ‘takes a whole community’

JORDAN MOSHE

“The COVID-19 pandemic we are going through now will probably go down in history as the most severe public health threat we have faced since the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918. This is a historic phase which is in many ways unprecedented.”

So said Professor Barry Schoub, emeritus professor in virology at the University of the Witwatersrand, and the former director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases. Schoub was one of five speakers to address the rapidly unfolding pandemic in a webinar hosted by the Union of Jewish Women on Tuesday.

From medical insight to economic analysis, the impact of coronavirus was assessed from a variety of angles. Speakers included infection control expert Phenelle Segal; the deputy chairperson of Sasfin Securities, David Shapiro; recovering COVID-19 patient Gary Sweidan; and tax practitioner Ernie Lai King.

Schoub offered a comprehensive timeline of the outbreak, beginning with its origins in Wuhan, China, in December last year, and tracing its development to the present.

“While we thought it would remain confined to China, the virus spread rapidly to South Korea, Iran, Italy, and then the rest of the world,” said Schoub. “Its expansion has been rapid.

“It all began in January, only three months ago. The first 100 000 cases took three months. The second 100 000 took 12 days, and the next batch a few days only. We’re all susceptible to it simply because we all need to breathe.”

Two approaches have been used to address the outbreak. The first is known as an “early approach”, and entails the identification and isolation of cases prior to a dramatic spread. Because this proved insufficient, the mitigation approach has been implemented worldwide involving mass community closures and lockdowns.

Schoub said that these techniques weren’t new. During the 1918 epidemic, the American cities of St Louis and Pittsburgh adopted different approaches with distinctive results.

“In St Louis they implemented social distancing and a form of lockdown,” said Schoub. “Consequently, the death rate was



358 per 100 000. In Pittsburgh, almost no measures were taken, causing an explosive spike of 807 per 100 000.”

Segal, an ex-South African living in America and the founder of Infection Control Consulting Services, stressed that the only way to prevent a dramatic infection spike was by staying at home. Moreover, the public must act in the interests of healthcare workers who are on the frontline of the disease.

“Stockpiling of personal protective equipment is detrimental to healthcare workers,” she said. “These are the people who save lives. Masks are controversial because if you misuse them, you can still contaminate your face. The same is true of gloves. We need you to know that the doctors fighting this [disease] need everything they can get.”

While under lockdown, Segal said it was essential to remain informed using only approved sources of

information. “Avoid the myths which tell you to use certain things to prevent or cure the disease,” she stressed. “A couple in America took medicine intended for animals, and it resulted in death. Listen to expert advice only. Myths will scare and harm you.”

“While at home, try your best to stay away from the TV and news as much as possible. You have to limit your anxiety. Use whatever methods you can to keep well. Your president has got ahead of the game, and maybe you can arrest the spread better than we have.”

Israeli doctors preparing for Italy, and hoping for Singapore

JORDAN MOSHE

People who have contracted the COVID-19 coronavirus should avoid certain anti-inflammatory medications as they have been shown to aggravate the disease in certain cases.

This is according to Israeli doctor Arnon Afek, the deputy director general at Sheba Medical Center, who was part of a historic webinar broadcast live from Tel Hashomer late last week.

“There are reports that non-steroidal anti-inflammatories like ibuprofen may be harmful. Paracetamol has become the first choice, so use it where possible,” Afek said, pointing out that it is under continuing evaluation, and those who need to take such medications may do so if necessary.

The web discussion, hosted by Sheba, had almost 500 participants tuning in to hear eminent Israeli doctors share their knowledge and insights.

“We want to offer hope without boundaries to anyone who wishes to understand the global battle against COVID-19,” said discussion moderator Yoav Har-Even, the president and chief executive of Rafael Advanced Defense Systems.

“Israel is leading the effort in three phases,” said Sheba Director General Professor Yitshak Kreiss, “containment, mitigation, and the building up of treatment capacity. Every planning model we’ve used has said the same thing: prepare for Italy, and hope for Singapore. We are making Israel ready for anything.”



enough as it doesn’t help mitigate the situation,” Kreiss said. “We had to come up with another level of care which was neither home nor hospital, moving mild patients into hotels which can offer a light degree of medical care.”

Sheba has also geared up to handle the influx of patients, implementing measures to ensure that those infected don’t enter the hospital. This includes the establishment of an internal medicine unit a mile away from the main building for treating mild cases, and the construction of an underground facility for those in need of critical care. A special unit for infected psychiatric patients has also been created, as has a new triage system which physically separates those needing standard medical assistance from those who require care for the virus.

“We insist on running the hospital as it was before,” said Kreiss. “Our biggest challenge is to continue to provide regular medical care in parallel to our battle with corona.

“Sheba is still carrying out procedures, transplants, and ambulance services, making sure they work as before. Many more patients will die from non-corona issues than corona itself if we don’t.”

Differentiation is key to the hospital’s strategy. Patients who require virus-specific treatment are directed to one of the facilities from the designated emergency room, and kept well away from other patients.

Said Kreiss, “I don’t know where we’re headed. I know that our role is to provide the best medical care we can. We learned from Italy and China that this corona pneumonia is one we can treat, that it’s not so different to diseases we treat every day at our wards.

“The outcome, however, is dependent on our capacity, preparedness, endurance, staff protection, and spirit. We are determined to be the hub that will help Israel cope with the challenge, and to emerge from the outbreak stronger. I’m not sure what the price will be, but we can’t ask that question. We are

preparing ourselves to make difficult decisions which may arise.”

Questions were fielded by Afek, Dr Galia Rahav, the head of the infectious disease unit and laboratories, and Dr Eldad Katorza, a senior physician in obstetrics and gynaecology.

According to Katorza, pregnant women are at no greater risk than other people, and should take standard precautions against the virus.

“As far as we know, the disease in pregnant women is no different to general population,” he said. “There is no evidence for outcomes like abortions or death, nor is there evidence of transmission of the virus in utero – not in the fluids, placenta, or foetus.”

Katorza said there was no reason to avoid delivery or breastfeeding.

Rahav insisted that treating the virus conservatively was the most effective way forward in the absence of any specific drug.

