


■ Volume 24 – Number 12 ■ 3 April 2020 ■ 9 Nisan 5780

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‘Zoombombing’ takes on an anti-Semitic twist

JORDAN MOSHE

When internationally respected Rabbi Moshe Taragin delivered an online *shiur* on Monday evening, he was taken aback when it was beset by a torrent of swearing, vile comments, and anti-Semitic rhetoric.

The South African community is well acquainted with Taragin, a committed Torah educator who has learnt alongside dozens of South African students on programmes in Israel. Even outside of Israel, he maintains a connection with South African Torah students of all ages through his recorded *shiurim* [Talmudic study sessions] and inspirational voice notes which are circulated across the community.

On Monday, though, uninvited users swarmed the platform to spread vitriol and heckle other participants, forcing students to sign off and leaving Taragin no choice but to end the lesson abruptly.

“It was sudden,” Taragin, an educator at Yeshivat Har Etzion in Israel, told the *SA Jewish Report*. “They took over, doodling on the screen, ranting anti-Semitic chants, putting up inappropriate pictures, and cursing. I tried to remove them one by one, [but] they seemed to regenerate immediately.”

Neither he nor the students who have thus far attended his daily *shiur* on the online conferencing platform, Zoom, saw it coming. According to one of the participants, Eliezer Ehrenkranz, nothing seemed untoward when the session began.

“I thought there were new people participating, so it didn’t seem odd that there were more people at first,” says Ehrenkranz, who lives in Boston, Massachusetts. “The *shiur* continued, and then a user called Asher Goodman started saying hello in the chat and on his microphone.”

Although Taragin muted Goodman, he continued to spam greetings in the chat, writing “Shalom” and saying that he was from Tel Aviv. Ehrenkranz says something felt off.

“We ignored him, and kept going. Another person suddenly joined in, then Goodman shared his screen, wrote “F-off Jews”, and drew a Magen David [Star of David]. The rabbi kicked him out, but then another guy shared an inappropriate picture and wrote the same message.”

At least ten other hecklers



Shiur hackers caught on Zoom

suddenly began disrupting the session at once, sharing hateful messages and yelling obscenities into their microphones using voice changers. Although Taragin attempted to remove them, their numbers swelled.

“I removed one, then three new ones joined in,” Taragin says. “They had all sorts of strange names. They seemed to use some sort of algorithm, because every time I kicked one off, more came in.”

Beyond spamming the session, hecklers also performed Nazi salutes and cried, “Heil Hitler!” Upset and angry, many students signed off, including Ehrenkranz. “It felt like a punch in the face,” he says. “People were shocked and upset.”

Left with few options, Taragin ended the session altogether.

The incident is far from isolated. Known as “Zoombombing”, the phenomenon is being reported around the Jewish and non-Jewish world as more people use the platform to conduct lessons and give lectures. Shuls, schools, and even restaurant chains are reporting that uninvited attendees are spamming sessions with hateful and graphic material, often using pornographic, racist, and anti-Semitic content.

The Jewish news website Forward reported earlier this week that an online board meeting convened by the Conejo Valley Unified School District of the Los Angeles region was disrupted by hackers. These individuals shared cartoon images of Hitler, photos of Nazi soldiers and swastikas, and threatened sexual violence against educators and parents.

Similarly, a webinar about anti-Semitism hosted by a Massachusetts Jewish student group was reportedly disrupted when a user pulled his shirt collar down to reveal a swastika tattoo on his chest. He is believed to be Andrew Alan Escher Auernheimer,



a known white supremacist and hacker.

According to Ehrenkranz, the problem also affected an online talk given by Dr Tova Lichtenstein, another educator from Har Etzion. She delivered her lecture a few hours after Taragin, and experienced the same bombardment by almost 20 hecklers.

The Anti-Defamation League has issued a list of suggested precautions Zoom users can take before and during an online session. These including disabling remote access by other users, disabling screen sharing, muting participants, and locking the session once all invited participants are online. If one is Zoombombed, they recommend removing problematic users and disabling their ability to re-join.

Taragin has implemented these measures and resumed his *shiurim*,

limiting certain user privileges to himself only.

“I changed the link, and sent it out privately via WhatsApp,” he explains. “Access is now password protected. I think I’ve got past the worst of it.”

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies finds it appalling that at a time of global crisis, bigots still continue to spew their venomous hatred. “It’s important when using online forums to be vigilant about safety, and service providers such as Zoom provide guidelines in this regard,” she said.

Milton Shain, an emeritus professor of history and an expert on anti-Semitism, says his inclination is to ignore such hecklers rather than take them on. “Rational debate hardly ever wins with conspiracists and fantasists,” he says. “Social media is an echo chamber for the lunatic right.

“Having said that, it comes as no surprise that anti-Semites are crawling out of the woodwork to lay blame for COVID-19. It’s no surprise that – at least for some – Jews provide an ideal explanation. It’s the usual argument.”

In the twisted mind of the anti-Semite, a convoluted case will be offered to explain why the virus is in the interest of Jews, Shain said. “Expect global politics to feature, money, and most importantly,

banking,” he says. “This will fit in with age-old canards. Let’s hope the audience is small.”

Rabbi Yossi Chaikin, the chairperson of the South African Rabbinic Association, says that Jews shouldn’t feel singled out by such disruptors, with non-Jewish groups also targeted by hecklers on Zoom.

“Based on what I’ve seen, it appears mostly opportunistic,” he says. “Other people and groups are also affected. Still, we all need to find ways to protect ourselves against such disruption.”

“Technology like Zoom has been amazing in helping us carry on virtually. Davening, learning, and communal leadership meetings can still happen. Almost every technology is open to disruption, and we need to handle this as we would any other.”

To help rabbis handle potential disruption, Chaikin says the association is in the process of organising training sessions to equip them to protect themselves online and continue teaching.

“We must find ways to make sure that *shiurim* continue if this is to become a reality,” he concludes. “It’s time to discuss online strategies to protect ourselves as best we can.”

Guidance on how to protect yourself against Zoombombing can be found at <https://www.adl.org/blog/how-to-prevent-zoombombing>

Lockdown lens



Peak-hour traffic on the M1 highway in Johannesburg this week.

Photo: Ian Ossendryver

See page 8.

This Pesach, let’s dig deep

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This is going to be a Pesach like none other. As we follow the stipulations laid out so resolutely by our state president – observing them not just as law-abiding citizens, but as Jews for whom the protection and preservation of human life is one of the highest Torah values – we will confront something we’ve never confronted before.

This year, we will be having our seders on our own.

Some will be literally on their own. Others will have their spouse. Many younger families will have their children. But for each person, each family, it’s a different challenge.

What this means is that, as a community, as families, and as individuals, we’re going to have to dig deep to make the seder experience deep, meaningful, and emotionally and spiritually invigorating. It’s going to test us and stretch us. It’s also, I believe, something that will make us stronger.

We’re accustomed to big seders, big gatherings of families and friends; we’re accustomed to having the energy of the sheer number of people carry the seder experience. This year, we don’t have that blessed luxury. This year, the circumstances will force us to look at the haggadah in a way we’ve never

looked at it before. Without the crowds to carry us, we will need to examine the haggadah more closely. We will have to scrutinise the ancient words to appreciate their eternal depth and meaning, and draw out their eternally relevant life lessons. We will need to truly immerse ourselves in the exodus, the divine story of our people, in order to appreciate the divine direction we receive from our tradition.

It’s going to require some effort and preparation on our part. And I’d like to suggest two practical ways in which we can prepare for seder night.

First, to help draw out the meaning, guidance, and inspiration of the haggadah, I’ve asked the wonderful rabbis and rebbetzins of our community to come together and share their collective wisdom with all of us. Many of them are writing short inspirational pieces that we will be compiling into a special South African haggadah companion to be shared with the entire community in the coming days.

I would encourage everyone to go through these ideas, to explore them as preparation for the seder: to print out the companion (if possible) and select a few ideas that really speak to you to read out at the seder. I also encourage you to do your own research beforehand. There are so many wonderful resources

on the internet, and so much wisdom buried in our own haggadot sitting on our shelves waiting for us to delve into them. Let us truly prepare for seder night this year. And, of course, the more we put into the experience, the more we will get out.

There’s another way we can prepare. The seder night is such a rich family experience. There’s something we can do to hold onto that, even in these circumstances. What I’d like to suggest is for all of us who aren’t going to be together to write each other personal seder notes. To look into the haggadah, and see what comes to mind, what personal insights and words of love and connection we feel moved to share with our loved ones. These notes can be so special and powerful. It will be so beautiful for grandchildren to share notes with their grandparents, and for parents to share notes with their older children. For all of us to share with each other. These notes should be emailed to the recipient before *yom tov* (the Jewish holiday) and printed out, but not read, and then opened and read at the seder. In this way, we can truly feel the presence of our loved ones at our seders even though they aren’t there in person.

We can choose to submit to circumstances or we can choose to rise to the occasion, dig deep, and find the strength and resilience to make this the most inspiring seder yet.

We can find a way to make our seders an experience to remember – perhaps the most memorable we’ve ever had.

I wish you all a *chag kasher v’same’ach* – a beautiful Pesach, and deeply meaningful, enriching seders.

May G-d bring health and healing to our community, to our country, and to our world.

YomTov/ShabbatTimes					
3/4/10/11 April					
CL	CL	YTE/CL	MS		
17:45	18:34	17:38	18:27	Johannesburg	
18:20	19:10	18:11	19:02	Cape Town	
17:32	18:21	17:24	18:13	Durban	
17:51	18:40	17:43	18:33	Bloemfontein	
17:51	18:42	17:42	18:33	Port Elizabeth	
17:43	18:33	17:34	18:24	East London	
8/9/14/15/16 April					
CL	CL	CL	CL	YTE	
17:40	18:28	17:34	18:23	18:22	Johannesburg
18:13	19:04	18:06	18:57	18:56	Cape Town
17:26	18:15	17:19	18:09	18:08	Durban
17:46	18:35	17:39	18:28	18:27	Bloemfontein
17:45	18:35	17:37	18:28	18:27	Port Elizabeth
17:36	18:26	17:29	18:19	18:18	East London
CL: Candle Lighting • MS: Motsei Shabbat • YTE: Yom Tov ends					

Torah Thought

Passover is no pushover

Pesach is a very interesting and stressful time of the Jewish year. There are so many fresh *mitzvot* (commandments) that have to be performed, so much food that has to be cooked and eaten (which is never really such a problem), and many guests to entertain.

The good news is that this pre-Pesach stress is not new to us. Many of us can recall how our parents and grandparents slaved away in the kitchen. And many of us remember how many times we were chased out of the same kitchen when we were only trying to help (yeah right).

In fact, this stress actually goes back generations to when the Jews were on their way out of Egypt. They had a lot more stress. It was just before the last plague, the death of the first born, when Hashem commanded the Jews to wipe the

blood of the slaughtered lamb on their doorposts. The reason for this commandment was, as the Torah tells us, for the angel of death to be able to identify that the house belonged to a Jew and Passover (pun intended) the house.

This explanation adds even more stress to Pesach, since in the Haggadah, it says – numerous times – that Hashem in His glory, smote (I think that means killed) all the Egyptian first born, alone, without the help of a messenger, seraph, or angel. If that was the case, why did we have to wipe that blood on our doorposts if Hashem was coming by himself? Hashem, who knows the inner thoughts of every individual, surely knew where the Jews and Egyptians stayed? Also why does the Torah make reference to the presence of the angel of death?

Rabbi Ryan Goldstein,
West Street Shul



The answer is that every day, the angel of death has his list of people to bring to the next world by the command of Hashem. The last plague was no exception. Hashem commanded the Jews to wipe blood on their doorposts to prevent the angel of death from doing its daily job. Hashem didn’t want any Jew dying on that night, even by natural causes, so that the Egyptians wouldn’t be able to say that the Jews also suffered. This answers our question: the Torah is talking about the daily job of the angel of death, while the Haggadah is talking about the final plague that was sent to the Egyptians.

With this question answered, at least now we have one less stressful thing to worry about.

South African

Jewish Report

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Design and layout Bryan Maron/Design Bandits – bryan@designbandits.co.za • Distribution Sandy Furman • Subscriptions Avusa Publishing (Pty) Ltd. Tel: 0860 525 200 • Board of Directors Howard Sackstein (Chairperson), Dina Diamond, Herschel Jawitz, Shaun Matisonn, Benjy Porter. Advertisements and editorial copy do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, staff and board of directors. Tel: 011 430 1980.

Editor Peta Krost Maunders – editor@sajewishreport.co.za • Sub-editor Julie Leibowitz

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Our heroes on the frontlines

TALI FEINBERG

As most of us stay within the safety of our homes during lockdown, others are stepping out into the unknown to fight an invisible enemy for all of us. They are doctors, nurses, paramedics, volunteers, and specialists who are heading into the eye of the storm of this highly contagious virus. They do it at great personal risk to themselves and their families, setting aside their own fears for the benefit of each one of us. They are the true champions in this war against COVID-19. We find out more about a fraction of these heroes in our community.

“As we enter this period of uncharted waters, we are all anxious, and sometimes terrified of what’s to come,” says Dr Raphaella Stander, a 33-year-old paediatric registrar working across the system at Red Cross War Memorial Children’s Hospital in Cape Town.

“I worry about my family and my child who is only nine months old,” she says. “I considered sending them all away, somewhere safe where I can’t expose them to this virus – although they refused to leave. The moment I’m exposed, I think I will find somewhere else to stay until this is over because the thought of harming my family is overwhelming and terrifying.” “We are seeing doctors updating their wills. It’s definitely a dramatic moment for all healthcare workers – you can’t play it down,” says Dr Evan Shoul, an infectious diseases expert in Johannesburg. “We are nervously anticipating what could happen, but panic isn’t helpful.” Indeed, all the healthcare workers we spoke to are stoic and measured in spite of being at the coalface of the pandemic.

While some healthcare professionals and volunteers have had to step back because of their own underlying medical conditions, they all have a sense of duty and responsibility to be part of this fight, says Shoul.

He says there is a lot of camaraderie in the medical community, and local doctors have had the advantage of learning from

colleagues who are in coronavirus hotspots. Some local medical workers have already had to go into quarantine after being exposed to patients with the virus. “This is two weeks isolated from their family and kids. It’s really difficult for anyone to go through, and the psychological aspects are huge. No one should have to go through this alone,” says Shoul – which is why support is so important from others who “get it”.

Dr Evan Shoul



He says there may be a shortage of protective masks and personal protective equipment (PPE) in South Africa, which would put doctors at much more risk of contracting the virus. Most healthcare workers are also putting protocols in place at home – changing out of their work clothes and showering before greeting their families. “It does feel like we are going to war,” he says.



“... there is a life, go save it.”

Dr Andrea Mendelsohn has been at the frontlines for weeks already as a senior medical officer in a HIV/ TB primary healthcare clinic in Cape Town. “I have no doubt that I have been exposed to the virus as I have been screening patients. My family is young, so I just have to do my best and hope they will be fine

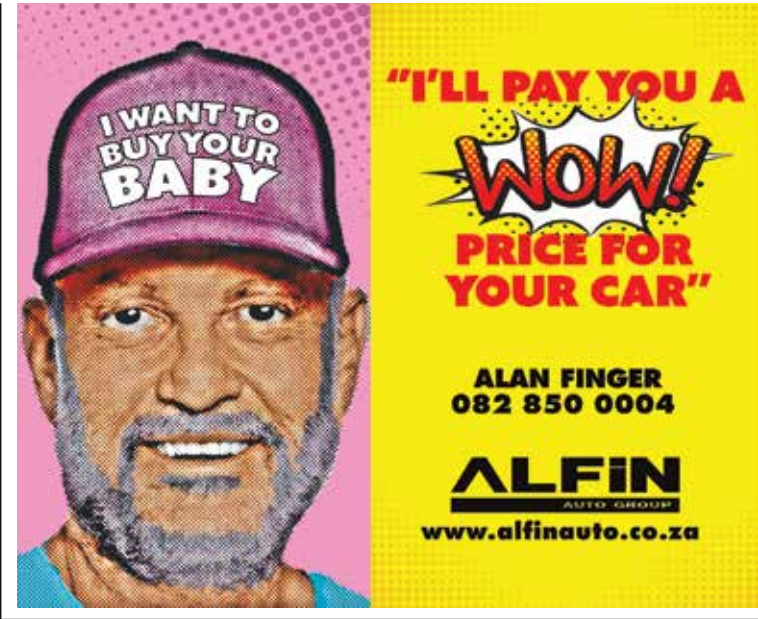
– but there is no guarantee.” She says the global shortage of PPE is worrying. Doctors are also afraid about having to “play G-d” if there aren’t enough ventilators. Working in a paediatric hospital, Stander is particularly worried about how children in this country might be affected. “The experience in Wuhan showed that children don’t get very sick [from COVID-19]. However this may be different in our very vulnerable population. We don’t have the answers to this.

“We have one of the most vulnerable child populations here in South Africa: 59% of children live in poverty, 30% are without safe water, 18% live in overcrowded households, 20% are far from clinics, and 27% have stunted growth, a reflection of chronic malnutrition,” she says. “We are also fearful for the lives of our children, their parents, and all the team members who will be working during lockdown – the nurses, cleaning staff, porters, clerks, and so many others. Doctors aren’t the only heroes in this story,” she says.

It’s not only doctors going into battle, but also nurses. Timor Lifschitz is a registered nurse and midwife working in a clinical environment. “We are doing flu and pneumonia vaccines as well as childhood immunisations which are our priority at the moment. My husband, an advanced life-support paramedic and I are both still working,” she says.

“There is definitely a chance we can be exposed to the virus. It can be very concerning to know we are at risk, but our duty within the healthcare system has always been to help the public, and thus we will continue, even at risk to ourselves. We are taking as many precautions to prevent ourselves getting sick as possible.

“We have a four-year-old and an almost 11-month-old at home. We are preparing ourselves during the lockdown by removing our shoes and leaving them outside before we get into the house, hand washing and sanitising as soon as we come in, and changing our clothes before attending to the children. My



husband and I are also sleeping in separate rooms as a precaution to try to limit spreading the virus to each other.” Meanwhile, paramedics and emergency services volunteers



Timor Lifschitz

are also putting themselves at risk, often as volunteers. A volunteer paramedic who asked to remain anonymous says, “All emergency medical organisations will do as much as possible within constraints. Emergency medical services will have freedom of movement, but with that comes risk, not only for ourselves but for our families and other paramedics who work with us.” This is why he advises that people who suspect that they have the virus take themselves to testing

centres unless they aren’t in a condition to do so. “I have a strict system when I get home, putting my clothes in the wash and making sure I’m clean before I even walk in the door. This is because we have learned that the virus can remain on clothing for up to 12 hours. Our response vehicle is also cleaned thoroughly after every call, and we all wear masks,” he says. “I feel humbled by this, and feel I have a role to play. I’m grateful to my organisation for allowing us to help on this level, and to my family for supporting me and pushing me out the door at 03:00 and saying, ‘there is a life, go save it’.

“These are uncharted waters, and I don’t think it will be over in 21 days. But I also think we don’t need to panic. We have good resources and amazing systems in place. I feel privileged to be a part of it.”



Dr Raphaella Stander

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New temporary rituals and restrictions

TALI FEINBERG

If Jewish life is centred on family and community, how will our rituals continue under lockdown? While the practicalities are constantly evolving, this is how the following *mitzvot* (commandments) can still be practised.

“For thousands of years, from the time of Moshe Rabbeinu, Chevrah Kadishas around the world have taken pride in ensuring that we treat the deceased with the highest levels of dignity,” says Saul Tomson, the chief executive of the Chevrah Kadisha South Africa.

“This is known as *chesed shel emet* [the truest act of loving kindness]. Our Chevrah Kadisha is no exception. Together with our volunteers and professional staff, we continue to make certain that every deceased person is treated with the utmost respect and dignity.

“At the same time, given the current situation, we are obligated to ensure the protection of those volunteers and staff who work with the deceased. Every precaution necessary is being taken, and will continue to be taken to protect these people. All our decisions conform with what is being done internationally by Chevrah Kadishas around the world, while at the same time complying with local by-laws, where applicable.

“We will always advocate for the customs of our community while obviously understanding the



requirements to comply with the laws of the state. Any halachic decisions that have to be taken are taken in consultation, and via a *p’sak din* (rabbinical legal ruling) from our Beth Din. We have closed the *ohel* (funeral room) to the public, and although up to 50 people are permitted to attend a funeral, we are requesting that attendance is limited to the immediate family.”

“Mikveh use is by appointment only,” according to the office of Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein. “Please contact Pearl Kaplan on 083 550 1217 in Johannesburg, and Bev Coblentz at 072 954 8542 in Cape Town. They will explain to you the procedure for visiting the mikveh. All preparations must be done at home, and users must bring their own towels, gown, and bath mat. In Johannesburg, the only mikveh that will be open is Maharsha.

“The Beth Din has ruled that, under the circumstances, ladies must schedule their appointment to take place on the eighth day. There will be no further appointments at night. If the eighth day is Shabbat, the appointment must take place on the ninth day, on Sunday. A lady who is COVID-19 positive or who is in quarantine isn’t permitted to use the mikveh. This includes someone who has travelled in the past 14 days or who has had contact with a COVID-19-positive patient.”

The mikveh guidelines are in compliance with government regulations and the ruling of the Beth Din. “We realise that these guidelines will be inconvenient, but please bear in mind that the chief rabbi and Beth Din are working under very constrained circumstances to ensure the continuation of *taharat hamishpacha* (family purity).”

Brit Milah will still take place, with only the parents of the baby boy being present. Barmitzvahs, Batmitzvahs, and weddings can’t take place under the laws of lockdown.

Afrika Tikkun calls for consolidated effort in townships

JORDAN MOSHE

Lockdown is a challenge for most of us, but when you’re confined to a crowded shack, the struggle is unimaginable.

Afrika Tikkun is at the forefront of helping those less equipped to handle the situation. In the face of dwindling resources, the organisation is appealing for help to reach those in need.

“You can’t ask people to put themselves into isolation when they don’t know if they will have food for the next 17 days,” Tikkun Chief Executive Marc Lubner told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “This virus not only raises the issue of medical security, but food security.”

Afrika Tikkun has been operating in the townships for 25 years employing a system of community structures to distribute resources and support effectively. Since the onset of the virus, the organisation has packaged and distributed countless food parcels, masks, sanitisers, soap, gloves, and other essentials among shack communities, focusing on the elderly and vulnerable.

Says Lubner, “We sent home 20 000 children attending our centres with food parcels and soap last week. However, we realised that we need ten times this amount if we are to have any hope of helping the thousands of *gogos* (grannies) that care for more than 3 000 of our Tikkun kids. If these *gogos* are lost, these children have lost their

support system.”

With the endorsement of the Social Development Minister Lindiwe Zulu, Tikkun has centralised a donation and distribution system, making its efforts more effective. Absa, the German embassy in South Africa, and others have backed the project, as have many members within South Africa’s Muslim community.

Far more support is needed, however. Says Lubner, “We’ve appealed to the Motsepe Foundation to help us, but have yet to receive a response. We’re also appealing to the Jewish community to get behind us and help make this happen.

“The Jewish community needs to be aware that the government recognises us as a community that performs meaningful good deeds in this country. We’re small in relative terms, so it’s essential that we consolidate our efforts if we’re to make an impact in this situation.”

Lubner says that it’s understandable that people are reluctant to commit large sums of money to the cause, anxious to know where their funds are going.

“We’ve spent much time putting together processes to monitor donation movement to ensure that we can trace money from source to recipient,” he says. “We even have video proof of people signing receipts in Hillbrow after receiving parcels. We know it’s important to manage it properly.”

Donors can back a number of constructive initiatives. These include a

Continued on page 5>>

An open letter from the Chief Rabbis of the world

This Shabbat – the Shabbat before Pesach – is called Shabbat HaGadol, the Great Shabbat.

It was first celebrated at the birth of the Jewish people, moments before the dawn of our deliverance from Egyptian slavery.

Every Jewish family, alone in their homes in Egypt, sat fervently anticipating the united dream of deliverance and nationhood.

3 332 years later, this Shabbat HaGadol, we too sit, isolated in our own homes, once again united in our fervent prayer for relief from the global pandemic that has shaken our world to its core.

We call on Jews around the world to adhere – with total commitment – to the health and safety protocols as set out by their country.

We call on Jews around the world to make this Shabbat HaGadol a Shabbat of kindness, a Shabbat of prayer and a Shabbat of connection to the Divine – tapping into the transformative power of Shabbat.

We call on Jews in every corner of the globe to do these three things:

Call or message each other with words of support before Shabbat

In our heroic global quest to protect each other, we find ourselves physically cut off from one another. So many of us are completely alone. Call or message someone you know who is alone or struggling, wish them Shabbat Shalom and offer them words of support and encouragement. There is so much we cannot do at this time – but let’s not underestimate the power we have to uplift, encourage and support one another.

Pray for each other just before candle-lighting

As the devastation of COVID-19 sweeps across the world, so many people need our prayers. Let us pray to our Father in Heaven together – for each other and all humankind.

Keep this Shabbat together

Let us bring this Shabbat into our homes together and harness its immeasurable invigorating power. Let us connect to light and love and disconnect from the relentless news cycle for a precious 25 hours. Let us fill our homes with the radiant light of Shabbat candles together. Let us proclaim G-d Almighty’s sovereignty over the world, and feel his loving embrace, as we recite Kiddush together. Let’s cook before Shabbat, put away our car keys, dress up, switch off all electronics, eat, sing, pray, hope and dream together.

This is a time for us to rally together in unity. This is a time for us to be together – to welcome Shabbat in together – **as one people with one heart.**

May we all find comfort and strength in Shabbat and each other.

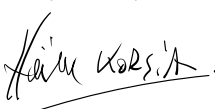
May it be a Shabbat HaGadol – a Great Shabbat – in the fullest sense of the words.

And may G-d bring health and healing to His world,

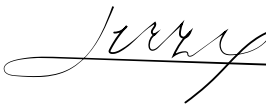
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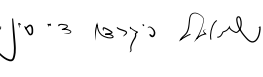

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt
Chief Rabbi of Moscow
President of the Conference
of European Rabbis


Rabbi Yosef Chehebar
Chief Rabbi of Argentina



Rabbi Gabriel Davidovich
Chief Rabbi of Argentina


Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
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United Kingdom


Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein
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Rabbi Dr Riccardo Di Segni
Chief Rabbi of Rome


Rabbi Berel Lazar
Chief Rabbi of Russia


Rabbi Albert Guigui
Chief Rabbi of Brussels

SAUJS not distracted by anti-Israel hate fest

TALI FEINBERG

When coronavirus hit South Africa, most organisations knew where their priorities lay – in tackling the crisis. But some, like the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) Palestine Solidarity Committee (PSC), carried on as if it was business as usual, taking the hate-filled Israel Apartheid Week (IAW) online.



Israel Apartheid Week 2019 in South Africa

The PSC announced on 24 March that it would host a “series of topics online surrounding IAW 2020”. It shared a range of anti-Israel content on its social-media platforms, in particular Twitter.

One tweet, which was originally posted by Africa4Palestine (previously Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions South Africa) paid tribute to Therese Halasa, who was one

of four Palestinians that hijacked a plane en route to Tel Aviv in 1972. “The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is an incredibly important discussion that needs to be happening on campuses throughout South Africa and indeed the world. However, there’s a time and place for it,” says South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) National Chairperson Ariel Goldberg.

He says his team is closely

host educational campaigns isn’t diminished by the pandemic. “However, we understand that there is an immediate need to join the fight against COVID-19. As such, we will be running our Israel Awareness Week campaign at the appropriate time later this year. With the outbreak and deadly spread of the virus, it’s time for unity. As our president and countless other community leaders have emphasised, we can only overcome this together,” Goldberg says.

“As the youth, we have a responsibility to South Africa. We are the ones who need to be at the forefront of the fight. We need to be the voice for the vulnerable and weak – those who are unable to help themselves at a time like this. We must answer the call, as many of our fellow students have done, to join the fight against COVID-19.”

He says SAUJS will double its efforts to help people – from handing out sanitisers and multilingual information brochures to fellow students, to discussing and promoting mental and physical health. “From inspiring communities to educating others about the best ways to stay safe and healthy during the pandemic, we are making a tangible difference to South African society.

“We refuse to compromise our focus on having a positive

impact on people’s lives in an effort to counter the false and hateful narrative being perpetuated by anti-Israel groups. We won’t be doing our own virtual Israel Awareness Week, but we will still stand against hate wherever it may arise.

“Please reach out to SAUJS if you’d like to assist us with our COVID-19 programme, or if there is any way SAUJS may be able to help you.”

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, said, “We commend SAUJS for responding quickly and timeously to the COVID-19 crisis, and channelling its energy to helping fellow South Africans. The anti-Israel hate-fest – the so-called Israel Apartheid Week – resonates with very few people. COVID-19 affects every single one of us. SAUJS has shown true leadership by dealing with the crisis in a real and meaningful way.”

Rowan Polovin, the chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, said, “SAUJS has taken the moral high ground in supporting the life and unity of the nation during this crisis. While the anti-Israel lobby has been turning coronavirus into a weapon against the Jewish state, SAUJS is prioritising pikuach nefesh (the saving and preservation of human life) through positive nation-building efforts.”

Afrika Tikkun calls for consolidated effort in townships

>>>Continued from page 4

local protective mask manufacturing project, the sending of a parcel with a personalised message, and the neighbour to neighbour support programme. The latter involves distributing parcels to individuals living next door to elderly or vulnerable residents to help them care for their neighbours as well as themselves.

Lubner hopes that these collective efforts will help stem the tide of devastation the virus has the potential to wreak on disadvantaged individuals.

“I’m particularly afraid of the social impact of the lockdown,” he says. “To combat this, we need testing, but after testing, a person needs treatment and has to have the resources to sustain it.”

“Alexandra has one real clinic to service a population of more than a million people. If we are going to curb the spread of the virus, we need to address issues like food security and access to resources.

“I’m desperate to get into the townships before the tsunami hits. Our Jewish community clearly wants to help others at this time, and I’ve heard of several initiatives launched to assist those in need.

“However, I’m appealing to people to consolidate efforts by backing Afrika Tikkun. We have the infrastructure. Rather than fragment our efforts, let’s rally together as a central force and make a meaningful difference.”