“Many centres are attempting to use HIV-type therapy,” she said. “I refuse to use it. The side effects are bad and include vomiting, increasing the risk of spreading the virus.” Others are experimenting with antibiotics and malaria treatments, and while they have reportedly yielded some results, their overall efficacy cannot be fully evaluated.

Rahav said that the use of antiretroviral treatment required extensive trials, but doubted their overall efficacy. “The most important thing is still to give fluids, follow up on the patient’s respiratory situation, and good nutrition.”

She is, however, optimistic about the discovery of a workable vaccine, and believes it will be ready within the next year (stressing that vaccines can typically take as long as eight years to be developed and rolled out).

The doctors feel confident in the measures being implemented in Israel and elsewhere.

“The health minister has taken the right steps,” said Rahav. “We have an increased number of cases, but this is mainly due to more tests being done.”

Afek said that Israel was open to sharing its medical knowledge and learning from other countries. “Such a threat should be turned into an opportunity. Innovation must be developed to address the situation,” he said.

“Our mission is to do whatever we can. We want to share knowledge and expertise, and use our innovation and brightest minds to do small things to change the pattern of the disease. We can stop it together even before we have a vaccine.”

Infection prevention takes a whole community, she stressed “You need to co-operate and be understanding. Remember that Anne Frank and those with her were stuck for two years in a confined space, but that it won’t happen to us. This will end, and we will all be fine.”

Shapiro said the economic slowdown caused by the virus wasn’t altogether tragic, having been foreseen and addressed in advance. In spite of the repercussions it will have on businesses, it will also yield positive outcomes.

“We’re probably closer to the end financially than we think we are,” he said. “Yes, sellers are exhausted, and buyers aren’t ready to buy just yet, but confidence is picking up and will be restored within a few weeks or even a few days. We just don’t know when.”

As soon as the public is confident that health authorities are in control, things will improve, Shapiro said.

“This is an imposed recession. Don’t get frightened when you see the stats and hear that America could go into recession. We were aware of this. Understand that the slowdown isn’t a normal market recession but one we implemented.”

When matters improve, Shapiro believes there will be massive investment in public healthcare.

“We’ve learned so much in terms of economy – working from home, using cloud technology and the like. When we emerge from this, we will probably experience a strengthening of data streaming infrastructure and a continued system of working from home.”

Moreover, food delivery services will also rise to greater prominence, as will online conferencing platforms like Zoom.

Shapiro concluded, “Positives and opportunities will emerge from this once we emerge. The banks are in a good position, and are invested in seeing us through.”

Professor Barry Schoub: calm amidst the chaos

NICOLA MILTZ

Two weeks ago, retired internationally renowned virologist Professor Barry Schoub was packed and ready to go on holiday – and then the phone rang.

“The community needs you. Now,” said Zev Krengel, the vice-president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, with an unmistakable sound of urgency in his voice.

“You cannot go away now prof,” said Krengel, explaining that life as we know it was about to change dramatically because of COVID-19 – the dreaded novel coronavirus – the spread of which this week plunged the country into a nationwide lockdown.

Heeding the call, Schoub cancelled his flights and car rental, and his phone has been ringing practically off the hook ever since.

In the blink of an eye, this man, described by experts in the field of virology and infectious diseases as a vaccine and virus guru, has become the community’s corona explainer in chief. He fields calls, WhatsApp messages, and emails around the clock from rabbis to restaurant owners, all seeking his knowledge and advice. He has done television interviews, webinars, and daily podcasts for the board’s “Facts Not Fear” information series in which he unpacks the truth and myths of COVID-19.

“I thought at my age I had done my duty for king and country,” said Schoub this week, “but I’m back.

“I never foresaw this happening,” said the emeritus professor in virology at the University of the Witwatersrand, and former founder and director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).

By this, he means a global pandemic the likes of which has not been seen since the Spanish flu in 1918.



Professor Barry Schoub

Schoub is acutely aware that at 74, he “falls in the risk category” of elderly and therefore vulnerable.

When we met last Friday (only days away from lockdown) he was calm and relaxed, smartly dressed in trousers and a long-sleeved shirt. There were no sign of scrubs, gloves, or masks for the eloquent and softly spoken father of three and grandfather of seven.

Schoub was born in Johannesburg in 1945, and lived in Saxonwold.

“I was an average, ordinary bloke at school,” he said. It’s hard to believe considering the numerous awards, accolades, and certificates achieved over the course of a highly successful career spanning 50 years in biomedical science.

He attended Parktown Boys High School, and his career in medicine was decided for him by his Russian-born father, a doctor himself, who encouraged all his children to become doctors.

So, when is it time to panic? I ask. His answer is simple, “Never”.

“One shouldn’t panic. Full stop. It’s not productive,” he insists.

Admittedly, he said, the immediate future looked “bleak” and “the scenario isn’t great”, but he praised the government and applauded President Cyril Ramaphosa for acting swiftly, facing the burgeoning health and economic crisis head-on.

As the numbers of those infected by the virus continues to climb steadily, Schoub is confident that because of the very strict control measures put in place, the country will hopefully avoid an “epidemic explosion”.

“There is no doubt it will be painful, but it’s pivotal in terms of being able to get on top of this virus,” he said.

“An explosive epidemic happens when you don’t have strict control measures like social distancing in place. It’s characterised by a sudden,

sharp, devastating, and very high level of infection, like what is being experienced in Italy.”

“We face a very serious public-health threat. We have a vulnerable population which has never seen this virus before,” he said, “But I think it’s unlikely there will be an explosive epidemic.”

Comforting words from a man with immaculate credentials, and who received the Order of Mapungubwe Award in Silver from the president in 2014. The award

was given for his achievement in virology and invaluable contribution to infectious diseases, science, and the people of South Africa and internationally.

Schoub is regarded as one of the thought leaders in the field of HIV and AIDS research. During his career, he served as an advisor for the World Health Organization’s programmes on polio, measles, influenza, and other viruses. He has also guided the careers of many young virology scientists. His work

includes more than 280 scientific publications, and 16 chapters in books.

A religious man, his passion for science and expertise in medicine culminated in the recent publication of his book, *Seeing G-d Through Science: Exploring the Science Narrative to Strengthen and Deepen Faith in the Creator*.

“Stay calm. This is going to be a long haul,” Schoub says. Perhaps when all this is behind us, he will finally get to go on holiday.

Havoc at the workplace as small businesses face closure

OPINION

MICHAEL BAGRAIM



Over the past week an unprecedented amount of small businesses have asked me how to retrench, close down, liquidate, even just lock the doors. There’s no need to panic, and there are systems in place which will help individual employers cope with the trauma that the economy is going through.

First, every business has to do a thorough exercise of what work has to be done, what work will come in over the next few weeks and months, and which staff are indispensable, if any.

Second, every business must look at its finances to ascertain how long it can survive with current expenses, and what has to be cut to in order to be able to keep the business solvent until the end of this epidemic.

The real issue is that no one knows how long this will last, but many experts are telling us that the curve will spring back within four months.

Our government – and the department of employment and labour in particular – has put together a package of assistance for small businesses.

Although this package doesn’t go far enough, at least it gives us something to work on. The labour department has indicated that the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF) is well resourced, and able to cope with the claims that are starting to stream in.

First, there is the ability to claim from the UIF for 14 days for self-quarantine. The condition is

that there must be a good reason to go on self-quarantine, and the employee can then apply for UIF benefits.

Most employers are assisting in ensuring that this is done correctly. In cases of quarantine for longer than 14 days, there is a requirement to show that the employee had been in contact with an infected person or had been travelling and had reasonable suspicion that he or she had been in contact with an infected person.

Although the UIF system hasn’t been tested yet, the fund’s commissioner has assured me that it has the regulations in place and the ability to meet claims.

Furthermore, distressed companies can apply for a reprieve from contributing to UIF. Over and above this, the UIF is in the process of accessing leave schemes to ensure that workers aren’t laid off.

All this will help if a company decides to close for a short period of time. However, if a company is expecting to close for more than two or three months and is also not expecting business to come on line until after this disaster, then it would have to explore longer solutions.

One of these is to approach staff, and undergo a proper retrenchment programme in which they would be able to claim UIF for a period of up to 12 months in terms of an agreed formula.

Many staff earning below the threshold (R17 100 per month) will be paid up to 45% of their salary for that 12-month period. Many loyal

staff members have agreed to either waive their severance payment or take a portion of it in exchange for a guarantee that they will receive the same job back on the same terms and conditions after a stated period of time.

I have successfully negotiated this arrangement with numerous employers and employees on the basis that everyone will receive the same position when the situation corrects itself.

Some employees have said – wisely – that if they aren’t back at work within three or four months (whatever the case may be), they would then have the right to claim their full severance package.

I understand that the department of employment and labour is discussing further relief for small companies who can show that they are under immense financial pressure.

Remember that the UIF has more than R60 billion in surplus, and there has been a call for specific support for small companies.

The secret to reaching agreement between employer and employee is open and honest discussion with full disclosure about the financial situation of the employer.

• 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.

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GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

“Eat your fruit and vegetables.” This isn’t just something parents say to their kids, it’s key to boosting our immunity. Healthy eating is more important than ever as we face this global pandemic.

“Good nutrition plays a very important part, not only in leading a healthy lifestyle, but also in boosting immunity,” says registered dietician, Melanie Sher.

“The body’s immune system aims to keep you healthy by fighting off harmful bacteria, viruses, parasites, and fungi. Combined with physical activity, getting adequate amounts of sleep, and practicing mindfulness, your diet can help you maintain a healthy weight, reduce the risk of chronic diseases, and maintain overall health.”

Shani Cohen, also a registered dietician, echoes this, but cautions that eating right, while effective, isn’t the first port of call in the battle against the coronavirus. “No specific food or supplement will prevent you from actually catching COVID-19,” she says. “Good hygiene practice still remains the best way of avoiding the infection.”

Yet, while there’s no evidence to say that any specific nutrient will supercharge your immune system, good and balanced nutrition is important. “Nutrients are involved with normal functioning of the immune system and maintaining a healthy, balanced diet will help especially in terms of micronutrients, vitamins and minerals,” says Cohen. “If you get the virus,

these can all help to decrease its severity and duration.”

If you have a strong immune system, your body will identify a virus, whether it be COVID-19 or any other, a lot sooner, meaning you’ll fight it more effectively,” says nutritionist Jake Axelrod. “Patients who are getting the most ill are those whose bodies are only identifying the virus in the lungs a week or two once it’s already in the body. By then, you’ll release too many white blood cells as an immune response, meaning you’ll probably deteriorate.”

Sher sheds light on the consequent importance of a balanced diet. “You should consume a diverse group of phytonutrients – the bioactive chemical compounds found in plants – to create a strong barrier against pathogens which may make you ill. These should be eaten as part of a balanced diet which contains lean proteins, complex carbohydrates, and good fats. Eating three balanced meals a day during lockdown is more important than ever.”

When it comes to getting the right amount and variety of phytonutrients, eating a diverse mix of fruit and vegetables is key, says Sher. “‘Eating the rainbow’ is an easy way to increase the number of phytonutrients to which you’re exposed, which will support your immune system. Each colour has its own set of health benefits, and the more colours you include, the bigger your variety of benefits. Aim to eat a minimum of five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, and try to have one to three

different colours on your plate at each meal.”

Cohen provides an example. “You can get oranges from your carrots, greens and reds from peppers and purples from your berries.”

Axelrod says that fruit and vegetables are important because they’re nutrient dense. Together with fruit and vegetables, wholegrains

Sher and Cohen reassure shoppers facing a limited availability of fresh fruit and vegetables because of panic buying. “If fresh groceries aren’t available, that doesn’t mean we can’t make use of frozen vegetables and fruit. They’re still packed with great nutrients,” says Sher.

Axelrod warns against going to extremes,



and whole proteins are also extremely bioavailable, meaning that your body will retain and absorb most of the nutrients they offer. “Then your body can build up a strong internal defence mechanism.”

as eating too many nutrients or fruit and vegetables can be toxic, causing the opposite effect than the one you’re seeking. “Overall, your immune system will respond well to just creating a general balance in your diet and overall health,” he says.

Sher agrees. “Aside from fruits and vegetables, a healthy, balanced diet includes lean proteins, complex carbohydrates and ‘good’ fats,” she says. “Avoid the intake of processed foods such as polony. While there may be fewer options available on the shelves right now, all you need to ensure that you have a balanced plate is a quarter plate lean protein, a quarter plate complex carbohydrates, half a plate of vegetables (one to three different colours per plate), and a small portion of ‘good’ fat per meal.”