Loading supplies at the Afrika Tikkun site in Braamfontein

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We are all in this together

Just getting food to eat during lockdown has become a massive motion picture. Nothing is simple right now, except perhaps our ride to work – from the bedroom to the study or dining room. Who would have thought one month ago that our reality would have changed so drastically? I remember marvelling at the experience of South African expat Adam Wolov being in lockdown in Wuhan, and thinking how his whole life has been put on hold and effectively shoved into a tiny flat. Now we are living that life, only some of us have a garden and bit more space in our homes. And the government says it’s for 21 days, but few of us expect it to end there and to resume our lives as we know them. We are still in the early phase of this pandemic in South Africa. There is an expectation from doctors who have spoken to this newspaper that the numbers of people contracting the coronavirus is going to skyrocket before we can really get it to settle down. But even that is supposition. There are some experts who say life as we know it will start to become a reality again only at the beginning of September. I’m no expert. I can only say we’re in this with you, and will keep bringing you the kinds of stories you want and need to read. I’m meant to be an expert at editing a newspaper, but can I tell you that this week, even that was tested. Trying to put a 52-page Pesach edition together with all of our team in their own homes was a challenge of note. Everything that we have come to expect to happen in the process was thrown upside down. But, I have the utmost respect for the *SA Jewish Report* team because they worked long and hard hours – trying their best to keep their cool – to get this newspaper to you. Simple things like being able to check a page becomes a test. But then, all of us are being challenged in everything we do. Those of us who work in travel, entertainment, and the retail industries, to name just a few, are at home trying to figure out how they are going to pay school fees, their bond, and even put bread on the table. A month ago, they were fine. Small decisions have become big ones, like whether you buy everything you might need in terms of groceries for a month just in case there won’t be any next week. Then you find you don’t have enough space in your freezer for the amount of meat you bought. And what of toilet paper and sanitisers? Yes, I joke about this, and perhaps there is little to laugh at because we are talking about a dire life-and-death situation. However, our community is like that. We laugh at ourselves and at the situation because it’s the only way to get through such a tough time. Some of the memes and jokes I have seen over the past few weeks have kept me afloat when I was stressing about things like how I was going to ensure that my youngest son kept up with his lessons remotely. The truth is, he isn’t, and I need to stop stressing about it. We can only do what we can do. And right now, for many of us, that isn’t much. On the flipside, I’m astonished at the innovation I’m witnessing. People who had *simchas* (celebrations) scheduled and had to give up their dream function, made an alternative plan. Zoom parties have become a hit. Dance, yoga, and karate classes on Zoom abound so you can keep fit at home. Our own *SA Jewish Report* board has created the most incredible webinars to keep the community in the know about all sorts of fascinating topics or laughing in the aisles (depending on which night). I guess one of the biggest challenges for us all is how we are going to make Pesach feel special when we are all separated. I usually go to one seder at one of my siblings and spend the other night at another sibling. They are always incredible events that we look forward to. This year, our little family is on our own, and we are going to need to find a way of making Pesach special for us. The incredible thing about this is that we aren’t alone. We are all in the same boat, having to turn this time of the year – which is all about togetherness and bonding – into something special. One thing is for sure, we are never going to forget Pesach 2020. It has been interesting how some stories that would typically be perfect reading for this Pesach edition really weren’t appropriate. What was appropriate was to look at how we could help you through this time on all levels as well as offer up-to-date news. We wanted to highlight our heroes, who risk their own lives to help keep us alive. We also wanted to show you some of the unique people who have turned this dire time into a way of helping others. We asked a few people about their experiences in lockdown, and others about what they plan to do over Pesach in the United States, Israel, and Australia. It’s evident that around the world, we are in this together. At the same time, this is an extraordinary bonding time for families. It’s also a time to dig deep, to find a way to cope and survive this. It’s a time in which we do things differently. Who knows, you may find that different works better.

The *SA Jewish Report* team and I wish you all a *chag Pesach sameach*!

Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Don’t forget
We won’t be publishing for the next two weeks because of Pesach, but we will be back on 24 April.
This week’s *SA Jewish Report* will still be available at your food retail outlets on Friday (not Thursday). Please check our website, sajr.co.za, in the top right-hand corner, to find which outlets will have it. If you aren’t able to get there, you will always be able to download a digital copy from our site.



Playing a politics game that Netanyahu always wins

There’s a joke that in Israel, you play politics for 90 minutes and then, in the end, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu always wins. That’s certainly true three elections and 16 months without a government, later. Now, finally, Israel seems to be on the verge of getting a broad and stable coalition to guide it through the coronavirus pandemic and beyond. And it’s none other than Netanyahu in the driver’s seat. His main contender, former army chief and leader of the Blue and White alliance, Benny Gantz, broke ranks with half his party to join Netanyahu in a unity government. He cited the national and global health emergency as the reason. What was so startling was that it was a complete turnaround on the central principle of Gantz’s campaign, namely that he would never support Netanyahu as prime minister as long as the latter was facing criminal charges for corruption. But it looks increasingly likely that Israel is about to swear in an emergency government with Netanyahu at the helm for at least the next 18 months. Either Netanyahu is a genius or a magician. Or plain lucky. Take your pick, because it was Gantz who was tasked with forming the next government after the most recent elections in March. That mandate basically tore his alliance apart. Gantz needed the support of the Arab parties – including those that are anti-Zionist and have supported terrorists in the past – as well as the backing of Avigdor Lieberman, a right-wing former defence minister. The demands made on him were vast, and such a coalition never really stood a chance. In the end, Gantz was willing to negotiate for an emergency government because Israel needed unified leadership to deal with the coronavirus. But his main partner, Yair Lapid, of the Yesh Atid (There Is a Future) party, flat-out refused to enter a government with Netanyahu. At the time of writing, negotiations between Gantz and Netanyahu are continuing. The two say they plan to have a unity government sworn in before Passover, but negotiations have been stalled by the coronavirus and who gets key appointments. It comes amidst a scramble for portfolios and lots of demands being placed on Netanyahu. There’s talk of Gantz becoming foreign or defence minister, while Netanyahu is expected to be prime minister for a year-and-a-half before Gantz will replace him. Most of the public, according to a recent poll, don’t believe Netanyahu will eventually give Gantz the prime minister’s seat. At the moment, the most important portfolio is health. Gantz claimed he was joining Netanyahu because of the coronavirus crisis, so it was assumed that he would push for the health ministry. But at the start of negotiations, he didn’t. He’s

**DATELINE:
MIDDLE EAST**

Paula Slier



since heard the criticism, and now says he wants this portfolio alongside others. Gantz’s supporters are disappointed. According to polls, most of them are upset with his decision to join Netanyahu. Although there are those who say he has done the responsible thing, others say he has let his voters down by backtracking on his promise to never ally with Netanyahu for as long as he’s facing trial. Gantz isn’t as left-wing as many of his detractors like to paint him. Many of his policies aren’t so different from Netanyahu – except for his promise to fight corruption, and now he’s shifted on that. What’s more, Gantz is also promoting a bill that will allow Netanyahu to sit in parliament as a minister – but also not – while under trial. It’s confusing. The law in Israel is that a regular minister or Knesset (parliament) member cannot stay in his or her job while undergoing trial. But it’s not clear what happens when the person in question is the prime minister. What will happen to Netanyahu if he gives his seat to Gantz in one-and-a-half years? Will he be treated as a regular minister or not? This new bill is trying to protect him. The latest developments are surprising, not least because the campaigns the two leaders conducted were ugly and personal. Observers say it looks mysterious that Gantz decided to join Netanyahu at the last moment. Many claim this is the problem with Gantz – he’s not really a fighter and only became army chief because of circumstances. He was a number two who became a number one, and he doesn’t really have the stamina or fighting spirit to be a leader. Analysts seem to agree that it’s unlikely he’ll have a meaningful political career after disappointing his voters so much this time around. He’s lost his political credit. There’s one more scenario. Gantz might not be able to form a new government by the time his mandate runs out. Could Netanyahu be delaying things and hoping for this? In such a scenario, fourth elections will be called for. But with the Gantz and Lapid split, and Gantz’s support-base diminished, Netanyahu might finally come out as the clear winner. Think of a football match – it doesn’t matter who plays the 90 minutes, in the end, the winner is always the same. Watch this space!



President Reuven Rivlin with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz

This, too, shall pass – or will it?

OPINION

DAVID SHAPIRO



In nearly 50 years on the stock exchange, the current crisis is the eleventh major downturn in financial markets I’ve had to navigate. Each crisis exhibits different characteristics.

Some, like the internet bubble in 2000, were easy to forecast, others like 9/11 weren’t. The collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market in 2008



took ages to put behind us, while the recovery from the 1987 crash was swift.

What distinguishes the present downturn from others is that the economic slump has been orchestrated by government decree to mitigate against the spread of disease by closing businesses, limiting social interaction, banning international travel, and postponing or cancelling sporting events and other forms of entertainment. One can’t talk of a fall in the economy or collapse in the market using conventional terms. This isn’t a traditional recession or bear market.

Still, in all instances, our emotions

are stretched to the limit. Fed with a constant stream of bad news through all channels of the media, we see only despair and misery, never believing that the darkness will end and that our former lives will return. Hours of worrying turns to days, days to weeks, and weeks to months.

Yet, somehow, each crisis passes. So, too, will this unfortunate tragedy.

We don’t know when, but we know it will. And surprisingly, we will pick up the pieces and continue to appreciate our lives.

Financial markets are forward looking, and the shock value of the spread of the virus around the world has already been discounted in equity prices. That doesn’t mean we’ll see a sharp turnaround soon.

Even considering the wide-ranging stimulus packages that administrators and central bankers have injected into the global economy, concern about how badly the shutdowns will harm the global economy and how long it will take for businesses and consumers to find

their feet again could keep investors sidelined for some time.

However, updates that infection rates are slowing or that health authorities are coping adequately with the influx of casualties might be enough to lift spirits and put energy back into the stock market.

Each crisis leaves us looking back with regret and introspection, and raises conversations about what we could have done to prevent it. And, it doesn’t take long before governments and regulatory bodies legislate measures to prevent any kind of repetition of the menace that threatened our financial, physical, and mental well-being.

After 9/11, airports introduced stringent safety checks that remain in force today. Governments bidding to starve terrorist organisations of their funding launched stern money-laundering regulations.

Following the near collapse of the world economy in 2008, banks were justifiably tamed from using their capital to trade speculative financial instruments for their own profit.

Similarly, when we emerge from the present gloom, sweeping changes will be proposed to aid and lift society, changes that could provide interesting investment opportunities.

The failure of the world’s richest economies to cope with the rapid spread of the disease has exposed alarming weaknesses in the administration of public health

services. City hospitals have been caught short of beds, equipment, and health professionals. More frightening has been the prospect of people with the disease hiding their



One can’t talk of a fall in the economy or collapse in the market using conventional terms. This isn’t a traditional recession or bear market.

illness and reporting for work for fear of losing a day’s wages.

Following the 2008 financial crisis, banks have frequently been put through rigorous tests to analyse whether their businesses could cope with the stress of another crisis. In future, we foresee comparable exercises being administered on the health industry. Governments will vote huge budgets to ensure the sector passes the test. Affordable medical cover will be a given for most developed nations.

Over the past few years, it has been common for governments to put pressure on the health industry to reduce the price of drugs and services. It has led to reduced healthcare benefits, and curbs on pharmaceutical budgets for research and development. No more. The current emergency has highlighted

society’s need to foresee future outbreaks and ensure readiness to engage in mass testing with immediate outcomes.

Without question, the big winner will be the technology giants. With immense criticism and disapproval directed at their size and power, countries, businesses, and households wouldn’t have survived without the services provided by organisations such as Amazon, Netflix, Facebook, Google, Apple, and many more related businesses. Their platforms have withstood an epic increase in traffic as schoolchildren stream educational programmes, companies arrange virtual meetings, families shop for food online, and teenagers keep themselves amused by downloading games and movies.

The importance of hygiene has never been a priority in our lives. Physicians, virologists, and epidemiologists have hardly attracted the celebrity status enjoyed by investment bankers and hedge-fund traders, but the way that COVID-19 has jolted our lives will alter our mindset and attitude for generations. If there is one lesson learnt from our present situation, it’s that trading strategies and valuation models can’t heal a community.

• *David Shapiro is a veteran stockbroker, market commentator, and deputy chairman at Sasfin Securities.*

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Seen during lockdown

Our intrepid photojournalist, **Ilan Ossendryver**, took to the streets this week to capture what was happening while we were under lockdown.

Lockdown in Hillbrow



The Johannesburg High Court



Empty streets in Glenhazel



The army patrols Alexandra on Wednesday 1 April



Sandton Convention Centre



A deserted Melrose Arch

Photos: Ilan Ossendryver

MOST SA JEWS (BOTH OF ASHKENAZI AND SEPHARDI HERITAGE) ARE ELIGIBLE TO REINSTATE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AND, ACCORDINGLY, AN EU PASSPORT.

A common misconception is that European citizenship and EU passports can only be obtained if one has documents providing his/her lineage. The fact is that not having any documents proving lineage, doesn't lead to disqualification of eligibility. Jews of Ashkenazi heritage can rely on documents obtained in Lithuania or Poland.

Jews of Sephardi heritage need no proof at all!

In his experience, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived, and therefore they are entitled to reinstate it, and accordingly obtain an EU passport.



Adv. Horesh has been operating in SA market with the Jewish community since March 2018. He arrives regularly to South Africa, and can meet in person with Jews who are interested to do so.

Ashkenazi: This ad refers to Jews of Polish & Lithuanian heritage only. The most important thing is the understanding that prior to the end of WW-I, the European map was very different than the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania did not exist as independent countries, and until 1918 these territories were only known as Lithuanian or Polish regions/counties of the Great Russian Empire who ruled all of north eastern Europe. Accordingly, until 1918, residents of these territories were Russian citizens, as Polish and Lithuanian citizenships didn't exist. Therefore, since applications for reinstatement of these citizenships can only be based on whether one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen, whoever is a descendant of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 will not be eligible.

In addition, it is highly important to remember that since borders in Europe were shifted once again during and after WW-II, one's eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor hailed. Horesh explains: Shifted borders resulted in cities changing nationalities, and that the resultant effect for descendants of Jews left Vilnius is that their application for Lithuanian citizenship will be declined whereas a similar



Adv. Avi Horesh is an Israeli attorney, who lived in Poland for seven years. Horesh is recognised in Israel as one of the leading lawyers in the field of reinstatement of European citizenship.

application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship may very well be approved! Horesh has an in-depth knowledge and a full understanding of European immigration laws.

Sephardi: This ad refers to all Jews of Sephardi heritage – Jews who arrived from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, as well as many descendants of Jews who arrived from Holland and the UK. Most descendants of Sephardi Jews (who were exiled 500 years ago) are eligible to reinstate Portuguese citizenship and, accordingly, an EU passport. If applicable, Adv. Horesh will apply for (on behalf of the applicant) an official certificate confirming such eligibility, on the basis of which, an application for Portuguese citizenship is most likely to be approved.

Horesh resides in Israel – a four-hour flight from Warsaw and Vilnius – enabling him to travel to Poland and Lithuania, as well as to Portugal, where he collaborates with local professionals who assist him in tracing documentation required for successful applications of reinstatement of European citizenship.

Adv. Horesh closely collaborates with professionals who assist him in tracing documentation in Europe required for successful applications of reinstatement EU citizenships.

I VISIT SOUTH AFRICA EVERY ONCE IN 3-5 MONTHS. MY NEXT VISIT IS PLANNED FOR AUGUST 2020. WHATSAPP ME ON +48-783-953 223, OR EMAIL ME ON ADV.AVI.N.HORESH@GMAIL.COM

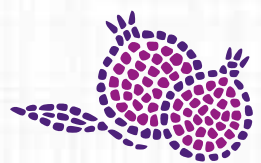
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ChevrahKadisha

Locked in and locked out under lockdown

TALI FEINBERG

As South Africa and other countries closed their airspace because of the global coronavirus pandemic, many South Africans were left stranded at airports or in foreign locations while tourists from other countries couldn’t leave our shores.

Darren Bergman, the Democratic Alliance shadow minister of international relations and co-operation, has been working around the clock to bring back South African citizens. He has been in communication with more than 1 000 South Africans stranded around the globe.

“We have had some serious cases of people running out of money, food, and shelter, literally living in airports that are closed, and some haven’t had access to their luggage for days,” he says.

Justine Segal was one of a large group of South Africans who became stranded at Heathrow Airport as South Africa’s national lockdown came

into effect. “We were travelling from Miami to South Africa with a connecting flight via London. We are a group of 47 people working with MSC Cruise Lines,” she says.

“Once we got to London, we realised that all our flights were cancelled, and we were stranded in Heathrow. I knew before I left Miami that my flight had changed from 15:55 to 07:30. I was overwhelmed with emotion, and decided to take my flight anyway, and hopefully catch another one.

“The flight I was booked on had changed its departure time in order to land in South Africa before lockdown. I was devastated at the thought of not being able to join my family. However, I was also grateful to be stranded with 47 friends and colleagues.



“We sat together in the airport building for 14 hours. Probably the worst part wasn’t knowing what was going to happen to all of us. The scariest aspect was being told we were on a flight to Ethiopia, knowing that there would be no connecting flights to South Africa.

“MSC was then able to arrange accommodation for us in London, and I was grateful to be allowed to leave the airport at 02:15. Airport officials weren’t sympathetic to our plight, but we were given a three-month visa.

“The kindness and support shown to us by others has been unbelievable. Lots of expats have come to our rescue with food, essentials, and even accommodation for people not part of the MSC crew. We are extremely grateful for all the help we have received thus far.”

She has no idea what will happen if she is stuck in London indefinitely. “I have to hope that MSC will continue to support us here, or that the South African government will be able to arrange a flight home. We are staying in a hotel. We have good accommodation, excellent food, and daily or weekly testing for the virus by checking our temperature. We talk about how lucky we are, as some of the other South Africans stuck here don’t have the best accommodation.

“My parents and two brothers are all at home in South Africa, and I hoped to be there with them during this difficult time. It’s the uncertainty and having no answers that’s most worrying. We all just want to be home.”

In a plea to the community, she says, “There are many South Africans stranded in many countries who are in the same position as I am. I hope the South African Jewish community is able to spread this story as far as possible in order to motivate some action.”

Capetonian Tyron Brivik is also stranded after going on holiday to Argentina with his girlfriend who is from Mexico. While she managed to return to her home country, he wasn’t able to secure a flight to South Africa before our lockdown came into effect.

“I’ve received no help from the South African embassy. When my girlfriend contacted her

embassy, it dropped everything to help her get home. The only assistance South Africa offered was to arrange accommodation for me at a hotel, but I would have to pay double what I am paying for an Airbnb.”

He has been staying in an apartment in Palermo since Argentina’s lockdown came into effect on 16 March. He went to a grocery store once, but had to wait in line for an hour and a half to enter the store because of social distancing rules. He now orders delivery of food, which is still allowed there. “The local rabbi has also been very helpful, bringing me challah for Shabbos, and asking if I need anything for Pesach.”

Brivik says being stranded is an expensive exercise. He spent astronomical amounts on three tickets home, which kept getting cancelled. He can’t earn a living, and still has to pay rent on his apartment back in Cape Town as well as for someone to care for his cat.

“I would love to get out of here as soon as possible – even if it means staying in Johannesburg, as I have family there. At the same time, I’m grateful that I’m in an apartment with everything I need.”

Meanwhile, there are Jewish foreign nationals stuck in South Africa. “I came to Cape Town on holiday from Sydney, where I was working on a temporary long-term visa, and I was stranded when Australia closed its borders to non-citizens. I was shocked when I realised I couldn’t get back,” says Jeremy Resnick. “Thankfully, I’m staying with my sister. If I can’t get back, I’ll consider working here as a doctor – I’m registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa.”

Regarding his commitments back in



Australia, he says, “I’m employed by the public healthcare system, so my position will be covered. There are some practical matters such as the expiry of my car lease, and I rent a property. The main worry is the separation from my long-term Australian girlfriend who has returned there.”

Peter Barnett was also visiting Cape Town on holiday from Los Angeles. “We called the call centre the day the lockdown was due to start as we were due to fly out about four hours before it started. We couldn’t check into our flight, and found that our change of booking hadn’t been ticketed even though we confirmed our reservations. There were no flights available after that.

“At first, we were in disbelief, which turned to irritation at the airlines for not being more communicative with us. The American consulate has been helpful in keeping us informed about our options. Luckily I’m from here, and semi-retired. I’m staying at my father-in-law, and my neighbours at home are keeping an eye on our house.”

Bergman has created a database and social-media forums for citizens who want to come home. Titled “HomeAwayFromHome”, the platform records where they are, whether they require anything urgently, and gives them a communication platform to talk to others in the same situation.

“We have seen people relieved finally to find fellow South Africans in the same situation as them. They are now able to network, share resources, and look after each other,” he says.

Bergman says the project wouldn’t be possible without the co-operation of DIRCO (the department of international relations and cooperation), and that all political parties are working closely on the matter without any political agenda. “We are trying to do everything within our power to bring as many people back as soon as possible,” he says. Late on Wednesday this week, Bergman told the SA Jewish Report that eight South Africans had arrived in the country from Dubai, and that there may be more such flights from other locations in future.

Life under lockdown in South Africa

Novel virus, new way of life

OPINION

MANDY WIENER



Counting to midnight lockdown like it was New Year’s Eve, I felt a sense of foreboding, of trepidation, like we were on the verge of something immense. It was anxiety, fear of the unknown. I later learnt that it was “anticipatory grief”, according to the foremost world expert on grief. Grief for our lives as we have come to know them.

None of us know what tomorrow will bring. But we do know that our lives are going to be irrevocably changed by this experience.

Locked down with my six and four-year-old, we have been taking it day by day. It’s been about trying to find the balance of what works for us, and stay sane in the process. Those of us who are trying to find a new normal, working at home while trying to keep children stimulated and alive are navigating through uncharted territory.

Are we doing enough? Are we doing the right thing? Are we overachieving? How does that make others feel? A schedule might work for my kids, but that doesn’t mean it works for yours. A day of TV and iPad might be what they need right now to deal with the anxiety. You do what you

gotta do to survive, and there should be no judgement about what that is.

For us, a schedule works. So we’ve been kicking the day off every morning at 08:00 with exercise, either training together outside or an episode of Cosmic Yoga, PE with Joe Wicks, or videos thoughtfully sent by their karate or dancing teachers.

Fortunately, the teachers at Sydenham Nursery School have put together the most amazing Pesach packs, so we’ve been crafting ourselves silly. There are also amazing resources online so days have been filled with science experiments as well as vintage board games, puzzles, sticker books, drawing shadow animals, and gardening. It’s non-stop. But to be honest, there have been hours and hours of iPad and TV time too.

Technology has also completely changed the game – we’ve been doing lessons via Zoom, baking challah with granny on Skype, and checking in with Bobs on Facetime. This year, we are doing a Seder by Zoom – my family is dispersed around the world so we’re each going to have ten minutes to “present” the Pesach story. A novel coronavirus forces us into novel ways

of thinking and acting, it seems.

I’ve also been trying to balance all this with fielding dozens and dozens of questions from people who don’t know who else to ask, posting regular updates and opinion pieces on where we are as



a country, and becoming a veritable information bureau. It’s a welcome distraction. I’m also trying to finish a book due out later this year – just for some added pressure. Social media can become a vortex of emotion, sucking you in for hours and spitting you out drained and tormented.

Right now, I’m grateful for my privilege. For having a home, a garden, a full fridge, a selfless helper, and family. It’s not going to be an easy 21 days for people

who don’t enjoy these privileges and who aren’t so fortunate. They are going to need help. I’m also grateful to all those who are on the frontline of this fight – in hospitals, laboratories, and on the streets.

Mental health is going to become a very real concern amongst us all over the next few weeks. People are already fraying at the edges. It’s the anxiety about the unknown that’s rocking us. The panic about a potential threat to our families that we can’t see. It has a devastating effect.

It’s a terrifying time. People are feeling bereft and scared. Shuls are closed. We can’t hug our friends. Our kids can’t play with their friends. Our sanity is slowly eroding.

Check on each other. Check on your strong friend. Ask your kids to share what the best part of their day was. We need to talk and share and do what we can to keep each other sane.

• Mandy Wiener is one of the country’s best known and most credible journalists and authors. She is also a multi award-winning reporter.

When past and future collide

OPINION

Our familiar and customary reading of the Haggadah with its description of the ten plagues this Pesach in such “unfamily-like” circumstances certainly made the COVID-19 scourge all the more relevant and terrifying. I, for one, have never had to experience a seder alone in all my 84 years!

Every day, we are informed of the rising numbers of those infected, and the tens of thousands worldwide who have lost their lives. The inevitable lockdown all over the world, so absolutely essential in these circumstances has, of course, had a severe effect on the global economy with the concomitant

escalation of unemployment. In addition, we all have felt the restrictions of the lockdown on our personal lives.

Technology has, fortunately, come to the rescue, with many companies and businesses maintaining operations with online computer communication and large numbers of employees working from home.

I look forward to the time when our students will return to their schools and to the ideal environment of interpersonal teacher-student contact. I’m certainly no Luddite, and welcome

the advantages that technology has introduced into education and its beneficial use in the classroom, but I still believe, perhaps idealistically, that true education isn’t just the imparting of factual knowledge and skills for independent thinking.

Essentially, it should be a human partnership in a shared learning experience where values and attitudes to life are exemplified and instilled.

As an “elderly” in the community, I remember the early fifties (of the last century!) when the dreaded poliomyelitis threatened societies all

over the world. At that point, no anti-polio vaccine had been developed, and as a result, thousands of children were maimed for life or, tragically, died. To meet this emergency, schools were closed for six weeks without any contact with our teachers, and we children wore home-made camphor bags around our necks to ward off the debilitating infection. I wonder how many of my contemporaries will still remember this to confirm the accuracy of my words.

We have all heard comments that in the face of this terrifying pandemic


that has affected all our lives so drastically and universally, we can look forward, when the virus has been controlled, to an era of greater co-operation internationally, of a decline in violence of all kinds, and of sensitivity to world issues in ecology. I sincerely hope so, though I have my doubts.

• *Elliot Wolf is the former headmaster of King David High School Linksfield, and the director of the King David Schools Foundation.*



ELLIOT WOLF

OPINION **MIKE ABEL**



Wake up and smell the hibiscus

That’s precisely what I did on day one. I walked into the garden, sipping my Nespresso Cosi Lungo, and noticed how quiet the streets were – in terms of sound, not sight. And then I saw lots of salmon coloured hibiscus on a bush at the end of my garden, so I walked over to examine them more closely. I was brought up to love plants, passed on by my parents and grandparents while growing up in Port Elizabeth.

We lived in a suburb called Walmer, and the gardens there are generally large and lush. The hibiscuses at the bottom of our garden were bright red and pink. I remember my mom used to pick the leaves when making a chocolate cake for one of their fancy dinner parties. She’d coat the leaves of the hibiscus with melted hot chocolate and leave them in the fridge to harden. She’d then carefully peel away the leaf and a perfect chocolate one would remain. And then she’d decorate her cake with lots of them. She was an amazing cook.

So, that’s how my day started. I share this story for one reason. A dramatisation of sensory deprivation, or at least the coming sense of it. I haven’t recalled my mom doing this leaf-making as an adult. It’s a memory of over 40 years. I similarly haven’t recalled the hibiscuses in my childhood garden in decades, or being aware of exactly which coffee I was drinking as I wandered across our lawn. I’m generally an observant person, but I was startled by my acute level of heightened awareness from the moment I was told about the lockdown.

For someone who has a keen sense of the world around them – visually particularly – and is, both to my own detriment and advantage, insatiably curious, the concept of 35 days in isolation is rather intimidating. You see, I’d only been out of confinement for a few days post a business trip to London and then a few days of skiing in Switzerland, cut short by the need to return. Little did I know as I left for my meetings in the United Kingdom that we’d be facing a rampant virus just a week later. There were less than 10 cases when I landed in the great city, yet I fastidiously wiped and swiped everything in close sight with alcohol swabs, being a self-confessed germaphobe my entire life.

After my walk in the garden, I got onto a three-hour, highly focused and productive video conference with the exco of M&C Saatchi Abel. There were no distractions for any of us, apart from my dachshund, Molly, being uncertain of whether she wanted to be in my study or not, and pawing the door both ways. A full day of virtual work and meetings followed, and then Shabbat supper with my wife and our three sons, while the rest of my wife’s family dialled in on a WhatsApp video and my father-in-law said kiddush for us, over the phone from Port Elizabeth.

A day full of learning, hard decisions, new experiences, old memories, and cherished family. We went to bed hopeful that the days to follow would remain calm, productive, and healthy.

• *Mike Abel is the founding partner and chief executive officer of MC Saatchi Abel.*



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It will get better, but in the meantime, stay home

OPINION

JACQUES WEBER



I’ll be writing to you live from my desk at home on day two of the lockdown if I’m not out on the road assisting someone.

I’m involved in several security-based organisations which are allowed to perform services during lockdown. If not on duty, I’m in self-isolation.

Fortunately work is keeping me busy – my professional job as well as keeping you up to date on [JWI](#).News, an area-based information page providing vital information along Cape Town’s Atlantic Seaboard and City Bowl. In the past 72 hours, the page has received more than 250 comments a day, which I try to answer. It has a view rate of about 10 000 a day.

As a former government representative (a ward councillor for the Democratic Alliance), I feel a responsibility to beg everyone to stay at home, as this is the course of action the government has chosen. This is a global crisis. We need to come together as a community worldwide and put our daily routine aside so that we can move through this faster. I know things will turn around, and we will be stronger for it.

I will focus on the things I can control. Cooking and baking, online gym sessions, staying healthy, keeping my community informed at all times, and surrounding myself with positive energy. I can’t control what’s going on in the world, but I can control where my thoughts go. Don’t use

your energy to worry, use it to believe.

We have already seen incredible acts of selflessness and community spirit. Those at the frontline are risking their own health to look after those in need. It gives me hope for humanity. I’m so proud of all those individuals who have become part of the solution. We are in this together. We are one. This will truly shift us into a kinder and more connected space.