Protein is vital at this time, says Cohen as it boosts energy levels and provides the muscle we need to fight infection effectively. “However, if you’re eating too many sugary foods, your energy levels will be down, you won’t want to exercise a lot, and bacteria love a sugary environment,” she cautions.

While the experts agree that a good quality daily multivitamin can be beneficial now especially in high-risk cases where it’s not medically contraindicated, they all advocate a “food first” approach. “If you consume a diet filled with enough protein, fibre, vitamins, and minerals, you shouldn’t need any other supplements,” says Cohen.

She also points to the importance of getting sufficient vitamin D. “A vitamin D deficiency is linked to an increased susceptibility to infection. Dairy helps here – milk, cheese, and yoghurt.” Filled with natural probiotics, yoghurt is especially important. “Your gut is the biggest immune system that we have in the body, so if we can help build good gut bacteria, it will help curb any infection that we might be susceptible to like the coronavirus.”

Fatty fish is a good source of vitamin D, says Cohen. “Not only does it provide good amounts of vitamin D and protein, it also has anti-inflammatory properties as a result of the omega-3s it offers. That will be in any salmon or grilled tuna. The omega-3 will take away any inflammation that there might be in the body.”

Turmeric is a good spice to add to your food arsenal as it has anti-inflammatory properties and is shown to be effective in the fight against infection and against other diseases including cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure.

Herbal teas which are rich in antioxidants are also advisable, says Axelrod. “The World Health Organization has also recommended drinking warm liquids because they neutralise the virus in the throat.”

How to keep fit behind the fence

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Where once your daily gym session or team training regimen was a given, social distancing and an impending lockdown have changed everything. But staying active at a time like this is vital for physical and mental well-being regardless of whether you’re a fitness fundi.

“It’s important to keep fit, active, and healthy, but especially at this trying time,” says local personal trainer Mandy Moss. Most importantly, being active helps to keep your immune system strong. “The best project you will ever work on will be yourself. That’s important to remember during tough times like these.”

Aside from following a healthy diet and getting enough sleep, being mobile and active during lockdown is vital, say experts. Innovation is key. “Exercise can be done very easily from home, we just need to get creative,” says Moss. “For example, if you don’t own dumbbells, doing weights with heavy water bottles is a good alternative.”

She also suggests using a chair as a workout tool, whether you’re doing step-ups, push-ups, jump squats, or tricep dips. For tricep dips, sit in a chair, hold the front of it, keeping hands against your hips behind you. Keep your feet flat on the floor hip distance apart. Push your hips and feet out, and bend your knees slightly. Slowly lower your body until your elbows form a 90 degree angle, and then rise again until your arms are straightened. Adjust the intensity of exercise to suit your fitness levels, suggests Moss.

Evan Hesselberg, a personal trainer in Norwood who offers home training, also suggests using what’s available to create exciting workouts. Getting off the couch and stretching before getting moving is essential, he says. Hesselberg includes boxing in his workouts. “Boxing is a form of cardio and conditioning, boosting heart rate, getting you fit, and conditioning your muscles,” he says. “If you don’t have a bag and gloves, you can hang up a pillow and punch it, or get someone to hold up a pad for you and box that.”

The most important thing with kids, Hesselberg says, is to keep things fun. “Don’t do the same things over and over, keep their minds and bodies busy.”

Kids can do anything from push-ups to sit-ups to running around the garden. Make obstacle courses using chairs, balls, and whatever you have around the house, he suggests.

There’s no limit to the number of exercises you can do from home, says personal trainer Natalie Rosen. Generally, one should train three to four times a week depending on fitness levels. “At this time, I’d suggest training for half an hour every single day. Exercise is vital, it helps to take the cobwebs out of your brain.” She warns of the dangers of staying sedentary, stressing that doing nothing becomes a vicious cycle. “The less you do, the less you want to do.”

“Getting those endorphins going gives you an overall feeling of well-being,” she says. “Get out into the fresh air [within prescribed lockdown limits] and walk or run – whatever your fitness level allows. Just standing outside for ten minutes also provides a much-needed dose of vitamin D.” Pull, push, and body weight exercises are easy to do at home, says Rosen. Squats, lunges, sit-ups, skipping, and running on the spot are all effective.

Experts recommend developing a high-intensity interval training

programme. “This includes a bit of cardio which is great for keeping up fitness levels, especially if you were previously doing a contact sport,” says Moss. “It’s great for beginners as well as you could do a less intense workout with the same principles. This workout is the best for lean toning of muscles, and most importantly, it can all be done at home.”

For beginners, Moss suggests the following high-intensity workout made up of a circuit of four exercises that can be repeated three times:

1. Jumping jacks for 30 seconds;
2. Ten incline push-ups (hands on a chair);
3. Sitting squat against the wall for 30 seconds; and
4. Ab bicycles – lying on the floor and moving your legs in the air like you’re riding a bicycle for 30 seconds.

Rosen also suggests a simple high-intensity exercise, one that can be adjusted for any fitness level. “Choose four or five exercises to do, targeting different areas of your body,” she says. “Then do that as a circuit and repeat it three to four times. For example, do 15 squats, then 15 lunges, 15 squat jumps, 15 sit-ups, and 15 push-ups. Repeat that circuit three to four times with small breaks between each circuit.” Depending on your strength and fitness, you can reduce the lengths of breaks in between each exercise and in between each circuit. Getting your heart rate up to between 130 and 150 beats per minute for half an hour is the goal.”

Yoga is also a great fitness practice to adopt at home especially in a lockdown situation. Candice Garrun Davies, who is offering a free virtual studio during lockdown, explains the benefits. “Yoga is more than just a physical practice, it’s a practice that stills the mind,” she says. “It allows you to focus on the connection between mind and body, and still feel the benefits of the things that come with a physical workout like strengthening and toning. We store everything in our tissues, cells, organs, everything that we’re going through emotionally, and we need an outlet. Physically, you’ll release that through the endorphins that are activated by moving your body. At the same time, you’ll feel the benefits of stilling your mind which helps release anxiety and difficult emotions.”