My heart goes out to everyone who has been affected by this situation. In one way or another we are all affected. We don’t know how long it will last, or the extent of the impact. It’s tough. The COVID-19 outbreak has already changed the world, and it’s going to keep changing.

I visualise the world happy and healthy again, clinking glasses over lovely meals, hugging each other, kissing hello, walking on our beautiful beachfront, and watching the magnificent sunsets Cape Town has to offer. I realise just how precious life really is.

We’ve got this! We’re in this together! We’ll emerge from this moment stronger than ever. Stay strong, stay positive, and most importantly, don’t lose hope.

• *Jacques Weber is managing director of the WatchTower Group, a former ward councillor of Ward 54 (the Cape’s Atlantic Seaboard), and the founder of news portal JWI. News.*

The heartbeat of Leningrad

OPINION

HOWARD SACKSTEIN



It’s 08:45, and I awake a little disorientated in a darkened room. My alarm hasn’t startled me awake this morning, and it’s so nice to have a late lie-in on a weekday morning. I listen for the familiar sounds, a passing car, the distant sound of trucks on the highway, the townhouse gardeners dragging a hosepipe, the chatter of domestic workers as they hang washing on the line and go about their daily chores. But nothing ... stillness, silence, and suddenly a cold chill, and I fear I may be the only person still left alive. Am I the lonely figure of Will Smith and his dog walking through the desolate landscape of Times Square in the 2007 post-apocalyptic action thriller, I am Legend?

In 1941, the German army besieged the former Russian capital of Leningrad (now St Petersburg), cutting off its supplies and starving the city inhabitants into submission. One of the most brutal sieges in history lasted nearly three years and killed one and a half million of the city’s inhabitants.

During the siege, the Russian army installed 1 500 loudspeakers throughout the encircled city. Twenty-four hours a day, the speakers broadcast the monotonous sound of a metronome, a slow dull ticking pulse. When the city was under attack, the metronome warned inhabitants with a faster pace. Over time, the soothing sound of the metronome became known as the Heartbeat of Leningrad. The sound of a continuous heartbeat was an auditory symbol that the city was alive, its pulse could be heard beating throughout the neighborhoods.

The technology has changed, but the heartbeat continues.

I reach for my phone, it’s filled with WhatsApp

messages, emails, Zoom meetings requests, and the annoyance of Houseparty App notifications – yes, I know Deelan and Pranita are in a virtual room waiting for me to join. The silence is replaced by noise, and my life is filled with people and chatter, meeting after meeting, Zoom and GoogleHangouts, Skype and WhatsApp. Can you assist with landing rights for a plane bringing in supplies? We have access to N95 masks in China, who needs? There is a copper-based mask in Israel, have you heard about it? The regulator has published new rules for rapid antibody test kits, what shall we do? A month ago, I knew nothing about planes, or hand sanitizer, plastic bottles, or rapid testing kits ... My world has changed.

The SA Jewish Report is the heartbeat of our community and we continue to publish and distribute electronically and in hard copy. The thirst for connection within our community is strong. Our first medical Zoom panel attracted 1 147 participants, our comedy panel numbers are, as they say, for want of a better word, “going viral”.

I don’t yet have time for books, movies, or online courses. I haven’t got round to cleaning my study. Viktor Frankl taught us that survival is dependent on your ability to find meaning and purpose in your everyday life. I have no idea if the plane will land, if the test kits will arrive, if the personal protective equipment medical equipment will ever find its way to South Africa, but the fact that I tried allows me to get up, make my bed, and have a shave, because I will be darned if I land up looking like Tom Hanks taking to a basketball!

Immuno-compromised in a pandemic

OPINION

DANIELLE BITTON



I’m living with a compromised immune system in Cape Town during the coronavirus pandemic.

I’m 35 years old and on 10 December 2019, I was living my dream, playing the lead alternate role in an international tour of the musical *Evita* in China, when I found a lump in my breast. After a visit to a hospital in Guangzhou, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. I also performed in Wuhan shortly before the virus first broke out there.

I returned to Cape Town to find out that it was stage two, aggressive, and I had the BRCA2 gene. In the next month, I had a double mastectomy and expanders inserted. Two weeks afterwards, I had a CT scan which picked up irregular looking cells in my lymph nodes, and had an auxiliary lymph node clearance operation.

I was homebound, recovering from the two operations for about two months, and in considerable pain. I was blessed to have many visitors and family and friends help me out with food and essential items.

As far as food and essential supplies go, my brother has been going to the shops for me since my mother is also self-isolating due to asthma. If friends want to drop some food off for me, they put it outside my gate and can speak to me keeping at least two metres between us. I’m lucky that my neighbour has become a good friend, and we chat on our balconies – also two metres apart.

The only time I leave my apartment is to go to the hospital. I make sure to put on my “suit of armour” before I go: my face mask which has a filter (luckily I purchased it in China for pollution), latex gloves, sunglasses, and sometimes I wrap a scarf around my head and face. They are very strict about sanitising before you enter the building, and you are given a sticker that reads “screened”.

No visitors are allowed in the hospital and the chemo room, only patients with appointments and those in need of treatment. I drive myself to the hospital for blood tests and chemo, and park in the basement. I take the elevator all the way up to the 16th floor where the chemo room is located. Luckily, no one has entered the elevator with me on the way up so far, but the other day as I was coming down, I asked people waiting if they wouldn’t mind taking the next elevator. A bit of a diva move, I know, but drastic times call for drastic measures!

Even though the world has been turned upside down during this pandemic, I’m an optimist. I’m just so grateful to be alive, to take this time to do everything I wanted to but never had the time for: to learn, to create, to connect on a deeper level with family and friends, to appreciate the little things we take for granted. It reminds us that we are all in this together, we are all connected.

There is such power in that. All spiritual teaching is about a divine consciousness that unites us all. Maybe now we will not only see it, but feel it.

However, after I started chemotherapy on 12 March, I was advised not to go to public places, supermarkets, and pharmacies, and not to see family and friends, as my immune system was compromised and I was at greater risk of catching any illness. This was at the same time that coronavirus arrived in South Africa.

Not being able to hug my family has been challenging, especially when I started to lose my hair and had a severe panic attack. My mother and brother came over to shave my hair last Saturday, and I just had to hug them – it was all too much!

I felt very anxious before my second round of chemo, as the coronavirus numbers started rising and members of our community in my neighbourhood tested positive. Since the country went into lockdown, I’ve been advised to isolate myself completely.

On the whole, self-quarantine hasn’t been too bad for me as I’m lucky that I can channel my energy creatively into my music, DJing, singing, painting, and writing my blog, which has been therapeutic (you can read my story [www.thejourneywithin.co.za](#)).

• *Danielle Bitton is a singer, actress and DJ who has lived and performed around the globe.*

From cruise ship to quarantine

OPINION

RAYMOND SCHKOLNE



Towards the end of December 2019, my wife Sheryl and I left for a once in a lifetime five-month cruise to all seven continents.

When the virus was still primarily in Wuhan, a medical doctor named Margaret whom we had befriended on the ship said that this would spread like wildfire across the world. She asked about the implications of leaving the cruise. We all thought, of course, that this was ridiculous exaggeration.

Then the message came through that New Caledonia wouldn’t let our ship in. “Why?” we asked. “Is it overreacting?”

Well, New Caledonia imposed a strict maritime quarantine in 1918 which resulted in zero Spanish Flu-related deaths. This can be compared to Western Samoa, also in the South Pacific, which didn’t impose similar restrictions, and tragically lost

about 22% of its population.

Then Tonga and the Cook Islands refused us entry. Fortunately, arrangements were made to spend additional time in beautiful French Polynesia and Fiji.

Next, we were offered a new cruise route via Africa to Europe rather than via Asia and the Middle East, where too many countries were “closing down”. We had been to Africa! So, we chose to travel around Australia and New Zealand, visiting family and friends.

After a wonderful day in Port Vila, sailing the next day to Champagne Beach, also in Vanuatu, we were told that we were no longer allowed in. Vanuatu, a country whose economy depends on tourism, had shut its doors overnight!

The captain then announced that the cruise –

about halfway through – was cancelled, and we were now heading, full steam, for Australia – with a cyclone behind us. Three days through rough seas followed, and we wondered, “What if they don’t allow us to dock or to get off the ship?”

We anchored in the spectacular Sydney bay for two days, with family and friends just a few kilometres away, yet out of reach. With travelling long since off the radar, it was straight to the airport and onto one of the last flights back to South Africa. We will be reimbursed on a proportional basis for each day not sailed.

We are now under quarantine in our home in Cape Town. We are disappointed of course, and we would so love to hug our grandchildren again, but this is nothing close to the consequences for so many who are ill, and whose jobs or businesses

are lost or at risk. We are healthy with much to be thankful for, and we are focused on transforming the lockdown into as special an experience as it can be.

Sadly, Margaret was right, and we sit reflecting on how special our cruise experience was, and how grateful we are to be home at this time. We are thinking about the speed at which things have changed, humanity’s shared destiny, and the lesson of New Caledonia.

• *Raymond Schkolne is retired. He has been deeply involved in the South African Jewish community his entire life, including as co-chair of Limmud Cape Town 2019, and executive committee member of the Jewish Democratic Initiative.*

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Caring in the time of Corona

NIA MAGOULIANITI-MCGREGOR

A number of caring people in the community are taking Winston Churchill’s words, “Never let a good crisis go to waste” to heart.



Alan Browde

SA Harvest: Alan Browde and Gidon Novick

SA Harvest, a food-rescue organisation, run by Alan Browde and Gidon Novick, is planning to deliver about 100 000 meals a week to the vulnerable during lockdown. “This is a national emergency,” Browde says.

Browde, who sold a marketing services company two years ago, launched SA Harvest in Cape Town in 2019. He introduced it to Johannesburg just a few weeks ago. Based on a concept started by his childhood friend, Ronni Kahn, in Australia in 2004, the organisation’s philosophy is to “rescue pre-expired quality food that would have gone to a landfill, and deliver it to people in need”.

Since its launch, more than 50 000 meals have been rescued.

Even with these processes in place, the few hours before lockdown last week were a “hurried scramble” to rescue five tons of food from airline catering companies, restaurants, bakeries, and delis who were about to close their doors and kitchens at midnight.

What’s unique to SA Harvest is that food is collected in refrigerated trucks – “we don’t break the cold chain” – which means perishables such as protein-rich fish or yoghurt can form part of the meals. But with lockdown, says Browde, the organisation has had to change its model. “With restaurants and bakeries closed, we are on a huge emergency funding drive to buy food.”

Meals are distributed to key beneficiaries including the Service Dining Room in Cape Town and the Afrika Tikkun Phuthadijhaba Centre in Alexandra, Johannesburg.

“Thirteen million South Africans experience hunger every day, while 10 million tons of food goes to waste every year. Though the juxtaposition of those two figures is mind boggling already, hunger is expected to worsen over the lockdown period,” Browde says.

Browde says the organisation works strictly on donations.

“While sitting in lockdown in a big house, many people have realised how hard it must be for those who are food vulnerable. Watching people and corporates give love to their fellow human beings has been incredibly uplifting.”

Contact: Chief Executive Alan Browde on 082 651 1313 or Chairperson Gidon Novick on 083 631 5397

FeedSA: Romi Levenstein and Genevieve Solomons

As soon as the COVID-19 crisis hit the country, Romi Levenstein and Genevieve Solomons had a solemn conversation. “We knew we had to start preparing for it.”

Childhood friends, Levenstein and Solomons have been running non-profit organisation FeedSA, which feeds about 6 500 people a day, for six years. They set up creches and feeding schemes. Beneficiaries include community centres, homes for the mentally and physically challenged, a hospice, and elderly citizens.

As the country went into lockdown, Levenstein and Solomons launched a dedicated campaign called Kunye (which means “together” in Xhosa) – the COVID-19 action plan to raise funds as an extension of FeedSA. Joining them was a third friend, Roxy Priebatsch.

They have raised R600 000 in 10 days.

Included in the support they offer Alexandra residents is a health-rescue kit. “For R480, we can help a family of four for two weeks with soap, canned food, personal sanitary items, and cleaning materials,” Levenstein says.

“These are people who could not afford to stockpile, and who live in overcrowded conditions. We believe it will prolong periods of self-isolation while also helping them financially.”

“We have distributed packs to more than 500 households already and the next 1 000 are in the process of being ordered for packing and delivery.”

Contact: Romi Levenstein 072 378 2554

CoronaCare: Daniel Harrisberg, Kaeli Epstein, Olivia Krok, Kim Harrisberg, Matthew Garrun, Kim Garrun, Robyn Garrun, and Kaylee Kantor

Within a week of Prime Minister Cyril Ramaphosa’s first speech to the nation about the corona crisis on 15 March, Daniel Harrisberg and a few concerned friends had established a nationwide initiative with more than 10 strategic partners. It has raised more than R200 000 to help needy communities across the country.

“With so many people living in informal settlements and the high rates of pre-existing medical conditions such as HIV and TB, we realised the country is highly vulnerable to this epidemic. We asked ourselves, ‘What difference can we make?’”

When the group first launched CoronaCare, it was about raising funds and collecting physical donations. “Our strategy has changed to a more collaborative platform connecting with concerned citizens and corporates who might want to share their time, assets, and resources.”

“We’re trying to find the sweet spot,” says Harrisberg, “the charities and grassroots organisations who have fallen through the cracks and don’t receive help from big charities, yet we are still able to vet accurately.”

“For example, if early childhood development centres aren’t registered with the department of social development, they don’t receive funding. Also, recyclers aren’t considered an essential service so need assistance. We discovered a group of about 350 collectors who are homeless and squatting.

“Also, now that the schools are closed, where will all these children learn? They don’t have iPads, books, or crayons at home.” CoronaCare has collaborated with



CoronaCare

partner LivCurious to donate 100 boxes of educational materials and cleaning products to the families of those who attend the Masibulele Educare Centre in Khayelitsha.

Contact: Daniel Harrisberg 072 378 7396

The Lockdown Collection: Lauren Woolf, Kim Berman, and Carl Bates

When the country went into lockdown, Lauren Woolf, the founder of Mrs Woolf, a strategic marketing consultancy, along with Kim Berman, the executive director of Artist Proof Studio, a community-based printmaking centre in Joburg, and Carl Bates, a global entrepreneur, became concerned about the prospect of artists losing their livelihoods.

“Artists are a national treasure,” says Woolf. “They are the record keepers, beauty creators, thought provokers, empathetic visionaries, political disruptors, and human inspirers.”

They came up with a creative concept to make difference. Called The Lockdown Collection, they envisaged a series of 21 artworks to commemorate and record these extraordinary times to raise money for vulnerable artists. Its theme: 21 days, 21 artists, 21 impacts.



Lauren Woolf



Kim Berman

“Every day of lockdown on social media, we upload a different work from a South African artist that reflects their thoughts, feelings, or observations of their lockdown experience.”

These are available to be sold or reserved on any day. “It’s not exactly an auction, but an online sale.” Participating artists include Penny Siopis and Diane Victor.

All artworks are underwritten by an individual or corporate funder to the value of R25 000, and are open for bidding by other art lovers. “So far, we have raised R300 000,” she says. “We went to businesses and individuals who we knew appreciate art, and we’ve been blown away by their generosity.”

All proceeds will go to the president’s Solidarity Fund which helps vulnerable people in South Africa (25%), a Vulnerable Visual Artist Fund (60%), as well as to the participating artist (15%).

“One of our offerings is from sculptor Thabiso Mohlakoana who has always been drawn to the plight of the illegally traded pangolin – a possible source of the coronavirus outbreak.” The piece, a pangolin bowl, will be fired, painted, and completed when the lockdown is over.

Contact: Lauren Woolf 082 782 3419



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Infections will soar, ‘but don’t panic’, say doctors

JORDAN MOSHE

“Don’t panic when the numbers [of COVID-19 infections] shoot up to 3 000 or 4 000 in coming days,” Dr Anton Meyberg told an audience of more than 900 people on the *SA Jewish Report* webinar on Sunday night.

“That doesn’t mean the lockdown isn’t working, it’s because we’re waiting for results. Lockdown can still be effective in helping us flatten the curve.”

Medical experts Meyberg, Dr Daniel Vorobiof, Dr Sheri Fanaroff, and psychologist David Abrahamson addressed hundreds of questions from viewers about the coronavirus pandemic.

“Our situation isn’t hopeless,” said

many results not yet confirmed. Nevertheless, he stressed the need to avoid hysteria.

He recommended getting a “flu shot”.

Fanaroff, a family physician, agreed, saying there were two types of vaccine available this year, but both are equally effective at combatting seasonal flu.

“Your system can be more compromised if you have both regular flu and coronavirus,” she said.

“Pharmacies have the flu vaccine in stock, and certain doctors are waiting for them. The health minister has announced that they will be in short supply, and suggested that we prioritise those who are older or immune-compromised, but everyone should have one if they can.”

considered more at risk under the circumstances.

For this reason, Vorobiof, an Israel-based oncologist who has piloted the *Belong.Life* support application for those with cancer, has set out to offer additional support to cancer patients afflicted by COVID-19.

“A few weeks ago, we thought we should create a group for cancer patients with the virus, and the results have been overwhelming,” he said. “Cancer is a disease that affects the immune system, so patients are asking a lot of questions.

“Cancer patients are at higher risk not just of contracting the disease, but are also at risk of a more severe course of the disease. It’s important for our patients to follow health regulations,” Vorobiof said.

scans, Vorobiof said that these should be delayed if a person has undergone one recently, pointing out that it’s better to delay them and consult doctors remotely where necessary.

Similarly, any visits to doctors or hospitals in person should be avoided. Should you suspect that you have the virus, it’s imperative that you call your general practitioner before going anywhere. Only those who have good reason to be tested based on possible exposure and symptoms will be tested, according to the medical experts.

“Please don’t go for testing yourself,” said Meyberg. “There is a backlog, and we can’t cope. You could be tested only after discussion with a practitioner, and if you display all the symptoms. Don’t self-medicate or self-diagnose, nor search the internet for where to get tested. Call us doctors or the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).”

He and Fanaroff stress that no home testing kits are available, and online offers of such products shouldn’t be entertained. Similarly, advice and tips offered on social media for preventing or curing the virus need to be treated with some scepticism and plenty of common sense.

“Silver spray, hot liquids, and hair dryers do nothing against the coronavirus,” said Vorobiof. “This is nonsense. They have no proven efficacy. Nothing can really modulate your immune system, so vitamins don’t really help in this situation. Proper hygiene and good sense is what we’re recommending.”

Abrahamson, a respected psychologist, said that caring for your mental well-being is equally important. He emphasised the need to be conscious of the toll the virus is taking on our emotions and minds.

“It’s understandable that people are anxious,” he said. “We thrive on predictability and consistency, neither of which are present in this situation. We can’t follow routines or do what we are used to doing.”

To compound the problem, we are unable to interact with other people, a typical response in times of crisis. It’s therefore essential that we take time out to get to grips with the emotional upheaval, setting aside at least a few minutes to be alone where possible.

“Take time away from your kids to recharge,” said Abrahamson. “We are now spending more time with our families, but that doesn’t mean not having your own space. Take time out from social media and news as well.”

Establishing a daily routine can also help ease anxiety, he said, because it adds an element of consistency to daily life. “Don’t feel like you’re on holiday. Structure gives us consistency. Still, remember to be flexible about it – don’t follow a routine like a prison timetable.”

As to whether we should expect the lockdown to last longer than 21 days, Vorobiof and Meyberg agree that time will tell.

“We have 18 days of lockdown left,” said Meyberg. “We won’t cure the virus in 18 days, but want to slow things down and are hoping for an improvement.”

Vorobiof agrees. “Those who want to know when it will end might not like the answer they get. Israel is already in its third week of isolation, and I think we will still be here after Pesach. The numbers continue climbing, and we need to see them flatten before anything changes.

“There’s still a long way to go. We’re not sure how long, but we need to be ready to wait.”



Meyberg, a pulmonologist. “We can’t panic, but must be informed, work together, and find a way forward.”

Meyberg said that the anticipated jump in numbers would be partly due to the fact that our laboratories are lagging with testing, with

A flu vaccine doesn’t render you more susceptible to the virus, and should be had by everyone, irrespective of age or existing medical conditions. This includes cancer patients and those who are recovering from cancer, both of whom are

“Not all cancer patients are compromised. There are those who haven’t received treatment for a while who are in a good immune condition. Those who recently had radiation or chemo are at higher risk.”

Regarding elective treatment and

Be prepared to ‘pump the brakes’ on social distancing

OPINION

DR DANIEL ISRAEL



I remember receiving two WhatsApp videos eight weeks ago. The first was a video of an horrific animal market in a city I had never encountered in Wuhan, China. The amateur footage of snakes and bats being eaten alive was bantered about, which “justified” the second video of random Chinese citizens dropping dead from a new disease called coronavirus.

“If you eat live creatures, that’s what will happen to you,” one of my patients remarked. There was little concern though. These events were all only in “Wuhan”, an exotic place governed by a strange government and a different reality, unrelated to real life in Johannesburg.

Today, eight weeks later, I carefully use my elbows to open my office door in a quick dash from my practice to my car. It’s home time, the end of another day of frantic calls about chesty symptoms. My goal has been to differentiate the common anxiety-stricken from the occasional real patient.

Over this short period of time, 775 748 people in more than 150 countries have contracted the SARS-COV-2 virus. A total of 37 109 people have died from the disease, COVID-19, that it causes. Beyond the statistics, worldwide economies have plummeted, unemployment rates have soared, and healthcare systems have crashed. At home in South Africa, the rand has hit its

lowest value, air travel has been stopped altogether, and all South African borders are closed.

So how will this unprecedented crisis end?

“By implementing social distancing, we are preventing the population from being exposed to this potentially serious disease.”

Pandemics only have three possible endings. The first is that all countries are able to isolate and trace their cases, and bring the disease to heel, as in the case of SARS 2003. However, given the spread of the corona pandemic, this endpoint is unlikely.

The second possibility is “herd immunity”. This is the resistance developed to a contagious disease when enough people have become immune to it. Considering the contagiousness of coronavirus, two thirds of the world’s population would need to be infected to act as a firebreak and stop this virus. The United Kingdom initially advocated a herd immunity approach,

and then backtracked in view of its dire consequences and the expected loss of human life.

The third is vaccination. Vaccination is 12-18 months away. Let’s explore why. Two weeks ago, the United States National Institute of Health already started its first clinical testing phase of a coronavirus vaccine. That’s a world record of only 63 days from typing the viral genome to injecting vaccine material into someone’s arm. But this is only the first step. The next challenge will be to determine effectiveness, measure whether the vaccine causes disease, determine the effective dose, and then to orchestrate mass production and distribution. This takes 18 months minimum.

So what in the meantime?

By implementing social distancing, we are preventing the population from being exposed to this potentially serious disease. We are “buying” time to develop a vaccine. Fewer new cases over time (a “flattened curve”) mean fewer critical cases in general, and fewer deaths.

Realistically, this is a far longer process than 21 days. We need to protect the capacity of our healthcare system. However, a full year of social isolation would break our society, both economically and spiritually. “The only way not to overwhelm the critical-care capacity of hospitals is to ‘pump the brakes’,” says Brenda Goodman,

writing for medical website Medscape. She is correct, and she is referring to intermittently tightening and relaxing social isolation in the future, similar to pumping the brakes to get a skidding vehicle to stop. These ebbs and flows in social distancing may be the picture on our horizon for some time.

What to expect in the short run? South Africa is behind in testing. As of 30 March 2020, there are 1 326 positive coronavirus cases in South Africa, and there are many more positive untested cases. Testing is pivotal to track the disease. As testing becomes more widely available, the numbers will spike drastically. Testing will raise numbers far quicker than social distancing will drop them. We can expect the news to look much worse before it looks much better.

But in spite of the reports you will hear of thousands of increased cases, and in spite of the deaths that will inevitably occur in our limited healthcare system, the preventative interventions will prevail. Thousands of lives will be saved. I believe regular daily life will ensue, and COVID-19 will become a manageable seasonal “flu”.

When SARS-COV-3 hits one day, the world will be far better prepared.

• *Dr Daniel Israel is a family medical practitioner, who has been practicing for several years in Johannesburg.*

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Vaccinate at all costs, mom says, after son dies of measles

NICOLA MILTZ

A heartbroken Johannesburg mother who recently lost her only child to measles is dumbfounded how a preventable disease ended her son's life after he overcame years of ill health.

Ruth Kusner Beinart, 48, went to shul on Purim to hear the reading of the Megillah, when she answered a call from her beloved son in hospital saying that his blood-test results revealed that he had measles.

"Measles was the last thing we expected," she told the SA Jewish Report this week.

She immediately dashed home to check the booklet containing his medical immunisation history, knowing he was up to date with all his vaccinations.

Dylan Beinart a Grade 11 student at King David Victory Park, turned 18 on 15 February.

A month later, he passed away not from complications caused by a liver transplant performed years earlier or from the removal of his colon in January, but from an illness that's entirely preventable.

"He was doing so well. He was healing beautifully and coping with his new reality of living without a colon. Then suddenly, he got sick. We thought it was his liver," she said.

When Dylan was five, he was diagnosed with primary sclerosing

cholangitis, a long-term progressive disease of the liver and gall bladder.

At the age of 14, he had a liver transplant.

Ruth said last year was particularly difficult for Dylan, as doctors tried everything to save his colon, causing him to become severely immuno-

remove his colon.

Dylan fought hard to make it home in time for his 18th birthday, a goal the determined youngster set for himself.

He was recovering well at home, his immunity was improving, and he took extra precautions, only going out a few times to the shops with permission from his healthcare providers, said Ruth this week. Life was returning to 'normal', and things were looking good.

Then out of nowhere, he contracted measles, a disease she laments shouldn't exist today.

"It's unbelievable to hear of someone dying of measles in this day and age when there is a vaccination to prevent it," she said.

On Facebook, a distraught Ruth blamed her son's death on "anti-vaxxers" – those who choose not to vaccinate their children.

According to the World Health Organization, the measles vaccination prevented an estimated 23.2 million deaths between 2000 and 2018. Sadly, there were more than 140 000 measles deaths reported globally in 2018 in spite of the availability of a safe and effective vaccine.

Parents worldwide are opting to forgo vaccinations for their children, citing alleged medical risks including autism as the potential consequences of being vaccinated. There is also the belief that since these diseases have been eliminated, there's no need for

vaccinations.

Professor Barry Schoub, a retired virologist, the emeritus professor of virology at the University of the Witwatersrand, and the founder of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), said failing to vaccinate children was irresponsible.

"Would that we had a vaccine for SARS-CoV-2 right now! And yet we do have a very effective and very safe vaccine against measles. It defies belief that in this day and age, there are still parents who believe totally discredited myths and misinformation about vaccines generally and measles in particular. Parents who believe these mischievous conspiracy theories are either ignorant or negligent, and are guilty of endangering the health – even the lives – of their children as well as other children who may be especially vulnerable because of underlying ill health."

The global incidence of measles dropped dramatically once the vaccine became widely available. But measles control was set back by the work of Andrew Wakefield, which attempted to link the MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) vaccine to autism. Wakefield's study was debunked, causing him to lose his medical license.

According to the NICD, scientific evidence shows that the measles vaccine doesn't cause autism or ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), and that all children should be vaccinated at a young age.

There is no legal requirement to vaccinate your child if you live in South

Africa. However, most South African schools ask for proof of immunisation on enrolment.

Ruth described Dylan as a "quirky, intelligent, smart kid who had an incredible sense of humour".

"He loved gaming, computers, playing guitar, and cooking," she said.

"He was a curious child, very inquisitive, and knowledgeable. I joked that I always needed to sleep with one eye open because he was always up to something.

"Dylan never moaned a day about being ill," she said. "He just got on with things. I never wanted him to be known as 'Dylan the sick kid' or to be defined by his illness. He got on with his life."

His school described him as "a truly inspiring young Parker".

In a tribute to her friend, Dina Kay said, "In spite of everything he was going through, he was always jolly, always smiling, and always asking how others were doing."

Ruth's message is to immunise your children, and "stay home" during this intense time of COVID-19.

"It's a virus just like measles, and by going out for only a few minutes, it could prove fatal for someone like Dylan. Also, it's responsible to vaccinate your children."

Dylan wanted to be an organ donor, and was growing his hair to donate to cancer patients.

"Measles ended this dream. It's such a waste of a beautiful life. It just isn't right, especially after all he went through."



Dylan Beinart and his grandmother, Maureen Kusner, celebrate his 18th birthday in February

compromised from heavy medication.

In December, however, he was well enough to go to Habonim camp with his friends, which he loved.

By late January, his body was taking strain, and the doctors were forced to



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Zooming into Zaida

NICOLA MILTZ

For the past two weeks amidst the mayhem of the COVID-19 pandemic, Rabbi Yossi Hecht of Chabad Sandton, has gathered all his beloved grandchildren – a lot more than a handful – into his living room for a mini Pesach seder session.

They come from all over to listen to his Pesach words of wisdom. Every second night, in the comfort of his home or on his patio, he surrounds himself with children ranging in age from one week old to 20 years old. There are between 30 to 45 people at any given time, and moms and dads join in the conversation.

It’s a raucous affair at times. Some kids break out with gymnastics routines, while others simultaneously do homework assignments. Some eat breakfast while others are getting ready for bedtime, one or two break out into song while others eat dinner.

The sessions take place over Zoom, the video calling application, and includes grandchildren who live in New York, Connecticut, Florida, Israel, Cape Town, and Johannesburg.

“I’m blessed to have children who live in many places, and I thought that while everyone was in isolation, it would be a good time to talk about the Haggadah,” said Hecht who has been in lockdown with his wife Raisy since last Thursday night.

Despite having lost his brother this week to coronavirus and Raisy having lost her uncle to the disease, they all Zoom into Zaida at about 18:00 local time. This brings them comfort.



Despite having lost his brother this week to coronavirus and Raisy having lost her uncle to the disease, they all Zoom into Zaida at about 18:00 local time. This brings them comfort.

“It is a very difficult time. Necessity is the mother of invention. Thankfully we are always in touch with our family, but now we can all get together at the same time and connect virtually,” he said.

“This way the cousins get to see each other. A few ask questions, a few answer questions. I encourage everyone to do this if they can. It creates a certain vibe, a certain spirit, which is nice before Pesach.”

“It’s a positive twist on a negative situation. We can all sit at home and mope because most of us will be alone for the seder. To be alone isn’t nice, but at least this way, we can share some good times before Pesach,” he said.

Last week, the Zoom session moved to the Marais Road Shul in Cape Town for a baby naming ceremony following the birth of Rabbi Hecht’s youngest grandchild, Rivka Dina.

Rabbi Hecht’s son, Rabbi Pini Hecht of the Marais Road Shul, named his baby in front of 100 “Zoomers”.

According to Rabbi Hecht’s daughter, Esther-Leah Levin, it was an emotional, moving ceremony.

“My brother, Pini, and Rabbi Dovid Wineberg were the only two present. About 100 people joined via live stream on Zoom. Even Chani and the baby made an appearance. It was so cute to see my newborn niece on screen. It was emotional and beautiful, a ray of light in these dark



days.” Pini told the *SA Jewish Report* it was “heart-warming at such short notice to be able to share the *simcha* [celebration] with so many people during this time in our lives”.

Hecht said he intends to continue his Passover sessions, and hopes to continue the tradition of connecting virtually once the pandemic is under control and things return to normal.

“It’s not a shiur in the

traditional sense, rather it’s an enriching learning experience, and it’s mostly about coming together as a family.”

“Who is the author of the Haggadah?” and “How many times is Moses mentioned in the Haggadah?” are some examples of the questions posed.

“Some know the answers, some don’t. I try to challenge them. Doing it this way makes it easy to talk with multiple people at once, and we can all connect during this very difficult time,” Hecht said.

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No time to rest on laurels for award-winning humanitarian

NICOLA MILTZ

South African-born social entrepreneur Naomi Stuchiner has been too busy to bask in the glory of winning the Israel Prize for Lifetime Achievement. She is the founder of the impressive Beit Issie Shapiro, an organisation dedicated to improving the quality of life of children with disabilities. Filled with “tremendous gratitude” for the award – the ultimate recognition by Israel of her achievements – Stuchiner told the *SA Jewish Report* that she worries about children and their families who have been in lockdown due to the

outbreak of coronavirus. “All this is under the shadow of COVID-19, which has had a severe impact on the children and their parents,” she said via WhatsApp from her home in Ra’anana. Since the rampant spread of

the disease, Beit Issie has been working tirelessly to help parents cope with their new reality of being under lockdown with disabled children.

“Families have been traumatised, it’s overwhelming,” she said. “We are in crisis-management mode. There are 150 children at home with their parents all finding themselves without their usual daily routine. We are developing support programmes for families.”

Stuchiner, 72, has been a social worker for more than 40 years and has been widely credited for spearheading revolutionary changes in the field of disability in Israel.

Born in Johannesburg, she learnt from a young age the importance of social responsibility. “My late father, Issie Shapiro, was one of the founders of Selwyn Segal,” she said.



“Each one of us has the ability to make the world a better place. The last 40 years has shown me that we can all be an enabling force for change.”

He was passionate about improving the lives of children born with disabilities and their parents, whose options were so limited at the time. “He had a good friend whose daughter had physical and mental disabilities. In those days, there were no services for people with disabilities in Johannesburg, and

my father decided to do whatever he could to help. “He had a vision of a society in which all people have equal opportunities for growth and to contribute to their community. His dream was to bring about a change in Israel for people with disabilities,” Stuchiner said this week. “When he passed away in 1980, my family and I, who had all made aliyah, were determined to carry out his mission.”

And so Beit Issie Shapiro was born. This world leading organisation has had an impact on thousands of lives through the innovative development and provision of treatment, advancement of rights, and most

importantly, by bringing about “a change in societal attitudes”. “We have a number of very successful collaborations with organisations in numerous countries including Bellavista in Johannesburg and Afrika Tikkun,” she said. Although Stuchiner has lived in Israel for decades, she still speaks with a strong accent.

“Once a South African always a South African,” said the committed humanitarian who matriculated from King David Linksfeld and went on to study social work at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). She enjoys telling the story of how she landed up in Israel. “I met my Israeli husband, Tuvia, when he came to South Africa when I was a student at Wits. He came on safari to South Africa, and I was the *wildechaya* (wild animal) he took back with him.”

After graduating in 1970, she married him and made aliyah. Stuchiner established Tel Aviv municipality’s community unit in the Hatikva neighbourhood. She later helped establish Israel’s first community mental-health unit at the Shalvata psychiatric hospital. Beit Issie Shapiro was her next step, and after 40 years, the organisation reaches out to 500 000 children and adults with disabilities as well as professionals in Israel and abroad.

Today, Stuchiner is founding president of the organisation, consulting to staff, and representing the organisation on various public committees. “Everyday something excites me, and I have a ‘wow’ moment,” she said.

“Each one of us has the ability to make the world a better place. The last 40 years has shown me that we can all be an enabling force for change. I experience such joy when I watch our children thrive. One of ours who started in the nursery school at the age of three went on to have his Barmitzvah and recently got married under a chuppah at the age of 25. The children and

their families have taught me the true meaning of courage and determination.” She said that Beit Issie Shapiro has been the forerunner of innovative therapies, changing attitudes in society, initiating legislation to protect the rights of people with disabilities, and is making contributions in the field of research and training that are influencing practice globally.

“I’m grateful to the dedication of our committed supporters and highly-professional staff. Through them, I believe my father’s legacy has been nurtured and developed.” Supporting families during lockdown is a major concern, so, while Stuchiner feels “truly honoured” to have been awarded the Israel Prize for lifetime achievement, she has her work cut out for her.

Torah a treasure trove for the feminine

MIRAH LANGER

“The changing of the world starts at home – and it starts between the spouses,” asserts Rebbetzin Tamar Taback, a pioneer in women’s Torah study. It’s a reflection which takes on a new poignancy as the world returns to the home as a haven during the COVID-19 pandemic. Taback’s focus is the interrogation of Jewish femininity. “As we approach the times of Moshiach [the Messiah] there is a predicted and undeniable rising of feminine energy.” Yet, conventionally, the way Jewish femininity and its association with the domestic realm has been interpreted can make it seem a “lesser” entity. “It’s ironic, because Judaism has always respected its women, but suddenly, after feminism, Judaism was put on the back foot because of the feminist movement and its claims of ‘Why are the women in the kitchen, and why can’t they read from the Torah, and why is there a *mechitza* [room divider for men and women at religious functions]? Why don’t they put on *tefillin* [phylacteries]?’

“As a Jewish woman, that’s going to affect your relationship with G-d because maybe you’re going to think you aren’t loved in the same way.” However, notes Taback, who is also a musician, artist, and the mother-of-seven, “just because the world doesn’t appreciate something, it doesn’t mean it isn’t intrinsically beautiful”. “The world doesn’t validate motherhood, but that doesn’t mean it’s not the holiest thing you could do. Just because something is put in the foreground or given high salaries, it doesn’t mean that’s where fulfilment is.” For Jewish women, there is no one-size-fits-all policy of how to develop their sense of spirituality. However, what there is, said Taback, is the Torah’s great depth of commentary on femininity. It’s this source which Taback has made it her life’s mission to unpack as the founder of Nexus, an online-platform for Torah learning for women around the world. Taback, who is Johannesburg-born and based, grew up in St Louis in the United States. Born into a family that didn’t start out as religious, her parents gradually took on Orthodoxy as she entered into her teenage years. As her parents embarked on their religious journey, Taback said she, too, sought her own particular path

within this sphere, specifically in understanding her role as a Jewish woman. She found resonance within the mystical realm of Torah teaching. “I had this thirst. It was really uncommon for a woman to be so interested in the mystical tradition.” She remembers as revelatory Rabbi Akiva Tatz’s book, *Living Inspired*, and a lecture at the Neve seminary in Israel about the sun and the moon. “I started to understand that the feminine and masculine are two sides of the same coin of the universe – intrinsically, there’s no preference between one or the other.” “The world is struggling, people are struggling. So many women cut off one part of themselves or the other. The first step is to come back to basics, claim Jewish femininity, and find its

through all our lives.” Now is the time, posits Taback, that women need to support each other. “We are ashamed of struggling. Even though so many of us are having so many of the same struggles, we don’t share them.” She hopes her digital platform, which allows Jewish women to collaborate across the world, will facilitate this. Taback suggests that when women develop their sense of spiritual femininity, it will also enrich their connections with men. “Divorce rates are high, and happy marriages are rare. In this reality, there is a lot to a woman having a strong spiritual self-definition. If she wakes up her spiritual being, she has respect for herself; she has compassion for others. She will act differently from a woman who feels disempowered; she will show up differently in her marriage.” Furthermore, as important as it is for women to embrace spiritual femininity, it’s equally important for Jewish men to explore their masculinity. “Just like there’s traditional femininity, there’s traditional masculinity – the idea of the macho, the giver, the strong provider.” While this is a role that feels fundamental for many men, there also needs to be space for them to express vulnerability. “Men also want to be able to be emotional, empathic, and nurturing.” Taback said the mistake often made is to try and promote equality between the sexes as sameness. “However, a wise woman knows how to heighten difference in order to enhance her partner.” Nevertheless, both masculinity and femininity are about spiritually complementing each other. They’re both coming a little closer to the centre, to find a new kind of harmony.”

Taback’s newest online learning series uses a study of the women of the Torah as the springboard for spiritual self-exploration. “Take our matriarchs for example: when you light Shabbos candles and you say, ‘Sarah, Rivka, Rachel’... it seems abstract. After all, who were these women? What were their marriages like? How did they mother? What was their relationship to G-d? “Well, when you start to learn the texts, you discover that they were outrageous women! They weren’t traditional, they were totally ‘calling the shots’. It’s paradigm-busting. “You realise that these biblical women are talking to us right now.”



spirituality. “It’s not an easy thing to do in today’s world, especially if you’re a highly creative, highly ambitious, highly intelligent woman. How then do you balance your maternal instinct with your desire for a career? “That balance is elusive, and you’re constantly course-correcting. It becomes about giving yourself permission to engage with your spiritual needs and identity.” Taback, who has been teaching Torah to women for almost two decades, said there was a real hunger for this from women across all ages and levels of religious affiliation. “What they have in common is that they are aspiring and evolving. Each woman is living out the story of femininity in her way. There are these motifs from the Torah that are threading



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Closing doors, opening hearts and minds

OPINION

RABBI YOSSEI CHAIKIN

“As for you, you shall not leave the entrance of the house.” (Exodus 14, 22)

“Hashem will pass over the entrance, and He will not allow the destroyer to enter your homes to smite.” (Exodus 14, 23)

Ever since that first Passover back in Egypt, we have gathered in our homes to commemorate that fateful night on the eve of the exodus, and to celebrate our concomitant freedom. As tradition has it, we start the seder with the famous *Ma Nishtana* (How different is this night from all other nights?)

But this year, as we prepare for this special night, the foremost question on our mind is: how different will this Pesach be from all other Passovers of our life?

Our seder will not be preceded by a shul service to set the tone for the evening. That will be missed, but the focus of the Pesach celebration is actually our homes. We like to compartmentalise our Judaism: when we want to practice our religion and connect to Hashem, we enter the synagogue; once we come home and close the door, we want to be just us, free to live our life as we wish out of the public eye.

Just like the first seder back in Egypt had to happen in each respective home, the locale of all subsequent Pesach observances is the Jewish home, where families gather to observe the rituals.

With lockdown now in effect, our focus this year is going to be on our immediate family only. No extended family, no guests. Not the large social events that we are accustomed to. For a community that measures the quality of a seder by the quantity of people we manage to seat around our tables, this is truly painful. It’s a pain we are all going to experience. I feel deeply for the many who will be totally alone on that night.

The silver lining is that, this year, Pesach can’t slip into a mere social event. We have a golden opportunity that we shouldn’t miss: to truly explore the theme of freedom, what spiritual slavery means in contemporary terms, and the ultimate redemption of the future.

On the theme of future redemption, the prophet speaks of the painful lead-up to this era, known as the “birth pangs of Messiah”.

“Go my people, enter your rooms and close your door behind you, hide for a brief moment, until the wrath has passed. (Isaiah 26,20)”

As we look in Rashi’s commentary for some deeper insight into this poignantly and prophetically topical prophecy, we find several interpretations.

The first explanation is that G-d is telling us to take refuge in our *batei knesiot* and *batei midrashot*, (synagogues and houses of study). How so, you may ask? Our current circumstances have forced us to move the shul into our homes, to turn our abodes into a mini-sanctuary. Our residences have



become places where we now pray and learn – there is an abundance of lectures, *shiurim* (Talmudic study sessions), and virtual

minyanim (prayer quorums of 10 men) via Zoom just in our own communities, not to mention beyond our borders, and for

doors as the performance of good deeds that will protect us from harm. Now more than ever, we can commit to upgrading our

those off work, available time for this.

Rashi then quotes Rabbi Tanchuma, who suggests entering your rooms as a journey into the depths of your heart to ponder your actions. Isolation from the hustle and bustle of the world affords us the unique opportunity to truly introspect.

Targum Yonatan explains closing

observance of *Yiddishkeit*. Even without freedom of movement, there are so many ways we can show kindness to others. According to Rabbi Tanchuma, it’s a reference to the closing of the aperture of our mouth, to refrain from questioning G-d’s decisions at this time.

How different this Pesach will be from all other Passovers of our lives! May Hashem indeed “pass over” our homes and not allow the destroyer to strike.

May this very different Pesach be one of true redemption, not just from the 21 days of restriction, but also from about 21 centuries of exile.

In the meantime, stay safe, stay healthy, and stay home.

Chag Sameach!

• Rabbi Yossi Chaikin is the rabbi of the Oxford Synagogue Centre, and the chairman of the South African Rabbinical Association.

The updated version of Mah Nishtana 5780

OPINION

REBBETZIN AIDEL KAZILSKY

Mah nishatana hashana hazot mekol hashanim? (Why is this year different from all other years?)

In all other years, we planned Pesach many months in advance. We wondered which Pesach resort to go to, and what delicacies were on the menu. We discussed and deliberated which one had better entertainment, and which destination was more exotic (of course, we must be better than the Cohens!)

We planned our seders with a guest list galore, ensuring that we were seen and admired, and that we rubbed shoulders with all the right people, leaving out those whom we hadn’t spoken to in years (they deserved it, anyway).

With utmost precision, and exhaustive shopping, we worked out what new outfit/s each one of us will wear, we matched it with the right shoes, and simply looked glam. Without saying it, the serviettes matched the tablecloths to perfection, and oh how clever, better, and original our Pesach games and decorations were.

Hashana hazot – but this year – we gathered and ate in simplicity because the shelves in the shops were empty. We just were happy to sit and be surrounded with those near and dear, and join in gratitude for the health and safety of our loved ones.

In all other years, Pesach pumped up our stress and frazzled our nerves. For weeks, we planned and obsessed about every detail. We fought in the aisles for the food we wanted (not needed), and we bought enough brisket and chocolate mousse to feed an entire cruise ship. Things got so hectic and so very stressful, we eventually had to pay a caterer to boil our eggs for the seder (true story!). In all other years, we became agitated and irritated as we shopped, fretting that the store didn’t bring in tomato sauce and ready-made bagels (*pesachdik*, of course). We yelled at our kids, and we spoke harshly to our spouses; we stressed about the crumbs that the kids and the cookies had made, and we arrived at the Seder frazzled and in disarray.

Hashana hazot – but this year – our priorities suddenly changed. Weeks of lockdown and quarantine have given us a new perspective, and we realised that we no longer needed to sweat the small stuff for it no longer mattered.

In all other years, we lived life in control – of everything, big and small. We helicoptered our kids, and bossed around our spouses; we decided who deserved to be our friends, and manipulated everyone else like the traffic on our GPS (the quickest, shortest route to get what you want). We managed our lives with minute precision (even convincing our friends on Facebook and Instagram that we were just perfect). In all other years, we strutted around with such invincibility. We were the masters of our destiny, and we had all the answers. Of course, we took sides in every argument conceivable (there was pro-Trump, anti-Trump, impeach Trump, blow your own Trump-et). It didn’t really matter because we knew right from wrong, and we knew better than you.

Hashana hazot – but this year, we ate humble pie as we submitted ourselves to an invisible germ that didn’t know how to discriminate, and simply robbed us of all our power.

In all other years, we regaled in the story of Pesach and talked about freedom, though none of us realised we were still slaves (to our iPhone, iPads, Facebooks and Twitters). We recalled the slavery of our forefathers and the bitterness of hard labour (not really pertinent for us, except when the maid didn’t come back); we ate the matza and maror (the horseradish was really bitter this year, hey? Not to mention the price of the matza, ridiculous!) We ate it without the Pascal Lamb, supposedly to remind ourselves of an era long gone (too long gone to be pertinent), and a Temple destroyed. We drank four cups of wine (ok, maybe it was more) and then broke out singing *Next year In Jerusalem* though what we really meant was *Next year in Mauritius/Thailand/a new Pesach resort*.

Hashana hazot – but this year ... it’s different. It really is! Redemption’s scent has filled the air. We’ve divested ourselves of



our arrogance, and cleansed our souls of our self-serving attitudes. We’ve thrown off the shackles of our bad habits, and we have had no option but to look Heavenward and pray that this year, we will all finally be free of the maddening world we’ve created (Thank you G-d for creating corona, every cloud has a silver lining.) We are no longer slaves for we have broken our bondage and tasted freedom (the real type). This year, at the seder, as we will all eat humble pie (um ... matza) and embrace our families. Let us pray with heartfelt conviction that we return to the place we call home, a place in the heart where we find kindness and empathy, connectedness and strength, light and inspiration, and that we should all finally be worthy of the ultimate gathering in Jerusalem – but this time for good.

Wishing all readers, a chag kasher ve’sameach!

• Rebbetzin Aidel Kazilsky is a radio and television host and an inspirational speaker who teaches the wisdom of Torah, and applies it to contemporary times.

Why is this night different to other nights?

HOWARD FELDMAN

The number four is built into the seder experience. Through the evening, we will drink four cups of wine, we will ask four questions, we will speak of the four sons, and on a personal level, I normally argue with a minimum of four people before the evening winds to its slurry and exhausting conclusion.

This year will be even more different to those that have preceded it. In keeping with the theme, I propose that there are four ways in which this year might be distinguishable from all others.

1. This year, we will be surrounded only by those who live under the same roof as us. There will be no mass gatherings, no carrying in and out of extra tables, chairs, and no irritating aunts who leave early. There will be no arguments as to who gets to use bobba’s massive soup pot. Because this year, nothing will be super-sized. It will be simple, and it will be contained. As Pesach has never been before.
2. If the memes that I have received are any indication, we won’t be able to open the door for Elijah the prophet who likes to visit late into the evening. Given the social distancing rules, anyone who has visited every Jewish household in the world is exactly the one angel to be avoided. We might leave a cup of wine for him, but no sips will be taken. Not on my watch.
3. Whatever our children contribute to the seder will be up to us. With school having been closed for some weeks, the education of our children – although facilitated by the school – is our responsibly. Which is more than a little annoying.



“Pesach this year has been designed to make us reconsider pretty much everything. It’s designed to make us value almost every aspect of the years prior to it. ”

For years, I have had the enormous parental privilege of being able to roll my eyes towards my wife when one of our protégés embarrassed us in front of the entire extended family. “Look how little they have learned at school?” I would telepathically convey. And for no reason whatsoever, she would return the glance with an apologetic expression as though it was her fault.

What might have started with them forgetting the words to *Ma nishtana* (the four questions), more recently has evolved to at least one of them consuming all four glasses of wine before we take our seats at the table. There will be no looks and no rolled eyes. Because this year, the ownership rests with us. And that’s kind of cool.

4. We will, of course, be able to relate to the plagues – most likely more so than many prior generations. Unable to leave our homes, go to shul, unable to see parents, friends, and family, we won’t have to wonder if the plagues that we are reading about are a metaphor for something. We won’t have to wonder what happens when

something sweeps across the world, and if it’s possible for people to perish from the affliction. It won’t be difficult to imagine a time when G-d unleashes his might against the world.

Pesach this year has been designed to make us reconsider pretty much everything. It’s designed to make us value almost every aspect of the years prior to it. It’s designed to make us focus on our spouses, our children, and ourselves, and to think about all the people – even that irritating aunt – who we’re going to miss. Because in more ways than four, it’s different to all other years.



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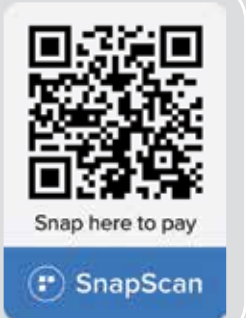
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The irony of celebrating the festival of freedom in lockdown

OPINION

RABBI SAM THURGOOD



Wow! How the world has changed in the past few weeks! Our sages say, “The salvation of Hashem comes in the blink of an eye,” and King David said in *tehillim* (psalms) 126, “When Hashem brings us back to Zion, we will be like dreamers.”

Well, we’ll soon have the truth of both of those statements – albeit in the reverse, in the suddenness with which the novel coronavirus has come upon us. Billions of people in lockdown around the world, police stopping to check people when they leave the house. Millions of businesses closed for weeks. All of this certainly feels like a dream, and the situation has escalated more rapidly than we could have believed possible.

These are challenging times, and we must brace ourselves for more difficulties times to come. But, we have a principle in Torah that the measure of goodness is far greater than the measure of difficulty; that from the challenge itself we can see the greatness of the reward. If this virus and all of its ensuing hardship has come upon us so suddenly and unbelievably, we must believe that so too can salvation. As Jewish people, we have been excitedly awaiting redemption for thousands of years, and for all those who say that such a thing is unrealistic, we are witness to how the world can be turned upside down.

This year, Pesach will be, for many of us, the first time at such a small seder and the first time we lead it ourselves. Never has the mandate that we received before the giving of the Torah been more strongly felt: that we must be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”. That every one of us must be a spiritual leader. Usually we are content (and understandably so) to have one member of the family or group take on this responsibility, but now millions of Jews around the world will be running their own seder – whether for one person or for 10 – on their own. It presents a real challenge, but also a significant opportunity to rise to the occasion.

The Talmud teaches us that the seder takes the form of questions and answers, and that even if we are celebrating the seder alone, we ask ourselves the questions and teach ourselves the answers. Each of us is a questioner and a seeker, and each of us a guide and a teacher. May we be inspired to continue to learn and to grow, to help and to share even as we return to “normal” life.

We also gain a deeper appreciation this year of the central role of Pesach and redemption in Jewish life. Our ancestors in Egypt experienced oppression, slavery, and unimaginable hardship, and must at times have felt abandoned and forgotten. But they weren’t. Hashem’s message to us was that He loves us, has remembered us, and will redeem us.

The experience of going “from slavery to freedom, from grief to joy, from mourning to festivity, from darkness to great light, and from servitude to redemption”



is central in Jewish observance. We mention the exodus from Egypt in the Shema every day, and when we make *kiddush* (blessings) on Shabbat. It is referenced in the Torah when speaking about countless *mitzvot*, and even in giving the ten commandments, Hashem introduces himself to us as, “Hashem your G-d, who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slavery.” Why is this so important? Because we need to know that Hashem has never forgotten us, and will indeed redeem us once more.

The irony of experiencing the festival of freedom in lockdown isn’t lost on me. I’m not a prophet who can tell you the meaning of these dark days that have come upon us, when they will end, or the toll that they will take, but I can tell you of the power of faith that has sustained our people through darker days than these. I can tell you of Natan Sharansky in the solitary confinement cell of a Soviet prison, saying *tehillim* (psalms), and feeling himself a part of his people in spite of his distance from them. I can tell

you of the women in the Warsaw Ghetto, who had children and chose to bring them into the world, believing that Hashem’s future would ultimately be good. I can tell you of Noah and his family, who saw the entire world destroyed, everyone and everything they had ever known lost to them, but afterwards were given the revelation of the rainbow – the symbol of Hashem’s faithfulness and love.

The world won’t be destroyed, and one day, we will celebrate together once more. There is a joke

which I have always enjoyed, “Next year in Jerusalem. The year after that – how about a nice cruise?” The point of that joke is that Jerusalem has miraculously become so very accessible to us over the past 50 years, that it can be experienced as simply another destination.

This year those words: *leshana haba’ah b’Yerushalayim* (next year in Jerusalem) will hold a special meaning and significance. We will be praying for ourselves – to be present, in good health, and capable of making the trip. We will be praying for Jerusalem – to be restored, healed, safe, and open to us once more – and we will be praying for the redemption of the world, the time in which death is swallowed up forever, and we will know sadness no more.

May Hashem bless us all with strength and courage, with faith and love, with togetherness and health, with prosperity and security, and with a *chag kasher v’sameach* (a kosher and joyous Pesach).

• Rabbi Sam Thurgood is the rabbi of the Beit Midrash Morasha @ Arthur’s Road congregation.

The blessing of boredom

SIMON APFEL

The famous therapist, Salvador Minuchin, was once asked if he believed in multiple personality disorder. He replied, “A person with multiple personality disorder is someone with very few personalities that talk to each other inside their head. Me? I have hundreds.”

Things have become very crazy very quickly. Those of us growing up in the West have been sequestered from global catastrophe to an extent that no other generation before us has. We’ve endured no great wars or famine. We’ve had a great recession, but no great depression. We got through SARS and Swine flu without too much upheaval. The climate emergency hovers ominously on the horizon, but has yet to really hit home.

COVID-19, though, has completely uprooted our lives. And now we’re all staying home.

It seems a lifetime ago that we marvelled at what was happening in Wuhan, at the millions of people locked down in their homes for weeks on end. But now it has become a lived-in reality for hundreds of millions of people across the world.

The truth is, for many in self-isolation or quarantine, the adjustment hasn’t been so extreme. We can work online, we can shop online, our kids can be schooled online. We have Netflix and eBooks and podcasts and Spotify and virtual museum tours to keep us occupied indefinitely. (If we didn’t realise before that we live our lives on our screens, we’re certainly realising it now.)

The problem, however, is what to do on Shabbat. Shuls have shut their doors. Dinner parties and big family lunches are off the table. Online Torah classes aren’t an option. Neither are Netflix, eBooks, podcasts, or Spotify. So what do we do with all that time to ourselves and no devices to distract us from boredom?

What we may not have considered is that for some, this is actually the opportunity of a lifetime. That being bored – spending hours in our own company, inside our own heads – may just be what we need more than anything else in the world.

Dr Michele Ritterman is a world-renowned psychotherapist. When I interviewed her recently on a podcast, she related that anecdote about Salvador Minuchin and the multiple personalities each of us

have that opened this article.

Ritterman is a big advocate of the practice of talking to yourself as a means of connecting with these different facets of your personality – of discovering who you are, where you want to go, what you want to be.

“We constantly have these dialogues inside our minds,” she says. “When I turned 60, I asked myself, ‘What do I want to do?’ And my self said, ‘I want to sing.’ And then my self replied, ‘You’re too old to sing.’ And then I said to my self, ‘Mind your own business.’ When you have a healthy relationship with yourself, you’re able to listen to all the voices inside you, put them out in front of you, and choose the one that makes sense.”



It begs the question: with all these voices inside your head jostling for supremacy, who’s actually doing the choosing?

Ritterman calls this singular voice of reason, the “discerning you”.

“It’s a voice of discernment – the voice in you that’s the most neutral, most compassionate, empathic, most enlightened, most sophisticated, but also realistic. It’s both analytic and intuitive, and it’s all-encompassing. It’s your higher voice.

Not everyone knows how to tap into their higher voice, Ritterman says. Not everyone acknowledges these arguments inside their head or has any awareness at all of these internal dialogues. But, she says, you’re definitely better off knowing you have them, and that if you don’t acknowledge them, you’re going to have the arguments with other

people.

Though not religious, Ritterman believes Shabbat is the ideal opportunity to tap into the higher voice, the “discerning you”, and to engage in these inner dialogues.

“We need time off the clock,” she says. “A sense of mental spaciousness, ‘subjective time’, where everything is slowed down, and we see things extremely clearly. We need a Sabbath – a real Sabbath where we are alone with our thoughts, but not alone, where we aren’t consumed with the mundane matters of this world.

“Subjective time, Sabbath time, is your time – time between you and you.”

A few months ago, pre-coronavirus, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to indulge in some real subjective time. I was home for Shabbat, my family were elsewhere, and I was simply too lazy to go anywhere or see anyone.

I lit candles on my own. I ate dinner on my own. I got pleasantly inebriated on kiddush wine on my own. I spent the next day in pyjamas, just sitting on the couch. A lot of that time was spent reading, but a lot of it wasn’t.

For hours on end, I let my mind wander, going where it took me, following its meanderings to no place in particular.

Letting go, I let multiple voices make themselves heard and had countless conversations. Sometimes I got clarity and direction, as my higher voice – my voice of discernment – emerged from the babble. And sometimes, the babble played out unresolved.

Through the boredom, I uncovered and communed with my multifaceted self, revelling in my own company. And through the boredom, I sensed the silence and stillness at the heart of all things. I also slept of course – heartily. And my sleep was filled with dreams and visions.

On the surface, it was a quiet Shabbat, completely uneventful. In reality, it was the most momentous of my life.

On Shabbat, many of us will be in complete isolation, cut off from friends and even family. The temptation will be great, but I would encourage you to forget podcasts and series and online shopping. Forget Netflix, and just chill.

You will be bored out of your mind. And it will be the best thing you ever do.



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A new and subtle freedom

OPINION

ADINA ROTH



Have you ever experienced a moment in your life when it felt as if the ground beneath your feet disappeared? Psychologists call these moments “life shocks”.

While we all might have experienced these individual moments (G-d forbid serious illness, the loss of a loved one, or job loss), it feels now as if the entire world is in life shock. The ground has disappeared beneath all our feet.

Rabbi Marcelo Bronstein says we are in a time of *bein hashmashot* (dusk or twilight). Not quite afternoon, nor yet evening, sometimes we are summoned to *bein hashmashot* for longish periods, and are asked to sit with tremendous unknowns and uncertainty.

How do we navigate our beautiful holiday of Pesach at a time when our community and our world is in *bein hashmashot*? The Pesach celebration that is familiar to us tells the story of the exodus in a triumphal tone. “We were in Egypt, Hashem led us out with signs and wonders, we became free to serve G-d.”

Perhaps the modern Jewish experience, in which Jews generally live in democracies, where we have the state of Israel, and are able to flourish personally and as communities, has reinforced a sense of triumph in our Pesach narrative – “we were freed ... and we are free”.