The abc of getting your kids out of their pjs

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Forget raising doctors and lawyers, under lockdown, parents are simply scrambling to ensure their kids don't become permanent couch potatoes. But by prioritising emotional support and creating the right balance between structure and flexibility, they can guide their children through this crisis.

Nursery school teacher Michelle Vinokur stresses the importance of routine, especially for younger children. She suggests treating weekdays as school days with the same wake up and bedtime routines and mealtimes. It's important that they don't stay in pyjamas, she says.

See what resources you have at home to build a base. "Go through their games and categorise them according to which ones will build up number, language, and sense skills, and which games will simply be fun activities." Allow your child to choose from the number pile, for example, and then play for 30 minutes. Then do an art activity. Include snack time, and teach your kids that food gives us energy.

Integrating outside play into the morning and afternoon is vital, she says. "Outside time can involve a variety of activities. If kids have siblings, they can do running races, hopping, jumping, skipping, galloping, dribbling a ball, playing with hula hoops, jumping on a trampoline, and so on. Create obstacle courses

around your house if outside play isn't possible."

After lunch, let them chill and have screen time on the TV or iPad, suggests Vinokur. "Parents also need time out, so two hours of screen time is realistic. Let them know that there's no more after that. For at least one of the hours, choose something educational for children to watch. The iPad also has many educational apps." TV won't become a problem, she says, if you build it into their day for a set period that's clearly explained to them. "Children don't enjoy using TV and technology constantly, it's only because their parents don't give them the opportunity to do something else. Make sure you provide that opportunity." Outside play after TV is advisable.

Afternoon activities could include science experiments, baking, or construction. Puzzles are important as is integrating sensory play. Let them get their hands dirty with mud, shaving cream, or finger paint. Exposing them to that kind of fun is important as they gain important skills, she says. "Try not to restrict them too much." Later, during downtime, read a book and

play listening games to develop their auditory skills. "You can play 'I spy', memory games, or simply make up stories. Make time for them to use their imagination."

Similar principles apply to primary school children, says Vinokur. Encourage them to start homework in the morning and finish in the afternoon if they need to. "If they don't get that morning slot, the day will drag, and they'll land up

resenting homework," she says. Outside time and fun activities are also important for older kids.

That means we need to stay calm, and not put too much pressure on ourselves either. Goldblum endorses child-led education within a daily framework. "While you do need routine and regular mealtimes, leave the kids alone until they need you to intervene," she says. "If they're very happy doing what they're doing, let them be. If you're unhappy with what your child is doing, intervene and provide an alternative. Think of the letter "b" and you'll have most of what your children need - a book, a ball, blocks, a bike, and building. Then add an "a" and "c" for arts and crafts." Exercise and nutrition is also vital.

"When we get through this, we don't want our children to get to a point where we entertain them every single minute of the day," she says. "They need to draw on their own creativity. It doesn't matter if your child isn't cutting on the line or colouring in properly, they'll catch up. What matters is that we got through the day, had fun, got dirty, and that we're healthy and safe."

Involve older kids and teens in co-creating their own schedules, advises a group of local ed-tech specialists. "Use orange posts for required learning [maths, reading, science] and yellow posts for fun like TV and iPad. The parent picks two,

and the kid picks two. Exercise, some mindfulness, art, drama, and music can all get time slots too.

This team also suggests forming a designated learning space. "Organise learning materials and designate a common area for learning. Ideally, the space has a strong wireless connection, can be blocked from noise at times, and is located where family members can participate in your child's learning."

Look for online courses that interest older kids. "Sites such as www.khanacademy.org/ offer a variety of short courses that can appeal to students' interests and help them develop skills." Ed-tech specialist Michelle Lisssoos and her team also suggest using gaming as an opportunity to teach coding. "Apps such as Swift Playgrounds, Tynker, and Hopscotch teach children to code using a game-like platform."

Scheduling virtual playdates or get togethers for younger and older kids can assist them in maintaining a human connection.

Self-regulation is important, says Jorgensen. "Find positive ways for children and teenagers to regulate their emotions, and express how they're feeling." Ultimately, no one expects you to be perfect. "The most important things parents can do right now is to be flexible, have an open mind as to how your child might be feeling, and implement stress-management techniques for the whole family."



Photo: Ian Ossendryver



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Salt, fat, acid – and Pesach heat

LAUREN BOOLKIN

While cooking at Chez Panisse at the start of her career, author and chef Samin Nosrat noticed that amid the chaos of the kitchen, there were four key principles that her fellow chefs would always fall back on to make their food better: salt, fat, acid, heat. By mastering these four variables, Nosrat found the confidence to trust her instincts in the kitchen and cook delicious meals with any ingredients. That, for me, is the essence of Pesach cooking. Follow these four principles (read fatty flap rather than flat-iron) and you will leave the table happy and satisfied even without the bread. Over Pesach, I try to stay away from preservative laden bottled sauces. Fresh herbs are easily available, and they lend an incredible depth of flavour to your food.

KNEIDEL SHOOTERS

Or soup and kneidlach if you haven’t lost the plot like me

Chicken soup

Ingredients

- 4 pieces of top rib
- 1 small chicken
- 1 packet of soup greens
- 1 onion
- 1 packet ready chopped pumpkin (about 400g)

Method

- Wash the chicken well. Put it into a large pot, and cover with cold water. Bring it to the boil, and then throw off the water. This will yield a scum free soup. Return them to the pot with your washed and peeled soup greens, pumpkin, and peeled onion. Cover with cold water. Bring to the boil, and then reduce heat and let your stock simmer for five hours. Top up with boiling water to keep the level constant.
- After five hours, strain your stock. Discard the chicken and vegetables. I also refrigerate my stock overnight. A layer of fat will form on top. I discard it before freezing.
- The stock will be strong so you can divide it in two, and freeze.
- When you are ready to serve it, defrost your stock. Add three or four Massel’s chicken cubes (or Telma for Pesach) and salt to taste.

If your soup is bland, add extra cubes and salt.

Kneidlach

These kneidlach come from a dear friend, and I guarantee you they won’t flop as long as you do not open the lid during the 25-minute cooking time. Yields 25 mini kneidlach or 14 whoppers.