This year, freedom won’t be felt in this same way as each one of us



grapples in an existential way with the loss of freedom. We have lost the ease of life which allowed freedom of movement and interaction. We have also lost a certain fundamental freedom of well-being, we are frightened about the health of ourselves and our loved ones, we are worried about material security. Freedom isn’t what it used to be.

When Moshe turns off the path to behold the burning bush, Hashem addresses Moshe and says, “Remove your shoes for you are on holy ground.” As Moshe stands barefoot, Hashem says, “You are to be the leader of my people, and are to deliver them from Pharaoh.”

It’s almost as if Moshe is thrown into a moment that is *bein hashmashot*. The life he knew is gone, and he doesn’t know what awaits. As

the gravity of his mission sinks in, Moshe asks G-d a question, “*Mi ani?*” (Who am I?) Hashem doesn’t answer Moshe directly but instead, reassures Moshe, “*Ehyeh imach*” (I will be with you).

Moshe then poses another question to Hashem. He says, “When I come to the people of Israel and say their G-d has promised to deliver them, they will ask, ‘*Mah shmo?*’ (What is His name?)” At this point, Hashem says, “*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*” (I will be that which I will be).

Rashi explains that Hashem is saying to Moshe, “I will be with the people in their suffering and slavery and in every single trouble that will ever befall the people.” Rashi teaches us that Hashem’s name, Ehyeh, speaks to the qualities of empathy and compassion. Perhaps Hashem

comes to model for us that at times of terror and great suffering, like Hashem, we must walk with hearts of kindness.

As Moshe stands in his *bein hashmashot* moment, we might learn from the two questions that he poses to Hashem. “*Mi ani?*”, (Who am I?) invites us to reflect on who we are as human beings, who we are as friends, as parents, as children, as members of the community, even who we are in relation to our domestic chores!

Who we are will influence how we manage this situation. We will each be grappling with this intimate and close confrontation with ourselves. Our greatest fears and insecurities will emerge, not for critique and flagellation, but for compassion and healing.

If we can work with this question, “Who am I?” with sincerity, we have the potential to move towards a more subtle freedom, the spaciousness of awareness in our being, even as we grapple with this life-changing moment in our world.

Moshe’s second question is just as important, “What is His name?” This question also confronts us at this time. What is the name of the other who confronts me, how do I come to know and relate to this otherness?

On one level, we ask this question about the virus itself, about the new world we are navigating, so that we can take measures to protect

ourselves and our communities. But we are also invited to ponder “What is His name” about all others.

We are invited to become reacquainted with our children, our spouses. We are also asked to examine our relationship with all humans, with animals, with our planet, and with G-d. As we engage with the question of “*Mah shmo?*”, (Who is the other addressing us?), our relationships have the capacity to enlarge. Barriers can crumble, and we can experience the freedom to relate in different ways.

The poet Rainer Maria Rilke advised that when we don’t have clear answers, we are invited to “love the questions themselves”. This Pesach, let’s love the questions, even if we don’t yet have the answers.

In asking these questions, we might experience more subtle notions of freedom, even as our more obvious forms of freedom are curtailed. Guided by compassion, these questions may enable us to forge new kinds of relationships with ourselves and others, leading towards a healing of our beautiful and precious world.

• *Adina Roth is a clinical psychologist in private practice, and a teacher of Jewish Studies. She runs an independent Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah programme in Johannesburg, and teaches Tanach to adults.*

MOST SA JEWS (BOTH OF ASHKENAZI AND SEPHARDI HERITAGE) ARE ELIGIBLE TO REINSTATE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AND, ACCORDINGLY, AN EU PASSPORT.

A common misconception is that European citizenship and EU passports can only be obtained if one has documents providing his/her lineage. The fact is that not having any documents proving lineage, doesn't lead to disqualification of eligibility. Jews of Ashkenazi heritage can rely on documents obtained in Lithuania or Poland. Jews of Sephardi heritage need no proof at all!

In his experience, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived, and therefore they are entitled to reinstate it, and accordingly obtain an EU passport.



Adv. Horesh has been operating in SA market with the Jewish community since March 2018. He arrives regularly to South Africa, and can meet in person with Jews who are interested to do so.

Ashkenazi: This ad refers to Jews of Polish & Lithuanian heritage only. The most important things is the understanding that prior to the end of WW-I, the European map was very different than the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania did not exist as independent countries, and until 1918 these territories were only known as Lithuanian or Polish regions/counties of the Great Russian Empire who ruled all of north eastern Europe. Accordingly, until 1918, residents of these territories were Russian citizens, as Polish and Lithuanian citizenships didn't exist. Therefore, since applications for reinstatement of these citizenships can only be based on whether one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen, whoever is a descendant of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 will not be eligible.

In addition, it is highly important to remember that since borders in Europe were shifted once again during and after WW-II, one's eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor hailed. Horesh explains: Shifted borders resulted in cities changing nationalities, and that the resultant effect for descendants of Jews left Vilnius is that their application for Lithuanian citizenship will be declined whereas a similar



Adv. Avi Horesh is an Israeli attorney, who lived in Poland for seven years. Horesh is recognised in Israel as one of the leading lawyers in the field of reinstatement of European citizenship.

application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship may very well be approved! Horesh has an in-depth knowledge and a full understanding of European immigration laws.

Sephardi: This ad refers to all Jews of Sephardi heritage – Jews who arrived from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, as well as many descendants of Jews who arrived from Holland and the UK. Most descendants of Sephardi Jews (who were exiled 500 years ago) are eligible to reinstate Portuguese citizenship and, accordingly, an EU passport. If applicable, Adv. Horesh will apply for (on behalf of the applicant) an official certificate confirming such eligibility, on the basis of which, an application for Portuguese citizenship is most likely to be approved.

Horesh resides in Israel – a four-hour flight from Warsaw and Vilnius – enabling him to travel to Poland and Lithuania, as well as to Portugal, where he collaborates with local professionals who assist him in tracing documentation required for successful applications of reinstatement of European citizenship.

Adv. Horesh closely collaborates with professionals who assist him in tracing documentation in Europe required for successful applications of reinstatement EU citizenships.

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Bringing the seder home

OPINION

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN



I was speaking to a psychologist the other day, and he told me about a particular case he was dealing with and how it took him a full two years of therapy just to get this one child to open up and share her honest, inner feelings with him. Well, I’m not claiming that Judaism has a magical panacea for all ailments, but I do believe strongly that it can help us in real life in many ways we often haven’t considered.

Take the upcoming *yom tov* (Jewish holiday) of Pesach. Children are trained to ask the four questions at the seder. Fathers and grandfathers provide the answers (actually, if you’re not sure, the Haggadah gives the answers and, fortunately, it’s an “open book test”). Here, we have an annual family occasion where we get the necessary hands-on experience in dialogue, discussion, and engagement. Surely, this must foster healthier communication throughout the year – and for all our lives in fact. Your old *cheder* teacher notwithstanding, Judaism really does encourage questions.

Judaism has always encouraged questions, discussion, and debate. The Talmud is filled with the most rigorous intellectual, philosophical, and legal debates. Every page of Gemarah records another argument between the greatest of the Talmudic sages. They weren’t

enemies slugging it out in the *Beit Midrash* (shul study halls). They were the best of friends who held the deepest respect for each other. They were simply engaging in open, honest, healthy debate about what our tradition teaches, and what should be the final halacha in practice.



Some of those sages were fathers and sons. The son addressed his father with reverence but when it came to matters of law, he was encouraged to question and even argue the point. And he did. The great Biblical and Talmudic commentator, Rashi, had his

interpretations challenged by his grandsons, Rashbam and Rabbeinu Tam, on a regular basis.

So, questions have always been encouraged. But, of course, we need to find answers too. Otherwise our young questioners will lose faith in our ability to guide them correctly. Naturally, we don’t always need to

into our homes and dining rooms.

Indeed, it’s nothing short of absolute genius that Judaism brings our faith from the synagogue right into our homes. The Jewish home has long been the laboratory of Jewish life.

I’m a rabbi, and I want people to come to shul. But I must admit that the home provides far more opportunities for the practice and observance of Judaism than shul does. Shul is a house of prayer. It is also a house of study. And, yes, today we see shul as a community centre and a place of social activity where important interaction between people and families takes place.

But far more *mitzvahs* (commandments) of our tradition are observed at home than in shul! (I know this isn’t good for my business, but I must be honest.) Just to name a few, while shul offers prayer, Torah study, and *tzedakah* (charity), the home offers mezuzah, kashrut, hospitality, educating our children, family sanctity, the practical observance of Shabbos, and all our festive *yom tovs*.

When it comes to Pesach in particular, the most important parts of the festival, all the main traditions, and the biggest *mitzvahs* are observed, not in shul, but right at your dining room table! Eating matzah, maror, drinking the four cups of wine, telling the exodus story, finding the *afikoman* (the

broken piece of matzah) and more, are all experienced together with the family, in our own homes.

Unfortunately, not everyone comes to shul. But more than 90% of South African Jews generally do attend a Pesach seder. And in a big way, it’s through this annual family event that our history and traditions live on. So many of our childhood memories revolve around our own grandparents’ discussions at the seders of our youth.

So, as we are now in lockdown and at home with our families with lots of new-found time on our hands, let’s use that time wisely and productively. Let’s ensure that all of us, we and our children, read up and prepare well for the seder. Get kids to prepare not only the four questions, but also insights, stories, and anecdotes for the seder and for the other *yom tov* meals too. The bookshops are closed, but there is so much available online today.

This Pesach, may the coronavirus quarantine provide us with the silver lining of the most interesting, engaged, and connected seder we will ever experience. May the Egyptian bondage inspire our family bonds to be stronger than ever, and eternally enriched. Amen.

• *Rabbi Yossy Goldman is the rabbi at Sydenham Shul, and the president of the SA Rabbinical Association.*

Meaning helps mitigate lonely seders

TALI FEINBERG

How do we deal with the unprecedented reality of a seder under lockdown on a practical and emotional level?

“We are being called upon to demonstrate resilience and strength this year, but we have weathered far worse storms before,” says Rabbi Ramon Widmonte, the dean of the Academy of Jewish Thought & Learning. “One of the messages of the seder is that we are still here, still devoted to our mission. That resilience is in our bones – we can do this!”

So how do we do it, even if we’re alone? “Every Jewish adult [man and woman] is required to participate in the Pesach seder, even on their own. The halacha clearly states that they should even ask the four questions themselves, and then answer them,” says Widmonte.

“The key *mitzvot* [commandments] of the evening apply as usual even to someone on their own: drinking the four cups of wine, eating matzah, maror, the meal, benching, and saying Hallel, and most especially, retelling and remembering the exodus from Egypt [including explaining the import of Pesach, matzah, and maror]. One must add that besides the *mitzvot* of the night, everyone has a constant obligation to care for the needs of the elderly, needy, and lonely, especially those who are our parents and grandparents, whom we are additionally commanded to honour.

“As such, we must make every effort to ensure that those on their own have as much support [besides the required food] as possible, and we must strive to be extra sensitive to them at this time.”

Regarding using technology to connect

with other family members during the seder, he advises, “As always, people should ask their personal halachic guide [usually their community rabbi] for guidance.”

“The haggadah contains the core of the seder – one can always add to it. With fewer people, it’s an opportunity to do things which aren’t feasible in larger groups. For those interested in guidance, they can join our solo seder online course for guidance [email info@theacademy.org.za for details],” he says.

Under lockdown, even the most vulnerable in our community must have access to Pesachdik products. “Thank G-d, the kosher shops and supermarkets are still open, and have more than enough kosher products, and the Beth Din has put out a wide list this year, so no one should have a problem obtaining these products. If they are elderly or quarantined, they should allow their family or friends to help them out and do some shopping for them,” says the rabbi.

To community members who are thinking of flouting lockdown rules and gathering for a seder, he says, “Our community leadership has been clear about our obligations in this regard, especially regarding the possible infection of older members of our community, for whom this may be fatal. G-d forbid that anyone should have this on their conscience.

From a psychological perspective, “Knowing what to expect during the days and weeks ahead goes a long way to prepare yourself emotionally for the challenge,” says educational psychologist Sheryl Cohen.

“The trouble is that it’s novel. There’s no precedent. There’s no sense of “what we did last time”.

“This makes it particularly anxiety-provoking. We human beings don’t like to sit with the difficult feelings of ‘not knowing’. We like to gain control and mastery over ourselves and our world. But the days and weeks ahead leave us with a sense of helplessness which leads to feelings of vulnerability,” she says.

“How do we deal with this? Many of us scramble for more and more information. But even with all the information at our fingertips, we are all feeling quite helpless. Our feelings of vulnerability also help us to identify with others. We get an opportunity for empathy: what it might

different to all others. First, optimism. For example, we could think, “This is going to be a simple Pesach. No extra cooking and fancy recipes.” We may also feel determined to keep going, but others may experience anger or irritation.

There also may be a sense of regret. “I should have fixed this before lockdown, or bought that before Pesach.”

“The human psyche tries to create equilibrium by creating a fantasy of what one can’t do in reality,” says Cohen. “We also may feel overwhelmed, or despair at missing loved ones and what we took for granted. Finally, we will begin to make



feel like to be homeless; what it might feel like to be working on the frontline, and so on. This creates opportunities for unity, for empathy, for connection, kindness, and care in a way that might not have been possible a few weeks ago.”

She says there are various emotions we may experience around Pesach that are

meaning of our new normal, seeing it as a time of service to greater humanity, keeping safe, and keeping others safe too.

“The process is one of grief and loss. But if we can edit the experience with meaning, then we will be able to balance the losses and the gains in order to make this time more manageable,” says Cohen.

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We hear from South Africans living overseas about how they envisage Pesach in the time of COVID-19.

Making it work far from home and family

ILANIT CHERNICK

Coronavirus. The word on everyone’s lips, no matter what language. There’s no doubt that it’s completely upended the world in more ways than one.

Thousands have died, and hundreds of thousands have contracted the virus, and each time I think of that reality, I get an awful feeling in the pit of my stomach. This isn’t a science-fiction film or dystopian novel. This is real life.

Over the past few weeks, Israel, where I live, has gone through various stages of lockdown. As the numbers of those infected and the deaths continue to climb, the laws have grown more stringent. For someone like me, who lives on her own, it hasn’t been an easy feat.

At the time of writing, we aren’t allowed to go more than 100 metres from home, unless it’s for food or medical purposes. Police are checking identities, and they aren’t afraid to hand out hefty fines to those breaking the law.

As someone who can work digitally, I’m still able to do my job and keep the world informed about the situation at home. I’m

working almost 15 hours a day.

The lack of face-to-face social interaction has taken its toll. There are mornings that I wake up hoping the past few weeks were just a crazy dream. It’s also made me realise how important face-to-face social interaction is, and how we shouldn’t take human touch for granted.

I saw a social-media post that said, “There’s Shabbat, and then there’s the rest of the week.” That’s sort of how things have been - there’s no Monday to Friday, it’s just one long day until Shabbat.

One of the things that’s hit me the hardest is the reality that I’ll probably be celebrating Pesach alone this year.

For months, I’d increasingly looked forward to flying “home” to South Africa for the festival of freedom. It would have been my first leil haseder (Passover seder) with my family in three years.

After a long conversation with my parents and brother, we made a decision that it would be safer for me to stay in Israel.

At the time of that conversation, movement was still allowed. Later, speaking to my rabbi from Midreshet HaRova about my predicament, he invited

me to spend leil haseder with him and his family in Elazar.

But then came new laws on Wednesday, 25 March. Laws that I have the utmost respect for, in spite of what they meant: I would be spending the seder alone. Not the Pesach I’d been hoping for.

In tears, I messaged my rabbi, and he called me back with some words of wisdom.

“Ilanit, I know this is hard, but you have to understand that this whole thing is bigger than one evening.”

He reminded me that last year, his son, who at the time was serving in the Israeli Defense Forces, completely missed the seder because he was on the frontlines dealing with the March of Return on the



Ilanit Chernick sends an online message of love to her friends after she watched them getting married on Facebook Live this week.

Gaza border.

“These things happen. It will be okay,” he said.

I decided to take things in my stride. The next morning, I went out to buy my own seder plate, an afikomen bag (for a piece of broken matzo), fancy plastic plates and cups, knives, and forks, and other goodies. I also decided that for an hour every night until the seder I would learn

new ideas and commentaries about the different elements so that when I get there, I’ll be prepared.

Yes, being alone is scary. Yes, celebrating Pesach alone is hard. But I’ll do everything I can to make this night different from all other nights in the best way possible. Who knows, maybe, just maybe it might be the best seder yet!

A story of human survival and goodness – how apt!

RAHLA XENOPOULOS

Today is 27 March. The reason I’m recording the date is because you know as well as I do that in the strange new age we’ve entered, with the passing of each day so too seems to pass entire lifetimes.

A mere three weeks ago, I was anxiously waiting for my husband to return from Paris. But it was Shabbos, so naturally, we had guests. We were aware of COVID-19 – concerned even – but, well, who could possibly have predicted the changes this pandemic would bring to our world? Wait, I forget, apparently Bill Gates, Max Brooks, and a psychic named Sylvia Brown all predicted this, but then, who was listening?

These past two weeks I have appreciated having my family so close by, and it goes without saying that I love having an excuse to stay in my pyjamas for days on end. We felt a collective sense of relief the moment we went into voluntary isolation, and it still feels like our longest Shabbos yet. Mind you, this is Shabbos with screens.

There is a certain ironic intimacy, an unexpected connection that comes of this isolation. Yesterday, I was in the kitchen and I heard a baby in the house, in fact, the baby was in the office of my husband who was holding a meeting with, among other people, the baby’s mother. Of course, the baby wasn’t actually here, but, being a baby, it knew instinctively when to cry, laugh, and distract everyone. While I realise that this was probably stressful for the baby’s mother, it was a delightful intrusion into our day.

I’ve been told how amazing New Yorkers were in their response to 9/11, and in the past week, I’ve truly come to understand why.

People are galvanised, motivated, and just nice. Cellular communities pop up on my phone. Friends leave vitamins at my back door. Delivery people smile. There exists a distinct kindness, a sense that we are all in this mess together. A friend pointed out to me that this generation of teenagers were

born into the anxious aftermath of 9/11, and they are coming of age during the anxiety of COVID-19.

As much as I love to have my kids around me, I recognise that this is a completely unnatural way to be a teenager. This weekend, my daughter, Tallulah, was supposed to be enjoying the experience of acting in her first American school musical. My son, Gidon, wrote a song yesterday, some of the lyrics are, “COVID-19, at this rate I won’t live to 18. I haven’t seen my best friend in days, I hope that he’s doing ok...” These words broke my heart because, really, they should all be out skateboarding they should be laughing, performing, learning, and making music with friends. This is the age when teenagers should be rebelling and venturing out of their parent’s fold, but these kids are expected to do the opposite, they are having to fold inwards and towards us, physically and emotionally.

We can’t predict how this will alter them or us.



Our world is forever changed. But, the great triumph of the human condition is that we so readily adapt to the unimaginable. I believe that teenagers, not unlike us, will learn to function.

Last Sunday, talking about Pesach, my brother-in-law said, “We’re Jews, this

is one plague. When they show us nine plagues, we’ll cancel.” But, by Tuesday, we all kind of knew, realistically, that this year was going to be a pretty intimate Pesach.

Admittedly I’m being narcissistic, but my family love having people in our home. We entertain constantly – long lunches and intimate Friday night dinners. I host creative writing workshops at my dining room table and, from the time they were in pre-primary school, my triplets have hosted sleep overs with upwards of six kids a night. Suffice to say, we appreciate a full house. One of our favourite things is a big, chaotic seder. I love the combination of friends and family, of teenagers and adults. I’ve always found it interesting that the word seder means “order” because, in my house, it’s bedlam and I do love the general chatter and chaos of it all. This year, however, this night really will be different to all other nights. As this reality has become apparent, I’ve considered it’s many implications. I know that Pesach, like love, friendship, and family isn’t cancelled, it will just be different.

Who knows? Perhaps this will be the first year we don’t have pandemonium, perhaps this year, we will have a genuine seder. I suppose, like our ancestors before us, we are feeling, for the first time in many decades, untethered. But, perhaps that’s a good way to be as we meditate on the true meaning of Passover. Jews, more than most tribes, have always been aware



Rahla and her husband, Jason Xenopoulos in New York

that security is an illusion. What is real and eternal is our ability to find love, to find meaning within that illusion. How blessed we are to be together.

These past weeks of “isolation”, I have loved the deep silences, the serenity and stillness of our world. I love to think about how skylines around the world are less polluted, less opaque, and more beautiful.

In a weird, poetic way, perhaps it’s fitting that this virus has hit us over Passover. I have fierce faith in humanity. I have faith in our morality, virtue, and goodness in times of crisis, and above all, I have faith in our ability to survive as a species. And isn’t this robust goodness and human survival illustrated in the story of Pesach? Perhaps this year will be different not only in its intimacy and order, but also in the depth and reality of our understanding. Perhaps this Pesach I will truly understand that, as quickly as the world seems to be changing, so, too, our lives are somehow slowing down.

Sage words from the Baal Shem Tov

OPINION

RABBI LEVI AVTZON



If you would ask me, “Rabbi, what’s your favourite story ever?”, it would be the following little tale which I hope will resonate with you too, especially in the unusual times we find ourselves in.

But first, let’s state the obvious. Our generation has never confronted the challenge we are all in together – alone. This is uncharted territory for modern man and woman.

As I write these words, we have no idea when shuls and schools will reopen. I’m sitting at my home computer (trying to avoid the screaming kids), less than 100 hours into lockdown. I think I’m already losing my sense of time and equilibrium.

Oh, and then there’s Pesach atop of all that. That beautiful holiday full of tradition, much of which won’t grace our tables this year due to social distancing (I prefer “physical distancing”), the separation of generations, and the avoidance of large gatherings.

There are so many feelings out there. But if I had to guess the two most potent feelings across the community it would be:

First, fear of the unknown; second, a deep sadness and compassion for all those left alone during this time, especially those who need the support and love of their families and community such as the elderly, the sickly, and those who live alone.

Which leads me to this little tale:

One of the greatest revolutionaries in Jewish history was a man known as Rabbi Yisroel Baal Shem Tov, in English, Rabbi Yisroel Master of the Good Name (1698-1760). He was the founder of the Chassidic movement. (Indeed, all Chassidic movements across the world – and there are many of them – trace themselves back to



רבינו ישראל ב"ר אליעזר

the Baal Shem Tov and his ideas.)

Numerous wondrous stories are reported about him. The story I’ll share with you isn’t about wonders and miracles. It’s not even so much about him, rather it’s about his wise father.

By the time the Baal Shem Tov was

five years old, both his mother, Sarah, and his father, Eliezer, had passed on. He was then raised in a local orphanage until he joined a group of mystics in his adolescent years.

Before his death, Eliezer called his son, Yisroel, to his bedside and told him, “Yisroel, know and remember throughout your life that the almighty G-d is always with you. Remember not to fear anything and anyone except for your Father in heaven! And remember, also, to love from the very core of your heart every single Jew, regardless of who or what they are!”

That’s it. That’s the story. Oh, what a story!

In his adulthood, Rabbi Yisroel would go on and change the world through the power of his revolutionary insight and passionate love, and all his ideas were based on those two simple truths: to fear nothing and no one except Hashem, and to love each Jew no matter what and no matter who.

This story has given me encouragement during the most challenging moments. When I find myself in moments of sadness, pain, hurt, frustration, grief, or anger I try to bring that story to the forefront of my consciousness. I imagine a tiny five-year-old boy who had already lost his mother and was now about to lose his father. A five-year-old boy.

And his saintly and wise father

turns to him and says, (I’ll put it in my own words), “My child, there’s so much in life that’s not in your control, but do you know who controls it? Not the government, not the society, not even an uncooked bat in Wuhan, China. When we say that life isn’t in our control that isn’t a statement of defeatism, but rather a declaration of faith. The creator runs this world, and He is the only one to turn to, not with ‘fear’ but with ‘awe’. Turn to your Father in heaven.

“My dear, we believe in divine providence and how nothing can happen in this world if G-d doesn’t will it. Remember that G-d is full of love, so be calm, and have faith. It will be ok.

“And my child, in times of pain and suffering, you might choose to be a victim, to blame, or to simply avoid society and enter a cave. My boy, never forget to love. Love everyone with the very core of your heart. Show compassion, empathy, don’t judge, don’t look down on the other. Treat them like they are the beloved children of the creator, which they truly are.

“When you meet your fellow, show them how much you care, first and foremost, about their physical needs. Do they have food? Can they pay their rent? Can they afford medical aid? Help them!

“Only after you show them unconditional love and concern for their material well-being, then you must show them more love

by sharing your spirituality with them. Teach them, guide them, inspire them, help them to ignite the fire in their soul, help them see the beauty and warmth of Judaism. And you will succeed, because you have done it with love and without judgement.”

That’s the story my friends. It’s a story for our times.

Fear nothing and no one. Hashem is in charge. Let go, and let Him in. We are in His loving hands. Don’t let panic take over. Don’t let the word “corona” become the topic of your every conversation. Keep on living. Keep on believing. Study. Develop good habits. Do the things you never have time to do. Read a million books to your kids or grandkids (on Skype or Zoom). Keep your world spinning.

And love. Let your heart burst with love and compassion. Reach out to the lonely. Show them how much we value them. Hug your loved ones even tighter than before. Don’t waste this quarantine time on bickering and petty fights. Cherish the moments that you have with the nearest and dearest to your heart.

This will be a time that we will speak of for many years. I pray that our memory of this era will be full of serenity and love.

Chag sameach to you!

• *Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi of Linksfield Shul.*

Passover in jeopardy for young Jews

GABE FRIEDMAN – JTA

Randi Bergman isn’t sure of her Passover plans yet, but there’s a good chance she’ll be spending the holiday alone.

Bergman, a 34-year-old freelance fashion writer, lives alone in what she calls a junior one-bedroom apartment in downtown Toronto. The setup – desk, bed, couch, TV, kitchenette, but no dining table – fits her usual busy lifestyle, which doesn’t involve a ton of cooking and eating meals on her couch or at her desk.

But it’s not ideal for conducting a Passover seder. “Just the thought of me having a miniature seder tray really depresses me,” she said.

Yet that’s exactly what Bergman is likely to do when Pesach begins on the night of 8 April.

Alyssa Feller, a 29-year-old aspiring comedy writer and executive assistant at an animation company in Los Angeles, is paring her celebration this year. She’s part of a networking group for executive assistants in the entertainment industry, and three years ago, she helped form a Jewish subset. The members have celebrated Jewish holidays together in the form of big dinners that usually end with a game of Cards Against Humanity or some other form of secular fun.

Raised in a “Reform slash nonreligious” home in Florida, Feller said holidays were more about coming together as a family than religious observance. She’ll keep to the spirit of the holiday on her own, and probably phone her parents at some point during the meal, but she’s upset that social distancing means she won’t get to continue the fun tradition she started with her Jewish friends and colleagues.

At its peak, the group brought together more than 30 guests for the seder.

“I’ll probably do the same thing I do every day of the week, which is wake up, eat

breakfast, sign into my computer, work online, and make dinner at the end of it,” Feller said. “I’ve already planned it: I’m going to make some matzah ball soup ... maybe make some of my own charoset, with matzah, maybe get a jar of gefilte fish, maybe get one of those rotisserie chickens, and just do that. Maybe if I feel super nostalgic, I’ll go on a Jewish kids learning website, and I’ll print out a paper seder plate.”

Recognising that many people face the same predicament, an entire cottage industry has emerged over the past few weeks pumping out online guides, webinars, and other resources to help make solo seder-making feel more doable.

Rabbi Louis Polisson co-authored one of those resources, an eight-page guide titled, “A Different Pesach: Ideas for the Solo Seder” that advocates keeping things simple. Polisson, who leads Congregation Or Atid in Wayland, Massachusetts, said he realises how difficult leading a seder on one’s own will be.

In order to preserve the spirit of the seder – the questioning, storytelling, and reflecting on the resilience of the Jewish people – he said feel free to incorporate other forms of spiritual practice, like meditation or yoga. Think about what seder foods mean before and while eating them. Lean into the musical aspect of the meal.

“Even if you’re not a good singer, sing to yourself, your neighbours, or to your family or friends over the phone or video call,” he said.

But including the seder plate, with its many symbolic elements, is essential for Jonathan Katz, a Reconstructionist 28-year-old urban planning graduate student and researcher at the University of Maryland. He’s keeping the number of participants in his Zoom call low, including only his mother, cousin, and his partner, so that everyone can hear each other clearly.

“We’re experimenting with seder-plate ideas. It might be that people have different parts, or one person has a set-up plate,” he said.



Photo: Adam Moco

Fashion writer Randi Bergman is still deciding whether or not to venture to her parents’ house for a Passover seder

David Kraemer, a professor and librarian at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, points out that Zoom – he’s started to deal with it as a teacher – doesn’t capture the warmth of a room full of people.

But he also pointed out that Jews have had to deal with much more precarious situations in the past, from the Middle Ages, in which people were ravaged by plagues on a much more frequent basis, to the time before the Spanish Inquisition, when Jews were forced to hide their faith by arduously cooking bread (so as not to raise suspicion) a specific way to render it kosher for Passover.

“If Jewish tradition weren’t vigorous and creative in times of challenge, we would’ve disappeared a long time ago,” Kraemer said. “We’ve been here before, we’re here now, and we could do an important job, a really reasonable job, of celebrating this and engaging with its rituals whatever our limitations might be.”

Bergman is still deciding what her Passover will look like. Like most, she has been following

the coronavirus news, perhaps a little too closely. “Most people have broken at some point, or are going to break ... I haven’t yet, but I will,” she said. She isn’t sure whether she should travel to her parents’ house in the northern part of the city – until recent years her parents would host 30 family members or more for the holiday meal – but she is sure that her mother will continue to play a key role in organising her seder.

Shopping for kosher for Passover food, difficult in Toronto in a normal year, is now an even tougher undertaking, so Bergman’s mom is ordering catered kosher food.

And while Feller, too, is still refining her plan, there’s one personal tradition she’ll make sure to sustain – one that falls squarely within social distancing guidelines. As she does every Passover, she will make time to watch, The Prince of Egypt, the animated DreamWorks film about the exodus from Egypt.