Ingredients

- 4 eggs
- 4 level Tbsp schmaltz
- 4 Tbsp water at room temperature
- Salt and pepper
- 2 pinches cinnamon
- 14 rounded Tbsp matzo meal

Method

Beat eggs. Add schmaltz and water. Add matzo meal, cinnamon, salt, and pepper. Wet your hands and roll the mixture into walnut size balls (or golf balls if you want bigger). Place into your fast boiling soup. Put on the lid, and switch your stove to low (three quarters). Boil gently for 25 minutes without opening to look. Serve in a shooter spoon or in your steaming bowl of soup.



Kneidel Shooters

FENNEL SALAD

Ingredients

- 8 baby fennel bulbs
- 2 packets of rocket
- 1 packet asparagus
- 1 cup sugared nuts (or toasted pistachios)
- Avocado
- 2 pears
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- ¼ cup brown sugar

Ingredients for dressing

- ½ cup light olive oil
- 2½ tbsp red wine vinegar
- 2 tsp Dijon mustard (there is a kosher for Pesach mustard, the use of which is varied as it may contain *kitniot* (grains and seeds). Omit if you need to.
- 1 clove garlic
- 1 tsp salt
- Black pepper
- Juice from the caramelised pears and the leftover brown sugar and lemon (about ⅓ cup of each)



Fennel Salad

Method

- Preheat the oven to 200 degrees centigrade. Peel and core the pears, and cut them lengthwise.
- Dip all slices of the pears in lemon juice, and then brown sugar.
- Arrange in a single layer on the baking sheet lined with baking paper, and

roast until they begin to caramelize. Turn them over to caramelize the other side.

- Coat asparagus with a small amount of olive oil and roast in the oven until slightly charred. Leave to cool.
- Cut the fennel bulbs into thin longitudinal slices. Soak in ice water for about 30 minutes. Drain and dry. Arrange the rocket in your bowl. Top with the fennel slices and nuts. Just before serving, cut the avocado into wedges, add your caramelised pears, and dress.

HERBY FLAP WITH BEETY LATKES

You can use a whole piece of flat-iron steak with the sinew removed. Sear it, and place it on indirect heat. Not directly on the hot tray. Rather go for the flap if you can, as it will remain juicier.

Flap

One flap feeds 10 people thinly sliced. Double the marinade for more.

Marinade

- 1 cup sunflower oil
- ½ cup lemon juice
- 2 cloves garlic crushed
- 3 Tbsp parsley finely chopped
- ½ cup spring onions chopped
- Heaped tsp salt (you may need more)
- Black pepper

Method

- Blend all the marinade ingredients together in a food processor or with a whisk. Taste for seasoning, as you may need more salt or lemon juice. Marinade the meat for 24 to 48 hours rubbing the marinade into the meat twice daily. Preheat your oven to 200 degrees centigrade, and cook the meat uncovered for 20 minutes a

side. Wrap in tinfoil and for Shabbat purposes, keep warm on the hot tray using indirect heat. For example, put it on top of the tzimmes bowl. Slice thinly, and serve surrounded by the beety latkes.

- You can also cook the flap on a braai for 40 minutes turning every 10 minutes.

Latkes

Ingredients

- 500g potatoes peeled and grated with the water squeezed out in a strainer
- 1 egg
- 1 onion peeled and chopped
- ⅓ cup matzo meal

- Salt and pepper
- 500g sweet potato peeled and grated with the water squeezed out in a strainer
- 1 egg
- 1 onion peeled and chopped
- ⅓ cup matzo meal
- Salt and pepper

Method

- Heat a little sunflower oil in a non-stick pan, and fry the latkes in colour batches until crisp and golden. These can be made in the morning, and left uncovered on paper towel and reheated.



Latkes

Kosher food for students trapped at OR Tambo

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies on 23 March arranged for lunch and dinner to be delivered to 13 Australian MTA (a one-year Bnei Akiva programme in Israel) students who spent 14 hours in the transit section of OR Tambo International Airport. They were waiting to catch a flight back home. Their only way home was via South Africa, having caught the last flight out of Israel. They and their parents were so grateful as there was no kosher food in the terminal, and the students weren’t allowed to leave the airport due to COVID-19 regulations.



Australian MTA students at OR Tambo International Airport

ORT alive and well at 140

ORT Johannesburg celebrated the organisation’s 140th birthday on International ORT Day, 18 March 2020, with a huge birthday cake and much cheer in spite of the current health crisis.

International ORT Day is celebrated by ORT and schools across the world, although this year, it was significantly smaller than originally anticipated as many countries, schools, and institutions are closed and have moved to remote learning and working.

Since its founding in St Petersburg, Russia in 1880, ORT, an education network driven by Jewish values, has expanded across the globe, and is now in North, Central, and South America, Europe, the former Soviet Union, Africa, Israel, and Asia, reaching 300 000 people in more than 40 countries.

“Our birthday party has been put on hold until things settle, and we are back to normal,” says Ariellah Rosenberg, the chief executive of ORT SA. “The ORT Jet division will continue training via online platforms and the public will be kept informed of progress.”

“On this ORT Day in 2020, in a much different but still shambolic world 140 years later, ORT in South Africa and the South African Jewish Board of Education (SAJBE) would like to express its sense of unity with our

sisters and brothers in the ORT family across the globe,” said Rabbi Kacev, the general director of the SAJBE (affiliated to World ORT) and Rosenberg in a message of support to the ORT network.



“We read with empathy of the ORT schools worldwide which are shut down, countries closing down while fighting an invisible enemy, yet we have the sense of being closer than ever during this worldwide pandemic. We would like to send you our thoughts and prayers during these times of difficulty.”



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The Power to Surprise

When did school become parents’ responsibility?

Last Friday marked a week that my daughter, Abby, who is 15, wasn’t at school. COVID-19 has closed her high school, which means that she is ours for the foreseeable future.

Last Friday also marked a week of struggling to get her set up so that no precious time would be wasted and she could become a professor of something or other before August this year.

Aided by more technology than has been used to land a man on the moon (I fact checked that), it took a frustrating three days before Abby was finally ready to drink from the well of education that we would now be dipping into (along with the school).

Enthusiastic teachers ensured that time didn’t pass wastefully, and that Abby’s youth wasn’t to be wasted on her young mind.

And just like that, “Zoom” became a new household word, along with “social distancing” and knowledge of the ingredients found in hand sanitiser with more than a 60% alcohol base.

Advice was plentiful. “Make sure there is routine. Make sure that there is time for breaks. Make sure that the day is as normal as it always is.” Seriously! School has been cancelled because a crafty Wuhan-produced virus is stalking us all with the evil intention of collapsing our lungs, but we must make sure that for Abby, it’s business as usual?

Does that mean on Friday, we should dress her in her school blazer, face shiny and hair tied up, sitting in assembly (to be held on the patio)?

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



Is Friday to see her receive an award for being the top of her one-person class? Should my 18-year-old son be the inspirational guest speaker? He can recount the story of the day when he beat my other son at FIFA2018 on PlayStation. All this when we consider having her out of bed and dressed by 09:00 a spectacular achievement and testimony to our parenting.

We are living in the strangest of times. Our stress levels are cosmic, and our worry is real. Our children aren’t shielded from it. It has had as much of an impact on their lives – or maybe even more – than it has had on ours.

Of course, routine and education are important, and of course, we are blessed to be surrounded by caring educators who take their responsibility very seriously.

But, as parents, we also need to see this period for what it is. It’s a time in our children’s lives that they will never forget. It will shape them, and it will change them. It will determine how they respond to adversity and to challenge. I believe that as important as the Russian Revolution is, helping them to process what is going on around them is of infinitely greater importance.

That said, I have a feeling that Abby is going to win the history prize this week.

Scourge of the open plan

Architecturally and sociologically, the “open plan” was a “wow” moment in 1980s design. The idea was that creativity would flourish without walls or doors to contain the energy of workers in offices. Office workers could see each other at work; and their space wasn’t private as it had been in previous eras. Even among management, board meetings were held behind glass walls rather than in private so workers could see their directors talking to each other. Similarly, domestically, kitchens spilled into the rest of the living spaces with a mere counter separating them.

But rather than a stimulus for creative energy, the open plan ended up being seen as a place where leadership and hierarchy was lost and creative energy was dissipated in interruptions between colleagues. The balance was completely compromised in this design fashion, in which everyone or every space was seen as somehow equal, and the personalities of different workers were erased.

There is a strange analogy between this, political discourse, and the coronavirus pandemic. The globalisation world movement, advocated passionately by its adherents in the middle of the twentieth century, feeds into our understanding of relationships and spaces in the world. Open-plan thinking, taken to extremes, argues for erasure of borders in the belief that all good things will flow from this.

The momentum of the movement gathered steam in the late 1980s. The Berlin Wall was breached, the Soviet Union collapsed, and barriers between East and West broke down.

The creation of the European Union heralded a new globalisation mentality which expanded across the continent, taking in more countries.

This matched perfectly with another, simultaneous revolution, which took the world by storm: communication technology. In the first decade of this century, the internet reached almost every corner of the world.

TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



What will the outcome be of the coronavirus pandemic for South Africa? Although this country has joined the globalisation club, we are still at the bottom of Africa. Will the pandemic have a positive effect in strengthening our sense of who we are, helping us to embrace that identity and be creative with it?

Many South Africans, particularly white people, have long seen themselves as part of the European and global cultural community. But they also



developed their own strong identity in the face of the isolation of South Africa from the world community of nations.

In the 1990s, apartheid ended and South Africa was welcomed into the community of nations. Like a breath of fresh air, the doors opened. Wealthier South Africans joined the elite club of global citizens. In the past decade, the global village became the global mega-city.

Then came the rise of the big ethno-nationalists: Trump in the United States, Johnson in the United Kingdom, and even Netanyahu in Israel, to mention a few, and the rejection of the global-citizen ideal. Walls that were torn down are being built again, metaphorically and physically.

In the war between open and closed borders, in the wake of our current lockdown, where will South Africa stand?

Prelims and pandemics



SCHOOL SAVVY

Dani Sack

Unsurprisingly, the parents of teenagers everywhere have shifted their concern to a different type of corona – the virus. We’ve officially been put on lockdown, and I’ll be honest, social isolation isn’t necessarily difficult for me.

As an introvert who loves my bed and Netflix, it almost feels like a strange, very sudden holiday. While the chocolate stash in my room is fast dwindling, my screen time is increasing by the day.

Even my mother, upon seeing me spending some quality time with my sister, expressed concern at my sudden, unusual need for human interaction. Never mind that we were both on our phones, we were together, and that’s what counts.

However, in the midst of all these unexpected occurrences, we had mini-prelims scheduled. In the exam hall for the few that we sat, sanitisers and tissues were a feature alongside our papers. I’m pretty sure the scent of sanitiser will linger in my nostrils and that exam hall for years to come.

And then, the rest of mini-prelims were cancelled due to the lockdown, and now we are preparing to do actual schoolwork over everyone’s new favourite app, Zoom. My school is trying to maintain a sense of normality – for which we’re all grateful – but you can’t escape corona.

During those exams (mini-prelims),

we’d write, then see friends for very brief interactions before being swept back home for more work and endless procrastination. Now, Zoom. This sour attempt at normality only highlights the effects of the virus: not having the solace of social interaction during this intense matric year is difficult.

Seeing my friends and extended family on weekends is what often got me through the week, and now that has been snatched so suddenly from us overloaded matriculants, we are all feeling it.

A group video call just doesn’t match the feeling of real-life social interaction. I’d never have thought I’d be saying that, considering I’m a huge homebody who far prefers my warm blankets to going on the *jol*. But it just feels like there’s something missing.

As matrices, we have countless questions – mainly regarding the matric dance and 18th birthday parties – but also about our schooling. I’m not doing this whole high school thing again, and I’m sure all my fellow matrices share that sentiment.

We want to know if that fateful lockdown day was our final day of school, if we’ll participate in our final sports matches or theatre productions. We’re confused about final exams, about university applications, and gap years.

So, this is an appeal to those younger and older than myself – stay home. Stay safe. Stay aware. If not for yourself, for your grandparents. And if not for them, for matric 2020. It’s in your (hopefully washed and sanitised) hands.

• Dani Sack is a Grade 12 pupil at Yeshiva College

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Information to help you weather the crisis

We applaud President Cyril Ramaphosa for his decisive action on Monday night in announcing a three-week lockdown to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. The steps outlined in his address are of critical importance to giving our country a realistic prospect of dealing with the extremely serious situation that we, along with the rest of the world, find ourselves in. As a community, we need to be disciplined and responsible at all times in abiding by these measures so that they achieve the required outcomes.