“I think I’m the only person who likes that movie,” she said, “so I watch it myself.”

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Chag Sameach

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COVID-19 and the song at the sea

OPINION

RABBI GREG ALEXANDER



Last night, one of the parents of a recent Batmitzvah sent me a beautiful and inspiring audio clip of her singing. He described it as her “contribution to lockdown”. It moved me deeply, and gave me the inspiration for this *dvar* Torah (talk on a topic related to the Torah).

While I write this, I’m aware of the real and justified fear that I, you, and everyone else is feeling about this plague that has struck down our world. It’s easy to feel powerless in the face of the unknown, and I’m ever grateful for the gift of Torah to give us tools for dealing with any crisis.

As we prepare for a Pesach like no other, I can imagine our ancestors, the children of Israel, huddled at the shores of the Yam Suf, the Sea of Reeds. In front of them, the waters stretch out as an impossible obstacle to cross. Behind them is the sound of the pounding hooves of Pharaoh’s army intent on bringing them back as slaves to Egypt or leaving them dead at the side of the sea.

What was their response? Panic, fear, fighting within themselves? Surely they felt all these emotions. The Torah describes their bitter cries so poignantly, “Was it for lack of graves in Egypt that you brought us to die in the wilderness?” (Ex 14:11). But with guidance from G-d and Moses (and the courage of one person brave enough to walk into the waters – another story for another time – they do two things: they walk forward into the parted waters on dry land, and they sing a song. Walk and sing.

We know how the story continues as we recount it every year around our seder tables – crisis passed, redemption achieved, path set to Mount Sinai and the promised land

beyond. How can we adapt this teaching to our present situation? How can this moment in our collective history give us the tools to cope with the terrible plague we are afflicted with in our time?

Let’s begin by walking. This is a sore point, as a big part of why I live in Cape Town is the unmitigated joy of walking in the beauty of the Table Mountain Nature Reserve. And this I can’t do right now. But for us today, walking means something else. It means to journey, to go forward. Like when G-d commands Moses and the Jewish people at the sea, “*Vayisa’u* (go forward)” (Ex 14:15). Don’t just stand there



– do something! We can’t walk far right now. For me, it’s a maximum 30 metres from one side of our flat to the other. But what we can’t do now is be paralysed with fear.

Walking now means to reach out (not literally) to neighbours over the fence, and speak, connect in ways you might have never done before corona. To call someone in your contacts you haven’t spoken to in years. To send that email you’ve been wanting to write, but never had the time. To get off Netflix,

and read an inspiring poem, learn a skill, and commit to studying something Torah-related to nurture your soul. To think how you can bring hope and positivity to the members of your family or community – and to yourself. This is the way forward.

Now, let’s speak about singing. The song our ancestors sang is complex, a pouring out of emotions at their moment of redemption. It contains their fears of dying, and the relief they felt when they were saved. Surely this is the song we need now.

While we can’t control the plague, and we can’t control the actions of those out there, some of whom seem to deny the responsibility they have to stay home, what we can control is our own actions. We can respond with panic and fear (both valid, but it won’t help us going forward), or we can respond with song. Let us sing out from our lockdown, from our pods to the world outside, and to Hashem who saves, heals, and redeems. Let us sing all our hopes and fears, all our yearnings for health and healing. Sing from your heart, from your soul. For this is in our power to do.

You see, song is prayer, and prayer can be an expression of gratitude for something good already experienced. But prayer can also be a reassuring statement of faith in the midst of uncertainty, a chance to voice our belief that in the midst of chaos, *gam zeh ya’avor* (this too shall pass), and we can get

through this together. More than that, prayer can also be a defiant attempt to talk a better reality into existence. It can be a call out to the creator and sustainer of our world that we need help. Right here, right now.

As we say, repeatedly, in our prayers, “*Oseh shalom bimromav* [may the one who makes peace in the high places]; *ya’aseh shalom aleinu* [make peace for us down here].” It’s one thing for the angels to enjoy peace up there, but we’re afraid, we’re suffering, we’re dying down here. We would like some of that *shalom* (peace) right here, please.

That Batmitzvah who gave her song as a gift for everyone locked down, her Torah portion was the song at the sea. And she chanted that song in such a moving way that everyone in shul that day will never forget it. The song is introduced with the words, “*As yashir Moshe uVnei Yisrael*” (Ex 15:1), which literally means, “And then Moses and the children of Israel will sing...” Most translations have “and then Moses and the Israelites sang” in the past tense, but the verb is future tense. One *midrash* (commentary) explains it as follows, “Moses not only sang then, but will sing in the future as well.” (Mechilta Shirata 1).

We sing now in the hope that we’ll continue to sing in the future. As the psalmist puts it, “I will sing to my G-d while I exist.” (Ps 146:2). May we keep our songs singing for the days and weeks ahead until we can once again fill our synagogues with the sound of our voices.

• Rabbi Greg Alexander is part of the rabbinic team at the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation. See all online offerings at www.templeisrael.co.za

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Dual citizenship a distinct possibility

Wouldn't you also like to have a European passport?



Well, if you are a South African Jew, you probably can!

Today, more and more people are seeking to expand their borders and possibilities. Since European countries have changed local laws enabling the descendants of citizens who left Europe to reinstate European citizenship, obtaining dual citizenship has become popular.

All South African Jews' ancestors arrived from Europe, and since even those whose ancestors arrived from North Africa or the Middle East are considered to be the descendants of Jews exiled from Spain, most Jews in South Africa stand a fair chance of obtaining European citizenship. The main question is why.

Jews in South Africa who have decided to try and obtain European citizenship say that it's an unfortunate reality that nobody is certain that their children will have decent lives in the country in terms of two key aspects:

1. Economic uncertainty: the country is experiencing a slow economic breakdown.

Dual citizenship and European citizenship is safeguard which also enables people to work and run businesses across the world.

2. Family safety: it's well known that South Africa isn't as safe as it used to be.

Many people feel that life is still good in the country - better and cheaper than in many other places around the globe. However, they want to know that if they need to do so, they can get out of South Africa at a moment's notice. Dual citizenship offers an immediate escape route.

Others say that besides wanting to have a backup plan and a "security blanket", dual citizenship offers the key to doors that are locked for South

Africans, enabling entry to new worlds, study at European universities almost for free, and the ability to travel without having to apply for visas long before planned flights. As one put it, it's "a way to have easier life".

Israel is always an option. However, in order to obtain an Israeli passport, you actually have to leave South Africa and make aliya. Many Jews say that if they decide to leave, they would like to move to Israel, but they are worried that the local culture is so different to South Africa, and they fear that the high cost of living in Israel won't allow them to maintain the lifestyle they are used to in South Africa.

Citizenship is a crucial form of wealth in a very unstable geopolitical environment. Money can be lost in the stock market, and savings can be eroded as the exchange rate fluctuates, but citizenship is an investment that stays with you for life, similar to obtaining a higher education.

As we've seen with COVID-19, countries don't hesitate to close their borders to non-citizens when global pandemics arise. Many countries aren't even letting holders of valid temporary work visas back in. Many countries also offer to evacuate their citizens when global emergencies take place. This is an option you would want to be able to access should you find yourself in a less desirable country during a global emergency.

We can certainly expect more global pandemics and climate-change crises to upend our reality during our lifetime. This pandemic has also highlighted that countries aren't equal in terms of the social benefits and medical facilities they offer. For those of us living in a developing country with limited financial and medical resources, it's an essential insurance policy to have access to citizenship in a developed country with a strong social safety net and medical facilities should that option ever need to be exercised during the next global emergency.

Advocate Avi Horesh is an Israeli attorney who lived in Poland for seven years. He visits South Africa every three to five months. His next planned visit is in August 2020. WhatsApp +48 783 953 223 or email Avi Horesh: adv.avi.n.horesh@gmail.com

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Creative ideas make Seder night truly different

MIRAH LANGER

Whether it’s turning to TikTok tutorials, “Zooming” in with Bobba and Zaida, sourcing a home-made haggadah hack, or preparing a platter of pantry-based bites, this year’s Pesach-in-a-time-of-corona, is certainly destined to be different.

Yet, be it a solo affair, a most unusual dinner date for two, or a soirée serving the elite guest list of your lockdown flock only, it certainly doesn’t mean that Pesach 2020 can’t be meaningful.

“For me, this Pesach isn’t about making the table fancy, it’s not about finding the last well matured 4kg scotch fillet, it’s about stopping, being humble, and reflecting that our ancestors had faith. They took the flour and water mix on their backs and, with faith in Hashem, left all they knew behind,” says Johannesburg fashion designer and mom, Janine Waisbrod, in musing about this year’s upcoming Pesach time.

Waisbrod says that the context in which the world finds itself actually brings to life the themes of Pesach more richly than ever before.

“We are in our own exodus ... We have a Moses who has told us to remain indoors as there is a plague that will befall the people.”

Waisbrod said she would use the intimate space of this year’s seder to really engage with her daughter in reflecting on this part of Jewish history.

“We are going to go through the haggadah discussing the pictures and stories. I’m going to ask my daughter about the story and what it means to her. My deep desire is that at the end of our seder, my daughter has a real connection with how much faith we as a nation have displayed through history and that now, in this new chapter of history, we need to display.

Furthermore, even though the usual choice of location, location, location for the site of your seder might already be preselected for you, this doesn’t mean there isn’t space for connection.

Donna Kedar, who lives in a small complex, suggests that if there are communal areas available, neighbours could stay safely distant but still share in the reading of the haggadah.

“I’m in a complex of only six units, and we are thinking of potentially setting up tables outside each unit which will be more than two metres away from each other.”

“We won’t share food, but it’s a way of bringing people together.”

It also means that the children in the

complex will be able to play a starring role for those separated from their own offspring or other younger family members at this time. “The children can ask the questions, and it will make it more lively.”

She urges people not to simply see this year’s Pesach seder as a disappointment that should just be completed as quickly as possible. While exact family traditions might not be able to be replicated, there is the chance to create new ones.

The internet is awash with suggestions on how to keep family ties close even when physically apart.

One Google document being shared around the world titled, “A different Pesach: ideas for the solo seder”, has suggestions like asking each family member to compile a different thinking point/discussion page about a particular section of the haggadah. Younger children can be asked to decorate or draw pictures for the different sections. These documents are then shared

join their daughter, son-in-law, and grandson in Johannesburg, they will still share the evening online.

“We so looked forward to sharing *yom tov* [the Jewish holiday] with our loving family, spending precious time, and celebrating being together. There’s nothing more enjoyable than joining them. The prospect of the two of us at a solo seder isn’t appealing, so it is with a lot to look forward to that we will be connected via a Zoom seder with our beautiful family.

“We’re glad that we’ll be able to recite some haggadah texts, especially *Ma nishtanah halailah ha’zeh?* [Why is tonight different from all other nights?],” said Lipschitz, before saying, “Please G-d, next year we’ll celebrate together in person.”

His daughter, Michal Alhadeff, says that it’s equally meaningful for her and her husband to be able to connect remotely to other family members.

“As in previous years, this year, we planned to host the first-night seder and



digitally to all related households and printed out, serving as a collaborative conversation starter from afar. Other families are using the opportunity to compile their very own family tradition recipe books. Each member shares culinary guidelines for a particular dish. All the households from an extended family then elect to cook the same dishes for each course of their separate seders.

Another popular option is to use digital meeting apps like Zoom to share various rituals of Pesach.

Cape-Town-based grandfather Ivan Lipschitz is happy that although he and his wife are no longer able to fly up to

have my parents fly up. However, as we started hearing about the coronavirus and the risk of flying [especially with my parents being seniors], we thought that they could possibly drive up instead. When the statistics started getting worse, and the anxiety mounted across the country, we realised that even driving up would be too risky. And so, once the lock down was implemented, I sent a Zoom invite to both my parents and my husband’s family to dial into our ‘Zoom seder conference’.

“It will be challenging, but I think very much worth it, and even though our son, Eitan, is only 22 months old, it will be exciting for him too!”

Kosher for Pesach goods still available to all

OPINION

RABBI DOVI GOLDSTEIN



My father-in-law recently told me a story about when he was serving in the Israeli Defense Forces on *erev* (the night of) Pesach in the Sinai Desert. After his 21-day stint at the army’s forward position, he was waiting to leave the base and go home for Pesach.

Just as he had checked out of his gear and was waiting to leave the base, a red siren went off signalling an emergency and that they would all have to take up their battle positions once again and wouldn’t be allowed to go home.

He and his fellow soldiers were taken back to their forward position, and they set up all their weapons and gear. As he received his new box of battle rations, he suddenly realised that he was given regular rations that included crackers and *chametz* (leaven) food. That night being the first night of Pesach, he was devastated that he wouldn’t be able to keep Pesach and have the basics for a meaningful seder.

Suddenly, a truck rolled up saying that it had special Pesach rations available for all the soldiers. The soldiers swapped their “regular” boxes for special Pesach boxes. In these boxes, there was a haggadah, wine, matzah, and canned fish and meat. Sitting under that 40mm anti-aircraft cannon that Pesach on his own, my father-in-law remembers it as the most special and meaningful Pesach he ever had.

I was thinking about how difficult this Pesach is going to be for many in our community and around the world. No guests. No family. No shul. However, what we will have is everything we need: a haggadah, wine, matzah, fish, and meat. In fact, I believe we are indeed very blessed in how many of the items we have come to rely on and enjoy for Pesach are available this year as well. This is due to the planning of the retail manufacturers and stores in making sure that they have ample supplies for the Jewish community.

For me, however, Pesach is still about the basics. We left Egypt 3 332 years ago with very little except for the basics. The bread didn’t even have time to rise (which is the basis for us eating matzah). Pesach is about connecting to what’s meaningful in our lives – our faith, family, and our community.

At the Beth Din kosher department, the reason for our existence is to serve the Jewish community and for more people to eat kosher more often. Fortunately, many of our kosher-certified food services are deemed “essential services” by the government, and you can buy from your favourite kosher butcheries, bakeries, and supermarkets.

We decided to move all our operations to remote sites early on, and our team has been working tirelessly to maintain the highest standards of kosher supervision during this challenging time.

We have a great list of resources to help you have a meaningful Pesach and make it as user-friendly as possible.

1. For a list of products that don’t require a special Pesach *hechsher* (rabbinical certification), please see our green list. We have close to 30 items on this list. You can access the green list on our website using this link: <http://www.uos.co.za/kashrut/openAlertUpdate.asp?updateID=913>.
2. The PNP Pesach guide is an indispensable booklet which can be accessed online and help you understand all the intricacies of Pesach as well as how to kasher your home. We have more than 50 common items and how to kasher them with an illustrated guide. Please use this link to access the guide: <http://www.uos.co.za/kashrut/Pesach%20Guide%202020.pdf>
3. This year, we have added extra hours to our kosher desk WhatsApp hotline to assist you with your Pesach and general kosher and halachic queries. Please use our WhatsApp hotline on 063 693 9417, so we can make your Pesach planning as smooth as possible.
4. Finally, we have an online “selling of *chametz*” portal. Please use this link to access all the information: <http://www.uos.co.za/kashrut/pesachSaleChametz.asp>

• Rabbi Dovi Goldstein is the managing director of the Beth Din’s kosher department.

A Pesach for residents only

STEVEN GRUZD

Being kept apart from your children and grandchildren might seem like punishment rather than a way to protect an elderly person. While most of the elderly at Jewish old age homes and assisted living facilities understand the Chevrah Kadisha’s introduction of stringent restrictions that prevent visits from family and friends, it isn’t easy.

Okey Fine, who recently moved into Sandringham Gardens due to ill health, is frustrated at losing his independence and being distanced from his family. “It’s a bit boring,” he says, while appreciating the importance of the restrictions. “We’re locked down here, with nothing much to do. Thank goodness I have a TV. There’s no sport now, so I choose movies. But I must say that the nurses have been very nice, and they make the beds, clean the rooms, and ensure we have our medicine.”

Saul Tomson, group chief executive of the Chev, understands his difficulties, but says, “Aged facilities all over the world have been closing their doors to family members and visitors – in the UK, Israel, and many other places. We know that the elderly and immunocompromised are most at risk from this virus, and we needed to act quickly and do everything we could to protect our most vulnerable residents. We took strong, decisive, early action on 13 March to protect those people in our care. It wasn’t an easy decision, but it was the right one. These are dangerous times for our elderly, and we need to suspend individual niceties to protect communal necessities.”

Sarah Sobel acknowledges the bigger picture. “We are coping well because the Chevrah Kadisha is going out of its way to accommodate us in every way. It’s for our own benefit. We can’t take part in all the big activities we did before. But we are doing

Continued on page 42>>

Chag Sameach

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This is a watershed Pesach, welcome it

OPINION RABBI ARI SHISHLER



Asher comes home from work. Late. Again. Sarah is annoyed. He’s always late. She has to manage the children on her own. She has to ensure that there is a meal prepared. She works too, actually, but that never seems to be a factor. She would vent her frustrations, but Asher has already collapsed in a pile, having barely eaten a thing. He certainly hasn’t connected with his family. This is how it is every day. No respite.

Sarah sighs. They’ve had the conversation. Multiple times. She already knows his spiel: it’s not that he doesn’t love her or the kids, it’s just that his boss is a tyrant who tolerates no excuses, and there is so much pressure at work, and everyone else is pulling their weight, and he can’t let the team down, and this is a national project, and he is on a perpetual treadmill. Sarah rolls her eyes. It’s not like Asher brings much home to show for all those hours of labour. And here she is, once again, trying to arrange a date night – a last-ditch attempt to keep their marriage alive – and he’s mentally and emotionally AWOL (absent without leave).

One day, something unusual happens. Asher comes home early. Sarah is bemused. Has her husband experienced an awakening? Apparently not. He explains how some issues have arisen on the production line, and they’ve sent everyone home. He’s agitated. She’s thrilled. The kids are confused.



A day later, rumours swirl that production is indefinitely halted. Apparently, some people from work are unwell, perhaps injured, nobody is quite sure. Some whisper that a nationwide crisis is brewing. Asher grows agitated with each passing day at home. He frets about being able to feed his family. Sarah revels in this unexpected family time. He rummages around for snippets of information or predictions from the experts. Sarah gently reminds him that all that vaunted progress has come at a cost to family and quality of life. Asher can’t see it, he knows no other life. His father and grandfather lived this way, and he is sure his son will one day live this way too.

Then it comes, that bewildering instruction that the rumour mills had warned of for weeks: “Stay home, with only your immediate family. Anyone who leaves home may die”.

Asher eats with his family, matzah, maror, and lamb. It’s a humble, intimate moment. He reflects on the whirlwind demise of financial structures, of a superpower, of social hierarchies. He realises that Sarah is right. They’ve been slaves, run off their feet, constantly glancing over their shoulders to ensure that they have satisfied the expectations of others. He breathes easier, and

contemplates the dawn of a brighter tomorrow for those who dare to embrace it. It’s the eve of Pesach, 1312 BCE. It could just as well have been Pesach 2020.

Our planet has experienced world wars, devastating natural disasters, and global pandemics. It has never seen this. A world more connected than ever, totally frozen. How many people may succumb is a moot point. Judaism insists that even one life lost is a whole universe destroyed. What is most intriguing is how it’s not the deaths that have paralysed every nation on earth and decimated global markets. It’s the fear. Fear of death. Fear of collapse, of immobility, of overtaxed healthcare systems. Fear that we have lost control. Someone recently commented to me that modern people are control freaks. We’re not. We are control addicts. I first appreciated this in November 2010, as I passed a snaking line of eager gamers outside Manhattan’s Toys R Us. Clad in winter-wear, wrapped in blankets and clutching steaming thermoses, they had started their all-night vigil to welcome the Xbox Kinect. Times Square dazzled them with luminescent screen displays that screamed the Kinect tagline, “You are the controller”.

This wasn’t a jingle for a new gaming console, it was the mantra of the millennial. Big tech has lulled us into a sense of control. You can prepare a steaming meal in minutes, binge watch all 16 seasons of *Grey’s* in a week, or click online to receive goods from anywhere in the world almost overnight. We had built the most collaborative global village, with history’s most robust financial systems. Medicine had beaten smallpox and the bubonic plague, and science had placed us on Mars. Who would have thought that a mutated flu virus could crash our super-sophisticated systems?

When you think about it, we’re not so different from ancient Egypt. We also worship the source of our livelihood, as they worshipped the Nile. We also live as slaves to a collective effort to build structures that will outlast and deplete their makers. We subscribe to Pharaoh’s belief in the self-made man.

Now, it seems, our plague has come. G-d doesn’t send plagues to kill, but to teach. Moses’ opening monologue to Pharaoh distills their purpose in a line: “With this you shall know that I am G-d.” Pharaoh obstinately clung to his insistence that he was in control as his empire was ravaged by supernatural disasters and societal collapse. Only when every one of his systems failed did Pharaoh surrender to the reality that only G-d choreographs life’s every detail. Our modern world is discovering that same lesson as we speak.

Like our forefathers 3 300 years ago, this year we will celebrate a humble Pesach, confined to our own homes. The great superpower that has consumed our lives, indoctrinated our children and redefined our morality is on its knees. This will be a watershed Pesach. G-d is offering us a chance for redemption and a whole new world. We should be “woke” enough to welcome it.

• *Rabbi Ari Shishler is the rabbi of Chabad Strathaven.*

How slavery persists today



TALI FEINBERG

While the story of the Jewish people as slaves in Egypt is an ancient one, slavery persists in our modern world. In fact, there are millions of slaves across the globe today, more than ever before in human history.

According to the A21 Campaign, which works to fight human trafficking, “Only 1% of victims are ever rescued. Human trafficking is slavery. It’s the illegal trade of human beings. It’s the recruitment, control, and use of people for their bodies and labour. Through force, fraud, and coercion, people everywhere are being bought and sold against their will, right now, in the 21st century. Slavery is a \$150 billion [R2.6 trillion] dollar industry.”

The organisation is “fuelled by radical hope that human beings everywhere will be rescued from bondage and completely restored. We are the abolitionists of the 21st century. We work with you to free slaves, and disrupt demand.”

It has offices all over the globe, including in Cape Town. “There are 40.3 million men, women, and children held as slaves around the world today. There are an estimated 155 000 people enslaved in South Africa today, according to the Global Slavery Index,” says the organisation’s social worker, Sarah Child.

“South Africa is primarily a source, transit location, and destination country for trafficking. This means that South Africans are trafficked within and without South Africa, victims travel through South Africa during their recruitment and trafficking, and victims are trafficked to South Africa. Importantly, many South Africans are trafficked here, within South Africa, from their homes to other places in the country.”

The most common types of slavery her organisation encounters are sex trafficking, forced labour – especially on factories or farms – and domestic servitude, in which people are trafficked and exploited in private residences. Other types of trafficking are forced marriage and bonded labour.

So, how do these slavery networks operate? “The one thing all victims have in common is vulnerability. Fifty four percent of South Africans are vulnerable to trafficking because of their circumstances, which include, but are not limited to, poverty, lack of economic opportunities and education, a poor quality of life, unstable social conditions, and a lack of social support systems.

“Traffickers prey on these individuals, and through deceit, people are recruited into trafficking. The most common way includes false opportunities such as a job, education, or the promise of a better life. Other recruitment methods include false relationships, being sold by family members, abduction, or the repayment of a debt. Traffickers then use various means of coercion and control such as violence, threats, and the denial of freedom of movement to keep people in trafficking situations.”

In addition, with so much low-cost labour in South African homes such as domestic workers

and gardeners who are often illegal immigrants, “human trafficking is hidden in plain sight, and it’s happening throughout our communities around the country”, Child says.

This is brought into stark relief in the essay, *My Family’s Slave*, by the late Alex Tizon, published in *The Atlantic* in 2017. Tizon describes how the woman who raised him was his family’s slave for 56 years, both in the Philippines and America, doing her work without pay, accommodation, meals, or any kind of rights.

“Her name was Eudocia Tomas Pulido. We called her Lola. She was 18 years old when my grandfather gave her to my mother as a gift, and when my family moved to the United States, we brought her with us.

“No other word but slave encompassed the life she lived. Her days began before everyone else woke up, and ended after we went to bed. She prepared three meals a day, cleaned the house, waited on my parents, and took care of my four siblings and me. My parents never paid her, and they scolded her constantly. She wasn’t kept in leg irons, but she might as well have been. So many nights, on my way to the bathroom, I’d spot her sleeping in a corner, slumped against a mound of laundry,” wrote Tizon.

“She ate scraps and leftovers by herself in the kitchen, and had no private quarters.” The essay goes on to describe how he came to realise that Lola was a slave, and how he tried to make amends for this injustice for the rest of his life.

Awareness is key to combat this kind of reality. “We can’t combat something that we’re not aware of. We all have a voice that we can use,” says Child. “If you suspect something, say something. You can report it anonymously to the South African National Human Trafficking Hotline. Educate family and friends or reach out to organisations that can do a presentation at your school, workplace, or community. Support organisations by attending their awareness events, supporting them on social media, and financially.”

“Civil society has been active in the fight against human trafficking,” she says. “There are many NGOs [nongovernmental organisations] working together and with the government. Services include prevention and awareness, victim identification, and survivor care. In 2013, the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act was passed, which came into effect in 2015. This deals comprehensively with human trafficking including the criminalisation and prosecution of human trafficking, protective mechanisms, services for victims, and the responsibilities of different government departments.”

As Pesach approaches, her message to the South African Jewish community is as follows: “The number and scale of human trafficking can feel overwhelming. Let’s not forget the power of one – the one victim we can assist, or the power of one voice to make a difference.”

• *South Africa’s National Human Trafficking Hotline operates 24/7 (even during lockdown). You can call the hotline anonymously on 0800 222 777.*

How to overcome today’s 10 plagues

STEVEN GRUZD

Every year, we recall the 10 plagues that Hashem sent to punish Pharaoh for refusing to release the children of Israel from slavery. The Egyptians endured blood, frogs, lice, wild beasts, cattle disease, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and the death of the first born.

This year, extended family won’t be able to gather together as we perfect social distancing, so here are ten COVID-19-inspired lockdown plagues to ponder.

Loneliness – Pesach is a time for family togetherness as we commemorate the exodus from Egypt. It will be extremely unusual and lonely in 2020 to not celebrate together with our families. People living on their own and the elderly will also feel isolated at this time. We should make a special effort to connect with family and friends by telephone or videocall in the days leading up to the seder. Remember, we are all alone together.

Boredom – Being cooped up in our homes for three weeks can become frustrating. Watch a classic movie, read a good book, and play board games to send boredom packing. Writing, cleaning the house, and working from home will also all help the hours to tick by faster. Just don’t create an indoor ice-hockey rink.

Cabin fever – Just as the ten plagues compounded one another, cabin fever is fed by loneliness and boredom. Make sure you can spend some time each day outside, whether it is playing with your pets, walking to buy essential groceries, or exercising in the autumn sunshine. Don’t get arrested or accosted by the army.

Irritation – Living on top of others for such an extended period can cause us to become annoyed with close family members who have become too close. Try not to get on one another’s nerves by practicing some social distancing within social distancing. Be patient, empathetic, and kind, and remember, “Thou shalt not murder.”

Overeating – Our grocery cupboards, fridges, and freezers are chock-a-block with panic-bought food. We are in danger of ballooning to twice our size as we race to consume the comestibles before their sell-by date. Many are on a seafood diet in lockdown – we see food, and we eat it. Ensure you’re not raiding the biscuit tin every fifteen minutes.

Ironing – Many families have allowed their domestic workers to return to their own families during these difficult times. This has created a plague of un-ironed washing across the length and breadth of the land. My advice here is to decrease the problem by wearing only clothing that doesn’t need ironing.

Depression – Constantly watching and listening to the news about the pandemic can cause you to become depressed and despondent. So can the close confines in which we find ourselves. Make sure you tune out from news sources, share your anxiety with others, talk it out, and seek professional help if needed. Don’t let the coronavirus blues make you feel black and blue.

Sedentariness – The temptation to do your national duty by lying on the couch all day should be avoided. Get off your butt, and do some exercise! There are countless online keep fit programmes to get you active.

Darkness – This plague is shared with the ancient Egyptians. With our electricity supply problems over the past decade, Eskom has made sure that South Africans are all too familiar with darkness. Make sure you have enough matches, candles, and LED lights charged up for when load shedding strikes.

Binge watching – The temptation to nestle in front of Netflix for days on end is enhanced during this time. Remember, your mother warned you that your eyes would go square if you watch too much television. Everything in moderation so that you don’t become a couch-potato latke.

Overcome the COVID-19 plagues and have a *chag Pesach kasher v’sameach* (happy Passover). Next Year in Jerusalem – or at least next year together again!

Finding (a different sort of) freedom



SCHOOL SAVVY

Dani Sack

Pesach is arguably one of my favourite holidays. After an often hectic first term of school, the holidays allow me to recover.

Most importantly, it’s the first proper yom tov (Jewish holiday) of the year – two nights where my extended family and friends raid my home and fill it with laughter, warmth, and love.

I was particularly excited about the Pesach holidays this year. I would have just finished exams, and would get to spend time with my loved ones as a reward. And then, COVID-19 hit. President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the 21-day lockdown, and dreams of our perfect holiday came crashing down.

On Pesach, we are obligated to see ourselves as if we are the ones leaving Egypt in the shadow of our ancestors. But how am I to experience the feeling of the exodus when I’m bound by the walls of my home?

Rabbi Naphtali Hoff says that we do this mitzvah “so as to better internalise our ancestors’ struggles as well as their deliverance. In so doing, we come to truly appreciate G-d’s miraculous intervention.”

Rabbi Aron Moss of Sydney, Australia, says, “Wash your hands well. And every time you do, remember whose hands you are in.”

These ideas are the basis of my outlook on Pesach this year.

At first, I resented the thought of sitting with only my parents and sister (good company, but I’ve seen a lot of them lately). But, this lockdown Pesach is a well of opportunity. If you’re like my mother and sister, you can use it to focus on your health – physical and mental. If you’re like my dad, you can use it to go back to your childhood. Rediscover some of your old favourite music, play sport and games, or find an “oldie but goodie” book.

If you’re like me, you can use it to reconnect. Talk to friends who’ve emigrated, and find out new things about those closest to you.