For detailed advice and information on COVID-19 including directives for the lockdown, I urge everyone to make full use of the COVID-19 Jewish Community Platform that we have set up, and which can be accessed either on Facebook or by consulting the menu on our website (www.sajbd.org).

This platform has been a valuable resource in helping our community weather the crisis, and indeed, it’s increasingly being used by other communities as well. It provides regular updates and communal guidelines on a wide range of issues and a hotline, “Ask the Prof”, an interactive forum for people to put their questions to Professor Barry Schoub and receive expert information and guidance. Regular podcasts by Schoub continue to be uploaded.

Following the president’s speech, several questions have arisen specific to our community, especially regarding kashrut and Pesach. Schoub has identified



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



a number of major adjustments that will have to be made on seder night to minimise the possible spreading of the virus and the infection of loved ones, particularly the more vulnerable members of our community and the country at large. These can be found on the platform. Should anyone have Jewish-related issues they would like clarification on, or in the event of experiencing or becoming aware of any instances of anti-Semitism, email sajbd@sajbd.org.

These are very stressful and uncertain times for all of us, and we can expect things to get worse before they get better. Painful sacrifices will need to be made, not least in having to forego the social interaction with loved ones, friends, colleagues, and fellow congregants that we have always taken for granted. That being acknowledged, I’m confident that our community is sufficiently united, organised, adequately resourced, and resilient to weather the present crisis. I can further assure all community members that the board will be there for them throughout this trying period, and that we will do whatever we can to advise, inform, or otherwise assist.

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

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Sports Page

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Israeli rugby players sprint home

LUKE ALFRED

Six or seven hours before President Cyril Ramaphosa was giving his second national address in eight days on Monday night, Israeli rugby player Omer Levinson was scrambling through customs at OR Tambo International Airport on his way home.



Yotan Shulman

He didn't know then what we know now – that the country will effectively be locked down from midnight on Thursday – but he was still anxious to escape the claw of the COVID-19 virus and get back to the casual familiarity of the country he loves.

Home, whichever way you look at it, is always home, and Levinson was looking forward to seeing friends and family back in the Yizreel Valley of northern Israel.

The nuggety scrumhalf wasn't alone. Down in the Cape, his teammate on the Israeli national side, Yotan Shulman, who had also been training in South Africa, was doing much the same thing at Cape Town International Airport. He, too, flew through a rapidly-closing window, as the world creaked towards lockdown as the virus gained global traction.

Levinson and Shulman's South African rugby safari started in very different circumstances back in January. Thanks to Israeli national coach Kevin Musikanth's Bridges through Rugby programme, the two had been invited to attend Frankie Horne's elite South African Sevens Academy in Stellenbosch, where both impressed, acquitting themselves well.

Indeed, so valuable to their burgeoning careers was the Stellenbosch experience, that when their Israeli club, Kibbutz Yizreel, came calling, they didn't go back together, but took turns to fly back home.

Shulman, a bearded lock, flew back first,

helping Kibbutz Yizreel to a 22-19 win over Tel Aviv Rugby Club in the first leg of the final of the Israeli league. According to Musikanth, he scored a rollicking try, and was good value for his team, doubtless putting into play some of the canniness he'd learned during several weeks in the Boland.

While Shulman was scoring tries up north, so Levinson was playing for Horne's Academy against Sevens teams from France, Russia, and the SA Academy in the Boland, a series of matches in which he excelled, says Musikanth.

The following week, the two swapped roles: Shulman returning to South Africa, while Levinson helped Kibbutz Yizreel to a nail-scraping 25-24

victory over Tel Aviv in the second-leg of the final, Kibbutz Yizreel taking the final over two legs by a slim four points to become national champions. "You could see the influence of their month or two at the academy," says Musikanth. "They were both stand-outs in their respective matches."

Shulman and Levinson's return home is symptomatic, says Musikanth, of the global rugby system shutting down. In rugby, as in other walks of life, itineraries are no longer being honoured, festivals are being postponed or cancelled, and even something as everyday (and often boring) as practise looks like a quaint relic of more normal times.

"The bottom line is that it probably hasn't really sunk in," says Musikanth. "You can't even practise anymore. You're obviously in touch with the guys you coach electronically, and the guys are organising online practices and sending each other WhatsApp messages of encouragement about keeping up their personal programmes, but we're wondering now about the sport itself."

"There's a fear that rugby across the world isn't going to be played at all this season."

This said, Musikanth is also aware of the bigger picture. "We need to look at what's happening around the world. I have rugby-playing friends and acquaintances in the United States, in Italy, where things are serious. There are some frightening things

happening."

Elsewhere in the rugby universe, Evan Speechly, a sports physiotherapist who was famously the Springbok physio during the World Cup in 1995, was doing his best to be positive where he could. He spoke to the SA Jewish Report late on Monday afternoon before the president's speech later that night, and at that stage, was still hopeful that the two practices of which he's part in Rosebank and Linksfield, could remain open subject to the usual protocols and precautions.

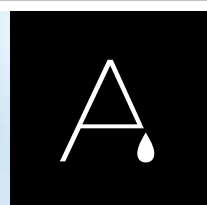
That remained the case when we spoke again at lunchtime on Tuesday, with Speechly saying that they were now going to focus only on the "absolute essentials". He mentioned joint replacements and injuries – hip replacements and rotator cuff repairs that were clearly in need

of physiotherapy and rehabilitation.

"Doctors will stop operating on these kinds of non-emergency injuries on Wednesday, and after that we'll have to see how we can be of help."

He said one of the peculiar advantages of the pandemic was that it provided opportunities for new ways of using technology, something he welcomed. "We're learning to be wise in 2020," said the man who in all likelihood won't be serving the Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Indian Premier League as he usually does this season.

"As an older person, I'm certainly learning new stuff with Skype and Zoom, and that's going to be the way we're now handling things with our patients when we can."



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**We are fully stocked with all
your Pesach requirements.**

If you have any queries, please call:

Lara, Chad or Ari on 011 440 9517

Wishing you, your family & the community

***Pesach Kasher
v' Sameach***

Be safe