Whether you’re like one of us or not like us at all, the lockdown enables us to rejuvenate. Our normal daily lives are so full of running around, working, and stress.

Pesach can often be stressful for those who have to cook, clean, and plan elaborate yamim tovim (Jewish holidays). But this year, there are no fancy table settings or excess amounts of food to be prepared.

A direct sign of the regeneration that lockdown can bring is the earth’s slow repair of itself. Usually murky canals in Venice are clearing, and a blue sky is being seen in Beijing for the first time in years.

Hashem clearly has a plan for this lockdown, and I can’t help but think it involves a rebirth of sorts. A rebirth of the environment, a rebirth of relationships, a rebirth of the individual.

• Dani Sack is a Grade 12 pupil at Yeshiva College

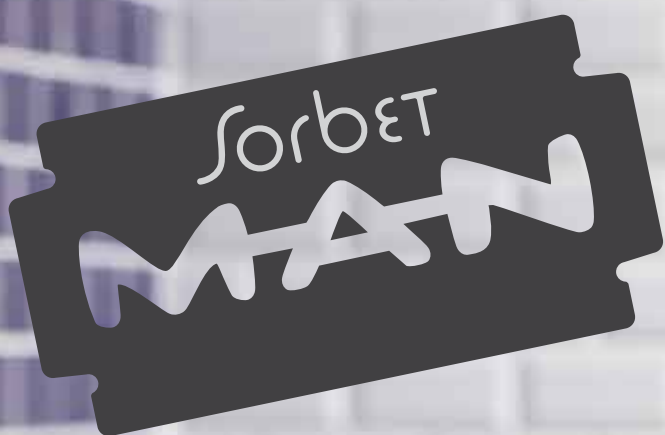
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Treasured letters that stood the test of time

LIONEL SLIER

I only ever saw my father cry once. It was 1945, the war had just ended, and an envelope arrived from the International Red Cross. My father read the letter, folded it into his breast pocket, and walked out the house. The tears rolled down his cheeks.

I was only nine years old. My mother explained that the letter contained the names of all his brothers and sisters, their wives, husbands, and children. And next to each name was the ominous word “Treblinka”. Or “Auschwitz.” I didn’t understand. I remember saying that I was going to play football. To this day, I regret that.

My father’s family were Dutch. Holland was invaded early in the war, in May 1940, and so it was easier for the Germans to keep precise records of what they did at the death camps.

One of my first cousin’s name was Flip. He was named after our grandfather, Philip, who was a diamond polisher. Grandfather Philip passed away in 1937, and he was afterwards referred to as “the lucky one” in the family as he missed the war and the German occupation of Holland.

Cousin Flip was in Holland for both these events, and wasn’t so “lucky”. He was arrested by the Germans for the crime of being a Jew, and was sent to a German labour camp in Holland when he was just 17 years old. There, he became friendly with local Dutch farmers who took letters from him that he had written to his parents in Amsterdam. In return, they gave him the letters his parents sent.

The letters are quite remarkable. And the story of how they were found half a century after being written is even more so.

In 1997, Flip’s parents’ home in Amsterdam was being modernised, as was the whole area.

A Dutch demolition expert was working on the ceiling of the bathroom when a tin box fell down. He examined the papers to find 86 letters written by a young Jewish man, Flip, to his parents that had remained untouched all these years. He gave it to his foreman who passed it on to The Netherlands Institute for War Documentation which was impressed by the content, and passed them on to a Dutch-language newspaper that published them. A family member in Holland sent copies to our family in South Africa.

Flip’s father, Leendert, and my father, Izaak (Jack), were brothers. There were nine siblings in total. Jack came to South Africa in 1922, leaving 32 close family members behind in Amsterdam. Like his father, Jack was a diamond polisher, recruited to teach locals the trade as it had just started in South Africa.

For Jack, 1922 to 1940 were years of consolidating and settling down. He opened a diamond cutting factory, nostalgically calling it the Holland Diamond Cutting Works. He married a girl from Belarus, had four children, and lived in Johannesburg.

He had little contact with his family in Holland. The post was slow and tiresome. The deteriorating social situation in Europe, especially with the rise of Nazism in Germany and the promotion of anti-Semitism, was worrying, but there was little that my father could do from so far away.

In 1939, war broke out when Germany invaded Poland. France, Russia, and Britain were all against Germany, and Holland declared

neutrality, hoping it would escape the hostilities as it had in the 1914 to 1918 war. False hope indeed!



On 10 May 1940, the Germans attacked Holland and Belgium as Nazi armies swept through the countries on their way to invade France from the north. Holland became a Nazi state under German regulations and laws. The Germans made a list of all the Jews in Holland.

I was growing up peacefully in South Africa when my first cousin Flip was forced to live under German occupation. He was sent to work and live in a German controlled work camp, but because it was in Holland, there was some optimism. In his first letter dated 25 April 1942 he wrote to his parents that conditions were satisfactory.

“Have arrived in the camp. Fairly comfortable. Reasonable bed. Three blankets. Send me a windbreaker as soon as possible.”

In one of his later letters, he tells his mother

that it will be okay if she hides the letters in the bathroom roof. In another is his thumb print from where he attached a soap coupon. His letters are full of hope and optimism. He repeatedly encouraged his parents to “keep chin up”, and often signed off with “before winter, I’ll be back” and “*totsiens* in Mokum” (see you in Amsterdam – Mokum is the affectionate name by which Jews call Amsterdam).

Flip was always positive. He wrote, “Remember Israel – Jews will never go down.” At another time, “The tommies [British soldiers] will rescue us”.

But Flip’s optimism turned out to be false. After Molengoot labour camp, he was sent to Westerbork transit camp where most of Holland’s Jews congregated before being sent to the death camps. From there, he was put on a train to Sobibor where he was gassed on arrival. His parents and the entire extended family, aside from six, met the same fate.

My sister, Deborah, is a publisher. She had the letters translated into English, and published a book called *Hidden Letters*. She dedicated it to all victims of genocide.

In his fourth-last letter Flip writes, “Dear pa and ma, if this is really true, and it seems so to me, of course, there’s no use in me coming to you in Westerbork to be separated over there. Write back to me about this in great detail, pa! You must understand that if we could be together, I would not hesitate for one moment. On the contrary, it would do me good [and also the other way round] to be able to support you. On the other hand, I don’t know how long I may still stay here in the camp. Dear parents, I end this letter expressing hope that soon, very soon, we can be together in freedom and health, and I end with warmest greetings and big kiss from Flip. Be strong and *totsiens*!”



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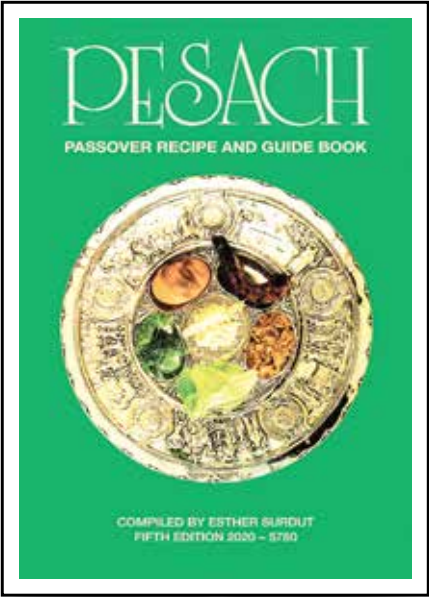
Wishing you and your family a Happy Passover



The miracle of Pesach lasagne

Thirty seders after her first book, *Pesach*, was published, Cape Town artist and author **Esther Surdut’s** book has been reprinted (the fifth edition), with 450 recipes that conjure up comforting holiday memories but have ingredients easily obtainable at your local supermarket – perfect for lockdown!

We all have family favourites like kneidlach, soups, chicken, and brisket dishes – not to mention tzimmes, but Esther focuses on food with a healthy twist, making this Pesach a truly different experience.



Italian lasagne

- 2 eggs
- 500ml/2 tubs low-fat cottage cheese
- salt and pepper to taste
- 1 clove finely chopped garlic
- 3-4 whole matzahs
- milk
- 2 cans tomato sauce
- 250g cheddar cheese, grated

Beat eggs, add cottage cheese, salt, pepper, and garlic. Mix well. Wet matzahs with milk to moisten, but don’t make soggy. Pour a little sauce in a square ovenproof dish, and spread evenly, layer the remaining ingredients by alternating

matzah, cottage cheese mixture, tomato sauce, and cheese. Repeat, ending with cheese. Bake at 180°C for 45 to 50 minutes. Let the lasagne rest for 5 to 10 minutes before cutting. Enjoy with a fresh green salad.

Sugarless pink apple dessert

- 6-8 Granny Smith apples
- 125ml/½ cup water
- 3 sticks cinnamon or 5ml/1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 packet sugar-free Pesach jelly (strawberry or raspberry)

Peel, core, and quarter the apples. Place in saucepan with water to simmer until almost soft. Remove from heat, and mash or puree. While still hot, stir in jelly crystals until dissolved. Cool, place in pretty glass serving dish or individual goblets and refrigerate. Serve well chilled. Enjoy plain or with a dollop of cream and a sprig of mint. So easy, so fruity, and no sugar!

Adina’s Passover breakfast crunch

Ingredients

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • 125ml/½ cup honey | • ½ teaspoon cinnamon |
| • 80ml/⅓ cup oil | • 250ml/1 cup raisins |
| • 250ml/1 cup pecan nuts, chopped | • 125ml/½ cup desiccated coconut |
| • 250ml/1 cup almonds, chopped | • grated rind of half lemon |
| • 500ml/2 cups crushed matzah | • 60ml/¼ cup marmalade |

Method

Heat honey and oil in a large saucepan. Stir in pecan nuts and almonds, and cook for five minutes on medium heat. Add crushed matzah, raisins, coconut, lemon rind, and marmalade, and continue cooking for 20 minutes, stirring frequently. Spread the mixture onto a greased baking tray. Heat the oven to 180°C, and switch off. Place the mixture in the oven for two hours to crisp. Store in an airtight container. This is absolutely delicious! Enjoy at breakfast with milk or yoghurt and fresh fruit, or on its own as Pesach nosh.

A Pesach for residents only

>>>Continued from page 36

what we can – cards, puzzles, handwork, knitting, reading, and talking.”

Says Betty Rubin “I appreciate the garden, and I appreciate what is done for us. Most people are co-operative, and we are lucky to be here.”

“Some people here are anxious and agitated,” says Fine “They’re moaning, and it’s all we talk about at meals. It’s not nice that no-one can come see us, especially family. I do feel isolated and lonely. I have a car, but I can’t go anywhere. The days seem extremely long. But I’m grateful when my kids and friends phone.”

Tomson says the residents aren’t isolated – except from family and friends. “They are surrounded by people. They have each other, our care givers, social workers, doctors, and other staff. These are all people

they know and trust. There is also a full programme of activities in smaller groups.

“People who are negative will be negative. People who are positive will remain positive,” Sobel says. “Our families overseas are grateful for what’s being done. I have no complaints. Normally now we would be having tea, and today we are still having tea. We haven’t changed our way of life.”

Tomson asserts that the residents are coping well. “They watch the news on TV, and read newspapers,” he said. “Many have expressed gratitude to the Chev for the strong and timely measures taken to protect them. The community, too, has been supportive and understanding of the situation. Nobody wants to see our aged population exposed to danger.

Sustenance after the seder

LAUREN BOOKLIN

With the seders and all the hype that goes with it behind me comes the realisation that I must produce meals for the remaining days. More so this year as the chances of going out or being asked out are non-existent. During Chol Hamoed, I try to make food that extends over two meals. So, the extra chicken will become a chicken salad for lunch, and the left-over quinoa ends up in my quinoa tabbouleh.

Mouth-watering grilled chicken

(Using Deb Perelman’s braaing method)

Double the vinaigrette as it can turn into a delicious dressing for a green salad. The juiciness comes from brining the chicken, but don’t do this for longer than six hours.

Ingredients

- ◆ 2 chicken braai packs
- ◆ 4 lemons or limes halved
- ◆ Brine
- ◆ 8 cups cold water
- ◆ 2 Tbsp sugar (brown if you can find)
- ◆ 2 Tbsp kosher salt (it’s kosher for Pesach)

Method

- ◆ Soak the chicken pieces in the brine. When ready to cook, dry them well. I like to braai the chicken, but you can use a hot skillet pan.
- ◆ Lightly oil your braai racks. Arrange the chicken on racks, cover with lid, and cook until well browned, turning over once, about six to eight minutes in total for smaller parts (wings, thighs, and drumsticks), and eight to 10 minutes for breasts.
- ◆ Once the chicken is well-browned, if you’re using a gas braai with multiple sections, turn off the centre heat, and move the chicken pieces onto it. If you’re using a gas braai with one heat control, reduce it to medium. If you’re using a charcoal braai and have left an area free of charcoal, move the chicken onto it. Cook the browned chicken, covered with a lid, moving the chicken around the braai as needed and turning over occasionally until cooked through,

- anywhere from 12 to 20 minutes, or until a thermometer inserted into the deepest part of your piece of chicken is 160 to 165 degrees centigrade.
- ◆ When the chicken is almost done, place lemon or lime halves, if using, cut sides down, uncovered, over lit burner until grill marks appear, about two to three minutes.
 - ◆ To finish: transfer the chicken to a bowl. Toss with vinaigrette and to coat evenly. You can also cover this bowl with foil to keep it warm until needed. Serve grilled chicken with grilled lemons or limes, if using, and any extra vinaigrette on the side.

Vinaigrette

Whisk six tablespoons lemon juice, two garlic cloves, six teaspoons minced fresh rosemary or oregano or a mix thereof, one teaspoon kosher salt, and three quarters of a teaspoon cayenne pepper together in a bowl. Slowly drizzle in three quarters of a cup olive oil, whisking the whole time. Stir in six tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley.



Quinoa tabbouleh salad

This salad is stunning as part of a meze meal with roasted baby marrows, aubergine dip, and of course, the braaiied chicken. The chicken can also be added to the salad for an easy healthy lunch.



Ingredients

- ◆ 1 cup quinoa
- ◆ 2 Tbsp Italian parsley chopped
- ◆ 1 Tbsp mint chopped
- ◆ 1 small red onion diced
- ◆ 3 Roma tomatoes deseeded and diced
- ◆ Radishes if you like them are great too, as are spring onions
- ◆ ¼ cup lemon juice
- ◆ ½ cup olive oil
- ◆ Scant tsp salt
- ◆ Black pepper

Method

- ◆ Bring the quinoa to the boil in two cups of water. Once it reaches boiling point, turn it down to the lowest setting and time 15 minutes. Leave it to cool before placing it in your bowl.
- ◆ Add the chopped vegetables.
- ◆ Beat the olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and black pepper together, and pour over the salad.

Nutella cake (without the Nutella)

Ingredients

- ◆ 4 eggs (read the whole recipe before starting)
- ◆ ½ cup sugar
- ◆ 1 ½ cups ground hazelnuts (grind before measuring)
- ◆ 1 Tbsp cocoa
- ◆ ¾ cup almond flour or ground almonds
- ◆ ¾ cup chocolate chips
- ◆ 1 ½ Tbsp olive oil (must be mild otherwise use sunflower oil or melted Cardin)

Method

- ◆ Grease and line a baking pan. Preheat your oven to 160 degrees centigrade.
- ◆ Separate two of the eggs, and set aside the whites.
- ◆ Beat the other two eggs with the additional two yolks and six and a half teaspoons of the sugar until it’s thick, white, and fluffy. Add the olive oil, and beat again just until blended.



- ◆ Add the ground hazelnuts, almond flour, cocoa, and chocolate chips.
- ◆ Mix until smooth.
- ◆ Beat the egg whites with the remaining sugar until soft peaks form.
- ◆ Fold it into the nut mixture, and pour into your baking pan.
- ◆ Bake for 40 minutes.

“We understand how difficult it can be for everyone when family and friends are unable to visit,” he says. The Chev has established an e-visiting system via Skype and WhatsApp in which families can be in touch with their loved ones via safe digital communication. There is also

a system in place in which volunteers shop for and talk to residents, as well as arrangements for family to drop off care packages at the front gate. Pesach – one of the most family-oriented festivals – will be different this year. “Usually we host enormous sedorim (said to be the biggest on the

continent) and welcome all people who have nowhere to go,” said the Chev’s Tzivia Grauman. “This year, we can’t do that in our facilities, so we are looking at alternatives. Our residents will enjoy a wonderful Pesach together, not going out and not having family visiting.”

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On both side of the homeless debate

TALI FEINBERG

The coronavirus pandemic highlights the fact that homeless people have nowhere to go under lockdown. It also shows the stark contrast between those who say that homeless people shouldn't be allowed to live on our streets, and those who say that these people need to be treated with compassion.

On day three of the national lockdown, activist Caryn Gootkin said there still wasn't enough clarity about where Cape Town's homeless would be housed during the 21-day period. "Several spaces have been earmarked by the City of Cape Town, but they can't accommodate the multitude of people on the streets. Many are homeless because of mental illness, addiction, and abuse, and forcing them all into a confined space during lockdown might be quite damaging."

The challenges regarding the city's treatment of homeless people came to a head in July last year, when seven homeless people took the City of Cape Town to court and won regarding several bylaws that are "anti-poor in their substance and execution", said Gootkin. "These bylaws allowed law enforcement to harass homeless people and confiscate their personal property."

Cape Town businessman Paul Jacobson said that in a sense, this case wasn't "a big deal". It focuses on just two clauses in the whole bylaw on public space, requiring the public to be mindful of what's valuable to homeless people. In the past, cardboard and plastic were thrown away by law enforcement, but now, since the interdict granted in December 2019, they can be deemed personal property and kept.

However, the City of Cape Town is appealing this finding in the Constitutional Court. "The wider implications of this ruling are that the City of Cape Town's law-enforcement divisions activities are quite severely curtailed," said attorney Gary Trappler, who acted for and behalf of the *amici* (friend of the court who are on the side of the ratepayers, residents, neighbourhood watches, and City of Cape Town) during the case.

"The interdict, which was made final by acting Judge Bernard Martin in December 2019, has suspended the Public and Nuisance Bylaw (2007) as well as the Dumping Bylaw (2009) until it is taken before the Constitutional Court for review," said Trappler. "This has left a vacuum in the system of overall law enforcement. It has the bizarre effect that law-enforcement provisions still apply to residents and ratepayers, but homeless people are exempt from any punitive action which otherwise may be taken against them by the South African Police Service or law-enforcement officers.

To Trappler's mind, the ideal solution to the problem of homelessness in Cape Town and South Africa is that "the government and cities create safe spaces where street people can sleep, and build housing. This is in line with foreign jurisprudence such as in Canada and the United States, which regulate that if there are alternatives in place, then sleeping rough isn't acceptable. There

currently are alternatives, but most street people prefer to live on the streets as safe places don't allow drugs and alcohol, which serves as a deterrent to street people to stay there.

"Street people deserve compassion, but the support must be correctly channelled towards city efforts to create more safe spaces, and not by tipping car guards or giving handouts," Trappler said. "A fair balance must be struck between the interests of lawful residents, ratepayers, and the community at large. In our case, by confirming the interdict, the judge threw out a 'blanket net' favouring street people, and paid scant regard to the interests of residents and ratepayers."

"It will be an absolute disaster if our bylaws aren't respected," said Jacobson. "We boast some of the most progressive bylaws in the world."

Regarding the solution to homelessness, Jacobson strongly believes that we must show "tough love". "There is never an excuse to keep someone on the street. No one survives the street – you live on the street, you die on the street. When we understand that, we must do everything in our power to enforce the law."

But Gootkin believes that the homeless can survive – and even thrive – on the street with the right support. "Homeless people are one of most marginalised groups in society. If we don't work with them to have their voices heard and their rights protected, chances are nobody will," she said. She is a board member of Souper Troopers, an organisation that was started in 2016 by Kerry Hoffman to restore dignity to homeless people and reintegrate them into society.

Regarding the recent court case, she said that the interim order that the homeless got against the city simply confirmed that law enforcement couldn't harass homeless people or "steal" their property. It doesn't allow homeless people to break laws or commit crimes.

"I have met a lot of homeless people. If you treat them like a human being, with respect, they will treat you the same way. We aren't deluded that some criminals are also homeless, or that criminals don't hide amongst the homeless. But they are human before they are homeless. They are entitled to all of the same rights the rest of us have according to the Constitution."

Her organisation would like to see South African Jews be part of the solution, and join it in setting up its vision of a "HumanHub", a place that will be the first port of call for street people. They will be able to shower, receive a meal, and clean clothes, and have a full audit taken of their history and skills. It will be a place to run workshops and training. Souper Troopers has already arranged employment for some homeless people to make and sell jewellery, but it's all done with no premises. "Such a space would allow us to help hundreds of 'Troopers' [street people] become productive members of society, which will help reduce anti-social behaviour."

She points out that often it's

untenable for a person on the street to return home, which may be a violent or abusive environment. Even those who manage to do some kind of work can virtually never afford to put down a deposit to rent a flat. Finally, she said that the shelter system is problematic as it doesn't allow the person to stay for an extended period, leading to a continuous cycle of dislocation.

"Troopers complain that the shelters are often places where sexual abuse, prejudice, and drug abuse are allowed to continue." Therefore, being on the street is sometimes the only solution.

Gootkin said it is "hurtful" to see Jews calling for the city to treat the

homeless more harshly and forcibly remove them. "Seeing a persecuted people persecuting another vulnerable minority makes no sense. For Kerry and I, our Jewish identity is what teaches us to treat people like human

beings. Our South African identity reminds us that as beneficiaries of apartheid, it's our duty to help this country to prosper. Our way is by helping homeless people to get their lives back on track."



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Religion in camps about survival, not the sublime

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

Oral testimony of religious observance in the concentration camps has been "mostly marginalised", skewing the real picture. This is a wrong Dr David Deutsch hopes to correct.

One doesn't imagine what people thought about during Pesach while in concentration camps – or if they even remembered.

Deutsch, the desk head of international seminars in English at the International School for Holocaust Studies, Yad Vashem, conducted a webinar – a scheduled event at the Cape Town Holocaust & Genocide Centre that was cancelled due to coronavirus – to address this.

He spoke of Rinah Fradkin, who described her experience of Passover in the camps. When it came to the bitter herbs for the seder, she reasoned that the inmates didn't need a symbol, their reality was far greater.

"We didn't need it – the camp itself was the bitter herbs. It was like Egypt, the plagues were the same," she said.

"We were the recipients – we had lice, skin disease, and the death of our firstborn."

"In fact, she felt that the divine was against her, and compared herself to the Egyptians," Deutsch said.

Leah Zonensayn discussed whether one should bless the bread on Pesach. Of course they ate bread over Pesach as they had to survive – there wasn't enough matzah, she said.

The chief rabbi of Rotterdam insisted they had to bless the bread, but she argued with him. The rabbi said the conditions were different – the goal was to survive, and "we bless even what is considered a sin".

"It's sanctification of survival, and the bread represents that," said Deutsch.

"We have read rabbinical accounts of what religious observance meant in those conditions," he said, but he uncovered different patterns of religious observance in his own research.

He intends to incorporate the accounts of "simple believers", what the search for the divine meant to them, and what being an observant Jew in the camps was like, saying it was a "fundamentally different" experience.

Deutsch said that a mere 20% of research included oral testimony, but this had been "mostly marginalised".

Jewish observance in the camps, judging by the written testimonies and Deutsch, was due to survival, a sense of self, a tool of individual expression, a form of defiance, or a struggle for normality. Jewish observance was generally seen as a positive thing assisting survival.

Professor Yaffa Eliach, who has incorporated informal testimony into her account, speaks of the continuity paradigm in trying to explain the phenomenon.

"Many prisoners had lost family and friends, and these few moments



Photo supplied

separate them from the twisted reality that surrounds them," she said. "It created a link between past and future, providing a sense of Jewish continuity and hope as a constant element in a collapsing world."

Said Deutsch, "This is where research stands now, but if you shift to oral testimony, you see a whole different story, with many across all streams describing their observance as non-existent."

In Erno Abelesz's testimony, he said that in the camps he didn't think of anything spiritual. "If I had, I would have electrocuted myself."

Deutsch maintains "the conscious decision to step away was a survival tool", and that, in contrast to Eliach's theory, Jewish observance didn't always serve as a positive tool. "When he saw his brothers standing in queues to put on *tefillin* [phylacteries], Abelesz admired them, but for him, it wasn't

only ineffective, but deleterious.

"He says he made a conscious decision not to think of anything spiritual. If he would have, he would have understood where he was at, and wouldn't have survived. Thinking of anything beyond survival would have endangered him," said Deutsch. In Abelesz's words, "Everything else was subordinate to that."

"Thinking of anything spiritual would have made him fall into despair," said Deutsch.

As Abelesz said, "Just think of yourself as an animal: your duty isn't to be taken to the slaughterhouse and to get as much food as you can. I think it was the right decision."

Another testimony Deutsch cited was from Nili Kokhva who found a prayer book in the camps – an everyday one, not for the holidays. "She told the others it was the right prayer book," said Deutsch. "She was happy because they got some form of hope."

"The main thing is that they believed it helped," he said. "For her, it was important that people would cry, because they gathered strength, thereby increasing their chance of survival. They were able to accomplish that on Yom Kippur."

This, he pointed out, was diametrically opposed to Abelesz's attitude.

Bluma Efrati also had the incorrect prayer book for Rosh Hashanah, swapped for a slice of bread. When asked why she prayed in spite of this, she said that it made her happy.

"G-d didn't ask it of us – He was minding His own business," she said.

Deutsch noted that there is a general pattern in the oral testimonies, one of which is diversity. Another is deglorification of the act – many prayers don't discuss the will to be saved, but rather the will to die.

Deutsch interprets Salomon Carlebach as saying that the majority of the religious acts in the camps weren't acts of heroism, they were meagre and small, relevant to conditions.

"We see in the oral testimony how the search for the divine was used in diverse ways by camp prisoners," Deutsch said. "They adapted their religious understanding to their conditions, and worked with what they had."

"Few did what they did in an attempt to sanctify something sublime. Their considerations relate not to preserving the faith, but to considerations of survival and normalcy."

CHAG SAMEACH From



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The best laid plans...

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

After months of planning, the big simcha is finally approaching. And then the coronavirus hits. For the many who had been planning weddings, Batmitzvahs and Barmitzvahs, a bris or any other simcha over this period, disappointment has been tempered by love, acceptance, and in some cases inspiring ingenuity.

Shortly before lockdown, Glenhazel came to life. Leigh and Micaela Weinberg (née Gruzin) took their wedding celebration to the streets. Here, the bridal party, friends, and onlookers united in joy while adhering to the parameters of social distancing.

The Weinbergs had just wed in an

believe we were always meant to have this wedding on this date. I wouldn't change it for a thing."

For Nicky and Jason Winik and their families, the coronavirus lockdown has caused much turmoil. Their son, Tal, was scheduled to have his Barmitzvah at Sydenham Shul on 28 March. Now it's unclear when the simcha will take place. "The rabbis have never faced this situation before," says Nicky.

The family and rabbis are exploring numerous options, from doing the Barmitzvah at someone's house, to having a later celebration where Tal sings his portion but can't say the brachot (blessings), to waiting until 2021 when he can do both his portion and the brachot. Yet, waiting a year would

Lucy. "The essence of a Batmitzvah isn't about the party and thankfully, we're not restricted by a time frame. She was going to have rainbow roses for her décor, so I got them at a flower market for her to enjoy during lockdown."

Although Lucy spent more than a year planning these celebrations, she says she's learnt to let things go. "I could let my whole world fall apart or I could say it will happen, but it's not on Hashem's agenda for now. It makes you consider how much time and effort you put into things unnecessarily."

Yet there are some simchas that can never be postponed. This past Shabbat, shortly after lockdown, Rabbi Asher

Deren and his wife Zeesy celebrated the bris of their newborn son, Shloimy, at their home in Cape Town. "It was the happiest bris I've ever been to, and yet there was a sadness, a pain that I've never experienced at a bris before," says Deren.

The Derens involved local and international family and friends as well as their community through online meeting platform Zoom. Before Shabbat, they held a virtual shalom zachor (a traditional meal of chickpeas and beer on the first Friday night after a baby boy is born), and afterwards, they went back online for a l'chaim (celebration). The children recited prayers and sang

traditional melodies, and both sets of grandparents gave the baby beautiful blessings.

Mohel Rabbi Matthew Liebenberg got special permission to spend Shabbat with the Derens and conduct the bris.

"It was a very intimate family service," says Rabbi Deren. "There was something raw about it, and there was a lot missing. But it was also very unique and powerful, just a father, a mother, and a mohel and baby in the room where the bris took place. It felt almost like the original mitzvah [commandment] – not to discount the many beautiful layers of celebration we've added over the generations."

Me, myself, I – how to cope during lockdown on your own

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

It's just me, myself, I. Although those who live alone may be used to their own company, being forced to stay at home by yourself for 21 days is undeniably challenging.

Never has the term "living in uncertain times" been more applicable. And with uncertainty comes anxiety. "People like to know what's next," says clinical psychologist Amanda Fortes. "The minute things become unpredictable, we get anxious." And when you're alone with your thoughts, such feelings may be amplified.

"Being alone definitely brings an added feeling of heightened stress and anxiety," says clinical psychologist Lana Kagan Sack. It's important to acknowledge this, and to know that these feelings are normal and real, says Fortes. Everyone is feeling this way to a certain degree. But for those that live alone, there's the added concern that that loneliness could set in. "The reality is that loneliness can set in even if you're not alone," says Kagan Sack.

Yet, if there's no one beside you with whom to share your fears and vulnerability, this time can be harder to handle. "Being in that alone space, you need to get flexible and creative about dealing with your personal set of circumstances," says Kagan Sack. "You must be proactive about asking for help, and about doing what you can to manage the situation," says Fortes. "In your life, you attract who you are, not what you want. So you need to initiate connection if you want others to do the same for you."

Technology is an invaluable resource at this time. "Arrange times with friends, family, and loved ones to meet on Zoom or on some kind of online platform to have regular contact to decrease your sense of isolation," advises Kagan Sack. Yet for some, technology is an inaccessible minefield. "People who are more socially vulnerable are the elderly who are alone a lot. If you have a family member in this situation, ask a neighbour to check in on them at least once a day just to make sure they're ok, and that they have some contact." Neighbours can even slip a note under the door.

"We need to show compassion to everybody because in these kinds of instances, we might all be in a similar situation, but our unique baggage creeps up on us in different ways," says Kagan Sack. And therein lies the worry. "Everything intensifies over this time," cautions Fortes. Whatever personal issues you were dealing with before, whatever you weren't happy with will come up as there are less ways to distil your anxiety when you're alone with your thoughts. That's why reaching out is so important.

Yet you need not rely only on others to lift your spirits. "Focus on gratitude," says Fortes. "It's so important at this time. Each morning, go through the things that you've got – food in the fridge, Netflix, your health, and so on. Then relinquish control." Recognise what you can control, like your own attitude, as opposed to what you can't, like how the government is handling the pandemic.

Stay away from triggers, advises Fortes. For example avoid a difficult friend or somebody who is negative. "The people you speak to must give you positivity and hope."

"Spend time talking about positive news, having a laugh, or bringing up positive memories with friends so that you shift attention out of that negative mindset," says Kagan Sack.

Looking up the latest coronavirus news is a natural way

to try to gain a semblance of control, but the minute it starts feeling overwhelming, take a step back. Limit your news consumption to once or twice a day, both experts suggest. "Reality checking is good, but sitting obsessively watching the news or social media doesn't bode well," says Kagan Sack. "If you're noticing that you're experiencing stress or anxiety, use apps that help with breathing techniques, meditation, and exercise."

Both psychologists emphasise the importance of routine and of planning the next day. Having a purpose and realising a daily intention is vital, says Fortes. "You don't want to slip into couch potato mode," says Kagan Sack. "It leads to demotivation, boredom, bad habits like eating and sleeping more, and all that has a negative effect on our mood. Get up, shower, get dressed, and pay attention to what you're eating. Those small things improve your energy and sense of well-being." Taking up a new hobby is also advisable.

Lynn Sherlock Golding, a widow who lives alone, is making the best of the situation. While she's used to being alone on weekends, she says she misses going to work and interacting with her colleagues.

"It's not fantastic," she says, "but it is what it is. I've made a list of the things I've been wanting to do for a while, and I'm focusing on the fun stuff. My house is a mess, but it's great because wherever I go, there's something to do. I have papers, laptops, a puzzle, a diamond dot picture, and more."

Sherlock Golding has also signed up to the Mzansi Marathon Lockdown Challenge, where she has to complete 42km over 21 days. "I don't run and I don't enter anything, but I have a treadmill at home so I entered it for the hell of it. I'm doing 2km



to 3km a day, and it keeps me doing physical exercise." She's also keeping in touch with friends and family daily, and she's looking forward to sharing a Zoom Pesach seder with loved ones.

Lockdown can be a great time for personal growth, say the experts. Whether you keep a journal, which is a great tool during this time, or you simply become more conscious of your thoughts and feelings, grab the opportunity to build a happier life.

"How often in your life do you get to be on hold, to just stop?" asks Fortes. "This is a time you get to reassess and ask, 'What am I doing with myself, what changes can I make, and what do I need to work on?'"

"We all have better and worse days, so don't feel ashamed," says Kagan Sack. "We're not meant to be able to cope perfectly with such an abnormal situation. It's an extremely difficult time for people, and everybody is feeling it, so don't hide it. Reach out to friends, family, and mental health professionals and organisations like SADAG (the South African Depression and Anxiety Group) and Lifeline, which are all available over this time."



Leigh and Micaela Weinberg celebrate in the streets of Glenhazel

intimate ceremony in the courtyard of the Sunny Road Shul. Their chuppah, which included only 20 of their closest family members, was a far cry from the wedding they'd been planning to hold at the Sandton Shul on 5 April, with a 400-strong guestlist.

"We'd especially scheduled it just before Pesach so that our families could come from overseas," says Micaela. "When all 40 overseas guests were forced to cancel because of coronavirus, we were heartbroken but determined."

As the laws regarding gatherings became increasingly restrictive, the couple brought their wedding date forward, and dramatically downscaled their guest list. But when lockdown was announced, they decided to go ahead before it began just with immediate family.

"To not get on with our lives when we wanted to be married more than anything wasn't an option," says Micaela. "So we chose our marriage over the glitz and glam." After a sleepless night agonising over the fact that their beloved friends couldn't be at the chuppah, Micaela chatted to her bridesmaids and decided to take their celebration to the streets.

"We live-streamed the chuppah to people around the world. It was the most emotional ceremony, we were sobbing throughout. It was so intimate. Afterwards, we and our bridesmaids, dressed in their purple dresses, danced through the streets. People were in their driveways and outside their houses celebrating. It was unbelievable. Others were hooting and playing music from their cars.

"When people say you didn't get the wedding you dreamed of, I say I got something better," says Micaela. "In a time of such darkness [the fact that] we could bring light to the community, even if it was temporary, was humbling. We

be too stressful for Tal, says Nicky. "He's at remedial school and had never done Hebrew before, so he learnt his portion phonetically. He's done amazingly well."

"Now, we've had to take things second by second," she says. "Initially I cried a lot. But then I realised that it is what it is, and we have to accept the situation. I also needed to be strong for Tal. He keeps asking when he's going to have a barmy, and we keep telling him no one knows."

Last Friday night, Tal said the kiddush over WhatsApp video link so that grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins could all be together, albeit virtually. The Winiks also filmed Tal saying his portion at home, and sent it to their family, rabbis, and Tal's Hebrew and Barmitzvah teachers.

They're grateful for the amazing support Rabbi Yossy Goldman has provided, and they were touched when Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein sent Tal a mazeltov message. "Realise that in the eyes of Hashem, you are a Barmitzvah boy," said Goldstein. "When you are 13, you become a fully fledged adult member of am Yisrael, the Jewish people. That's a privilege, and it's inspiring. It's the beginning of your path of mitzvahs [commandments] and good deeds in this world. Truly that's something to celebrate."

Lucy Gordon Shalekoff also had to postpone her daughter Gabriella's Batmitzvah celebrations. Gabriella is doing the Emunah Batmitzvah programme. The ceremony, which is just for parents, is now on track for August.

Yet around Gabriella's birthday in April, the family had planned a big Batmitzvah colour disco which they were co-hosting with her friend. They had also scheduled a massive family challah bake and a Friday night dinner. "She's disappointed, but we've told her it's not cancelled forever, it's postponed for now," says



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Living la vida lockdown

OPINION

GUS SILBER



Thanks to the miracle of the internet, you can watch the world from the comfort of your locked-down living-room, but if you need a good alternative to the news, try these essential movies and TV shows on streaming platforms.

Uncut Gems (Netflix): Best known for playing the warm-hearted klutz in a series of forgettable knockabout comedies, Adam Sandler reveals himself to be an actor of extraordinary depth in this intense, claustrophobic thriller about a charismatic New York diamond-dealer trying to weasel his way out of a serious gambling problem.

Giri/Haji (Netflix): Following the culture-crossing path of a Tokyo detective who journeys to London in search of his brother, a renegade Yakuza gangster, this mesmerising series breaks every rule in the book as it delves into the intersecting lives of its quirky cast of characters with as much heartfelt empathy as slam-bang action.

The Planets (Showmax): There’s nothing in the regulations to prevent you from standing on your balcony or going out into your garden to gaze at the stars. And if you’d like to learn more about what you’re gazing at, try this breathtakingly brilliant BBC series which uses groundbreaking CGI (computer-generated imagery) to explore the life-stories of our planetary neighbours. Presented by Professor Brian Cox, the five episodes will forever broaden your horizons at a time when we most feel the need to break free of our boundaries.

Ozark (Netflix): A mild-mannered financial planner gets caught up in a drug-money quagmire, and flees with his family to a quiet and charming resort community. Except it’s not as quiet and charming as it seems, in this dark and brooding tale of greed, bloodlust, and desperate survival. If you loved *Breaking Bad*, then *Ozark* will grab you

by the collar and drag you right into its curiously green-tinted netherworld.

Cheer (Netflix): You’ll feel every wince of bone-jarring agony, and every sweet surge of high-fiving triumph, as you surrender to the charms of this rousing reality series about a squad of cheerleaders in training at a college in a small Texan town.

Hostages (Netflix): While you’re waiting for the next season of *Fauda*, the heart-pounding Israeli series about a special-forces squad on an undercover mission deep inside Palestinian territory, here is another Israeli action series to grip your attention and rivet your imagination. In *Hostages*, a brilliant surgeon is kidnapped by four masked men, and forced to perform an operation that puts her own life and the very future of the country in peril. It’s a thriller so tense, so involving, that you almost have to remind yourself to breathe, all of which makes it ideal viewing while you’re in hostage to lockdown.

Veep (Showmax): Julia Louis-Dreyfus – you know, Elaine from *Seinfeld* – is at her smirky, sardonic best as a ruthlessly ambitious vice-president in this razor-sharp satire of American political wrangling and wangling. Much of the hilarity derives from the blood-drawing dialogue, so exercise all due caution if you’re allergic to invective at its most inventive.

Brooklyn Nine-Nine (Showmax): A procedural cop comedy with uncommon heart and soul, and a cast of realistically flawed characters you’ll fall head-over-heels in love with, this super-smart series tackles such real-world

issues as racism, workplace harassment, and police brutality, without ever sounding preachy or losing its comic grounding.

After Life (Netflix): Ricky Gervais of *Office* fame, master of the ingratiating smile and the inappropriate gag, takes his anti-social comedy to a whole new level here, as he portrays a small-town newspaper reporter whose world comes crashing down when he loses the love of his life. The comedy is dark and bitter, but it works its way towards the light with sure-footed grace, and it feels just right for our times.

Succession (Showmax): Each character in this seductive, fast-moving drama about generational wealth is more obnoxious and Machiavellian than the next, and yet you will very likely find yourself magnetically attracted to them as they revel in their ill-gotten opulence and plot to tear each other apart. It’s either a vicious satire of capitalism, or a primer for post-Corona empire-builders, but more than anything, it’s the most wicked and delicious family soap opera since *Dallas*.

The Detectorists (Acorn): Metal-detecting for fortune and glory in deeply-green English fields, where they hope to uncover legions of long-hidden Roman coins, an odd couple explore the intricacies of life and friendship in this whimsical and perfectly-pitched series. It’s also the perfect intro to the joys of Acorn TV, a niche streaming channel that focuses on the best of British movies and television. They’re offering a free one-month trial as a lockdown special. Visit acorn.tv to sign on.

Unorthodox is perfect fare at this time

REVIEW

ANTHONY CHAIT

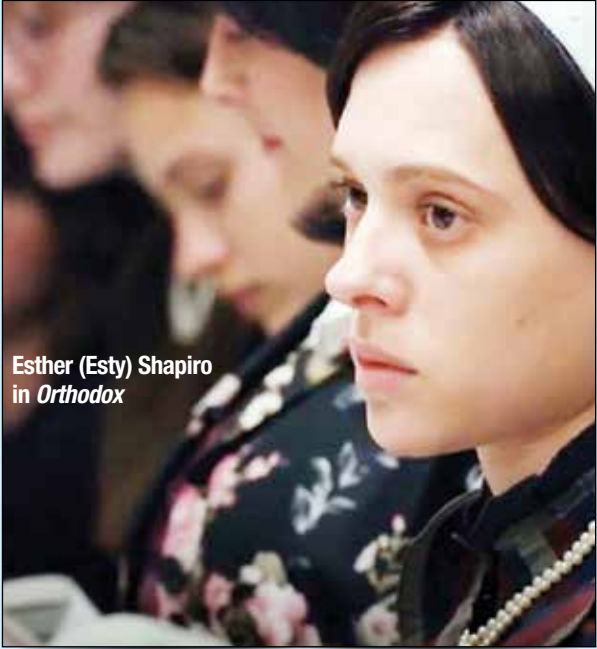


At a time when we all feel a little alone and perhaps detached from our people during lockdown, Netflix’s *Unorthodox* is ideal viewing.

Released last weekend, this new miniseries in English and Yiddish is based on the autobiography of Deborah Feldman. She tells her story of being raised in the Chassidic Satmar community of Williamsburg, Brooklyn. She abandons this life as newly married and pregnant woman for a new beginning in Berlin, Germany, to pursue a career in music.

Her autobiography, titled “*Unorthodox The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots*” is rated as a *New York Times* bestseller.

The main character is Esther Shapiro or Esty, played by the diminutive Israeli



actress Shira Haas (who was in *Shtisel*). She has difficulty accepting what she believes is her place in life, which is simply for procreation. With the customary pre-wedding coaching, failed wedding night, and interventions from both her husband’s mother and his sister, huge tensions emerge as the community’s spotlight falls on Esty and Yanky (her husband) who are childless after a year of marriage.

Yakov Shapiro (Yanky) is played by English-born Israeli actor Amit Rahav. He describes his depiction of the role as naïve and innocent to the point that Yanky may be said to be feeble.

Rahav is well known for playing the first gay character on Israel’s Kids’ TV Channel’s *Flashback*, in which he portrayed Aviv. The production was noted in the 27-year history of the channel as the first time a guy had come out in front of his whole class.

In the role of Yanky’s friend, Moishe Lefkovitch, is Jeff Wilbusch, born in Israel in 1987. Raised in Jerusalem and now living in Berlin, Wilbusch told American television viewers that he thought twice about going out on the streets (of Berlin) wearing a *kippah*, a Jewish skullcap. “It’s literally dangerous,” he says, referring to the far-right Alternative to Germany movement.

When television writer Anna Winger read the memoir, National Public Radio reports that she knew she wanted to tell that story, but with one crucial difference. In her version, Esty not only leaves her family, she heads to Germany, the country that nearly destroyed the Jewish people.

Winger is a Jewish American and has lived in Berlin for two decades. “As a metaphor, we wanted her to go directly to the source of the trauma and find herself,” Winger explains. “Living in Germany has made me think about Jewishness, certainly about the Holocaust, about the legacy of violence and trauma, in a way I never thought about it in America,” she says.

Reminders of the city’s violent past are

everywhere in the series. While completely true to Winger’s metaphor and the hidden comparison she refers to, there’s nothing in the story about the Holocaust.

Yet, for me, the stark reminder was there, but in a beautiful way. In one of the scenes, Esty walks through the Brandenburg Gates. She moves effortlessly between the east and the west of the once divided city.

It’s only a memory that lingers, and only for some who recall the 18th century architecture built at the behest of Prussian Frederick William II, but two centuries later was adorned with Nazi regalia. Lest we forget.

Most of the TV series was filmed in Berlin with a studio set up to produce some of the Brooklyn scenes particularly of the traditional Chasidic Satmar wedding, complete with *bedeken* (veiling), *chuppah*, and *yichud* (seclusion) room.

All the *shtreimels* (fur hats) used in the film are made from fake fur which together with the velcro *payot* were painstakingly cared for by the wig mistress on the set.

When Esty escapes, she is pursued by her husband, Yanky, who is led by his friend Moishe. In its online review, Penske Media’s *IndieWire* relates that the series indulges in the dark comic exploits of the men on her tail. Moishe, a chain-smoking gambling addict with nothing to lose,

hauls the reticent Yanky on a globe-trotting journey that forces him to confront his own discomfort with his ideological lifestyle.

With Wilbusch as Moishe embodying the role of carefree bounty hunter, and Yanky as his quasi-virginal disciple, Moishe speaks of what he calls “a different *Torah*”.

Moishe, who is clearly a bully, arranges for the soft-spined Yanky to visit the red-light district of Berlin, which he finds tormenting.

Flashbacks are skilfully used to tell the story as Esty embraces her new-found life while constantly haunted by the past from which she is desperately trying to escape.

Much like the current New York stage production of *Fiddler afn Dak* (Fiddler on the Roof), it is incredibly gratifying to see how the language of my father and grandparents – Yiddish – is being kept alive today in such a vibrant cultural form, much like it was spoken on the streets of Lithuania and elsewhere exactly 100 years ago and earlier.

The miniseries *Unorthodox* is enthralling, and during the lockdown can be tackled as I did on a binge basis. That’s all four of the one-hour episodes in one sitting. It’s simply like a good book that one can’t put down.

You will enjoy the Yiddish. It’s easy to understand and if you can’t, there are subtitles.

It’s best viewed when the children are asleep as it’s exclusively for adult-only audiences. It contains scenes of nudity, and the marital relations between the doomed couple are extremely explicit. So, too, are the explanations of the concept of a Jewish married woman emerging from her *niddah* state and the rules relating to family purity. It includes a *mikvah* scene with nothing left to the imagination.

Unorthodox reminds us that life is a constant search, that happiness isn’t always the end goal, and that sometimes you just have to work through tough times to come through the other side. How apt for this time in the world.

Minnie Bersohn cooks up inspiration online

Minnie Bersohn Nursery School brought laughter, inspiration, and Shabbos light into pupils’ homes by holding a virtual challah bake at the outset of South Africa’s lockdown on Friday, 27 March. The bake was led by Michelle Vinokur, with 76 pupils and teachers in attendance. Mandi Defries gave an emotional introduction, welcoming everyone to this special *mitzvah* (commandment).

The kids loved hearing why we add each ingredient, and the power they all have individually and together. The teachers enjoyed

seeing the little faces they miss every day. Together, they said *tehillim* (psalms) and made a *brocha* (blessing) for health in South Africa, Israel, and the rest of the globe.





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Naming and shaming

I'm more than a little conflicted about this new and increasingly acceptable phenomenon that allows us to name and shame transgressors of the "lockdown laws" as determined by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. I know on the one hand, there can be nothing more satisfying than calling in a selfish runner who flagrantly dashes through the streets of Glenhazel as though the Comrades Marathon will still be happening. Which it isn't.

On the other hand, we aren't Australian. And we never have been.

South Africans generally don't snitch on each other. We tend to look out for each other, and to call "chips" as we did at school when authority was on its way. We flash our car lights at each other when we see the Johannesburg Metro Police Department flashing, and we don't encourage each other to pay our e-tolls.

But this is different. COVID-19 is ravishing many parts of the world. I'm in contact with friends who live in New York, and it's hard to describe the loss, the fear, and the anguish that they are living with, as many fall ill to this terrible disease. The loss of life across that city is tragic. And it's made worse because it very clearly didn't need to be as bad as it is.

What makes it more infuriating to see a runner or lockdown breaker, thin body and all, parading their fitness all over the show, is that many would like nothing more than to do the same. I'm no runner, but I have some insight into the struggle for those who are used to doing so to not be allowed to do so anymore. It's a coping mechanism, a stress relief, a social endeavour, and a sanity preserver. There is no runner who wouldn't gladly give up one of their children to be able

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



to run at this time.

But they don't. Because they understand that there are times when there are bigger things at play.

I'm proud of South Africans. I'm proud that the opposition parties have understood how important it is to stand behind the president. They are clear that even if at other times their role might be to challenge, this isn't one of them. I'm proud of our army, the police, the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, and the health department. I'm proud of the citizens of the country who in spite of massive sacrifices, are observing the lockdown.

I'm proud of our children's teachers who have found ways to educate, and of our children for getting on board. I'm proud of our rabbis and communities who continue to teach, learn, and gather with Zoom, and who are conducting virtual *minyanim* (prayer quorums). I'm grateful for the incredible work that our charities and individuals are doing to help those who need it. And I'm proud of the companies and individuals who even if struggling, continue to pay their staff.

I'm just not proud of the runners that I see on the streets of the suburbs. I don't believe that I will ever be able to "name and shame" them. And I don't think we should aspire to. But, hell they don't make me proud!

Lost, again, in the 20s

What does it mean to be a teenager in a time of coronavirus lockdown? You will grow into adulthood with a scar in your understanding of how society works and what's permissible. But maybe you will also become an adult with an extra advantage.

Those who came of age during the carnage of World War I spent their early years in a time of massive sadness when huge numbers lost loved ones in the war, thousands were maimed and mentally damaged, and millions suffered the gruesome aftermath of the Spanish flu's ravages. They are colloquially known as the "lost generation". The generation of the 1920s suffered the physical and emotional wounds of their time, which they transmitted to further generations.

Gertrude Stein, an American writer living in Paris during the 1920s, is credited with coining the term. Ernest Hemingway popularised it in the epigraph for his 1926 novel *The Sun Also Rises*: "You are all a lost generation".

But the doom and gloom of being mooted "lost" aside, that "roaring twenties" era was full of great art, where the Charleston was the dance of choice, flappers and women's rights held sway, where Picasso blossomed, and the literature of F Scott Fitzgerald was seminal. It was the time of the Harlem Renaissance, and the career of Louis Armstrong.

Today's coming-of-age youth, particularly the South African born-frees, a part of the millennial generation, are growing into adulthood in a society where apartheid is history and joblessness and hopelessness the norm. Because of COVID-19, these young people – like the rest of us – are experiencing a traumatised society, where no-one can predict how it will end.

But end, it will. Humanity will survive; economies and societies will be rebuilt. We don't know how; there are more questions than answers.

TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



Whatever else it brings, it will help many to focus on what's really important in life, and the urgency of doing the things that really matter.

One already hears stories about couples who have long courted, suddenly deciding to move in together because no-one knows what will happen and they abhor the notion of not being together. Or people with long grievances against each other calling out of the blue to reconcile in friendliness. Or others trying to locate colleagues they have worked with in the past with whom they had a special connection.

It might also have the opposite effect. People who have carried protracted resentment against each other might decide to vent this anger without regard for the consequences, since they might not get another chance. Divorce, suicide, and violence might easily be among the outcomes.

Will babies born now carry any particular identity as they grow older? What will a child who was taken out of school this month, away from his friends, carry about the notion of friendship? In years to come, will people who were born at this time be named after the virus? Like the "lost generation" of World War I or the "baby boomers" after World War II?

On a more philosophical level, the value of things might take on an entirely different meaning. If the whole world and humanity are under threat, what does it matter whether one was called a Muslim, a Jew, a Christian, or an atheist? A vegetarian or a meat eater? Or for Iranians, whether their hatred of Israel had any value? Or for Israelis, whether it mattered who had control over the Kotel? These questions hang in the air, but there is a future, and humanity will survive.

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A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

We're in this together

At the time of writing, we are approaching the end of the first week of lockdown. We can only hope and pray that the radical measures adopted will be successful in safeguarding us from the silent enemy in our midst, but at the same time, we need to be realistic. This is uncharted territory, not just for South Africa, but the entire world. No-one can declare with certainty how this will play out in terms of fighting the disease itself or how our society will cope with the inevitable stresses and strains that this unprecedented crisis has placed on it.

And yet, the picture isn't altogether bleak. If there's one thing that should encourage us now it's that we are all, quite literally, "in it together". As a result, we are seeing people across the political, racial, and social spectrum working together for the common good. If history has shown how frustratingly self-destructive humanity can be when pursuing its own selfish interests, it has also demonstrated that when there is unity of purpose, people are capable of showing tremendous resilience, creativity, adaptability and, most importantly, altruism.

Such unity of purpose is evident in the inspiring manner in which our own community, at both individual and communal level, is making an effort to get us through these very difficult times.

We face a dual challenge in this respect. One is obviously to ensure that the basic material needs of all community members are met in this exceptionally tough economic climate. Here, numerous funding initiatives have been launched by the Rambam Trust and other welfare organisations to provide an element of financial support. The other concerns the critical area of mental and emotional health, particularly for those living alone. In this respect, we are blessed in Johannesburg to have organisations like the Chevrah Kadisha provide such outstanding professional services

ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



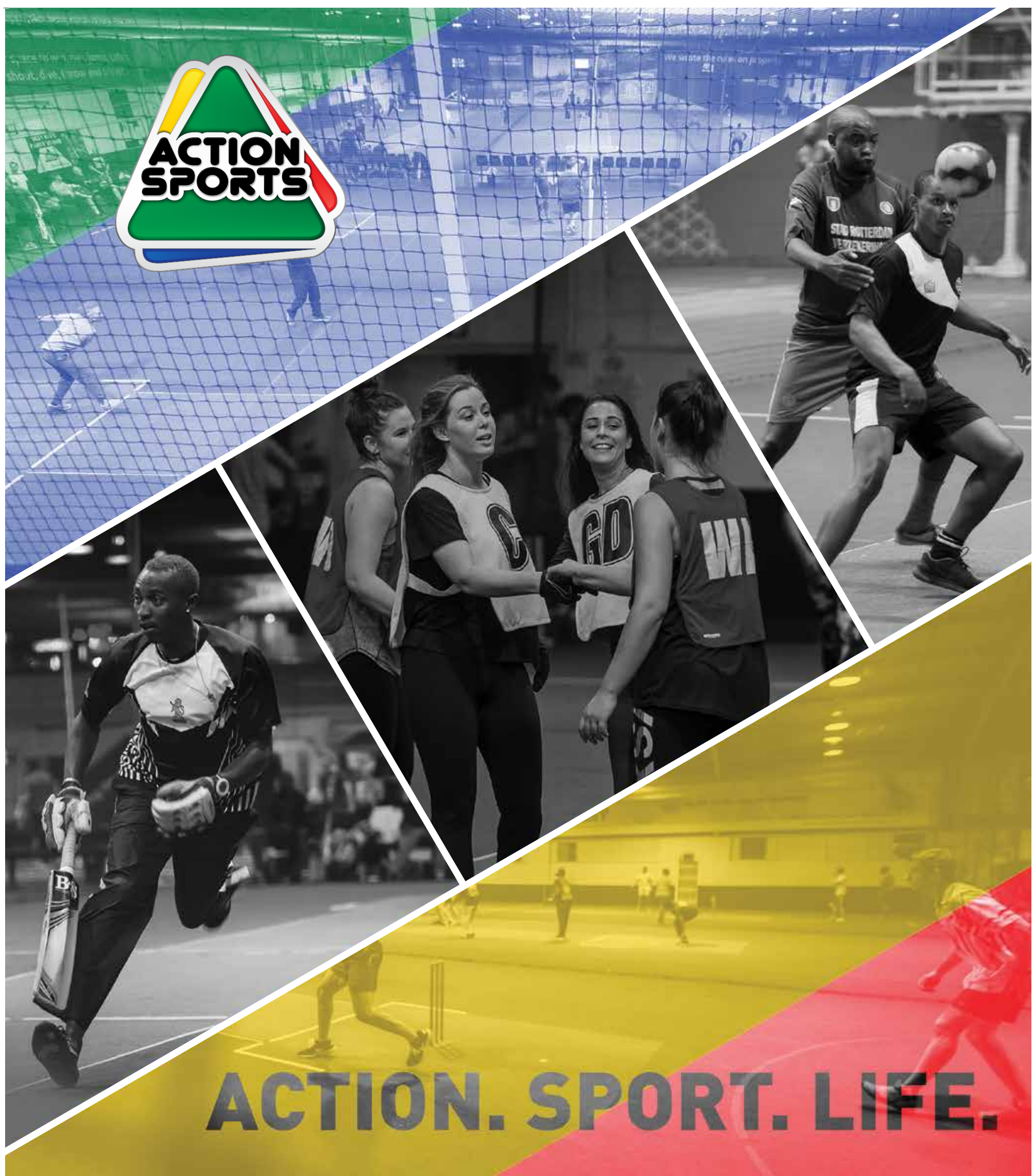
and other volunteer services and hotlines from Hatzolah and ChaiFM. This work is being replicated under the auspices of other equally fine organisations in Cape Town, Durban, and the other centres.

Recognising the need for people to feel connected and to find ways to contribute, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) this week launched #LockdownMensch, a forum for community members to share experiences, describe what they are doing to assist one another, and identify further ways in which they can make a meaningful difference. Another vital area in which the board involved itself this week is President Cyril Ramaphosa's Solidarity Fund. We encourage our community, wherever possible, to contribute to this important fund, irrespective of whether it's a large or a small donation so that we can be part of trying to alleviate hardship in our country. For details, see our Facebook site.

Both SAJBD National President Mary Kluk and National Director Wendy Kahn have spoken on several international platforms briefing global Jewry about our community's response to the pandemic. It's gratifying to see that our leadership's decisive action has been widely recognised and praised. Likewise, we believe that Ramaphosa and his government's firm and decisive leadership has been exemplary at this difficult time. It can't be emphasised enough that we all have to do our part by strictly complying with the lockdown guidelines.

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

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



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The tale of the cricketer who perfected the googly

LUKE ALFRED

Reggie Schwarz – the name might ring a far-off bell? If not, for sheer romance – if not the manner of his death, which strikes a contemporary note – his story is worth re-telling.

The son of a German-Jewish merchant father who settled outside of London, Schwarz was born in Lee in 1875, and played three rugby Tests for England between 1899 and 1901.



Reggie Schwarz

His summer game was cricket but, certainly at first, he achieved little success. He hovered around the edges of playing for Middlesex but didn't play regularly for the county, emigrating to South Africa in September 1902 where he joined the South African Railways.

Like many men of his class (he was Cambridge educated) he caught the mail ship to Cape Town in search of fame and fortune. Although he was unsuccessful as a cricketer in England, he had been exposed to the wiles of Bernard Bosanquet, two years younger than he.

Bosanquet has been widely credited by cricket historians as inventing the googly, (or, as it was once called, in honour of its founder, the "bosie").

The googly is bowled with a traditional leg-spinner's action, but instead of pitching from the leg and spinning towards the off, it does the opposite, spinning from off to leg.

From a batsman's point of view, it's difficult to predict (because it looks like a leg-spinner) and therefore difficult to play – a magic delivery, if you will. A mis-read

googly is liable to bowl a batsman or hit his pads. If he survives with his wicket, the befuddled batsman is liable to look slightly stupid at the very least.

While Bosanquet invented the googly, he was seldom able to perfect it, interspersing the dangerous deliveries with some poor ones easy to score runs off. With a note of exasperation, the famous English cricketer, "Plum" Warner once called Bosanquet the "worst-best bowler in the world".

First in the Cape and then in Johannesburg, Schwarz found the ideal, far-from-prying-eyes conditions in which to practise bowling Bosanquet's bosie. Although he wasn't immediately successful, he honed his craft, and was often a feature in the nets while others were having lunch or had gone home.

In 1904, he was chosen to tour England as a member of the South African team, the qualifications for playing for another country far more elastic than they are today. He was picked for South Africa essentially as a batsman, but in the fourth match of the tour against Oxford University, the students were cruising in their second innings and he was tossed the ball.

He was an immediate success. "Precisely 7.2 overs later, he had five wickets, all clean bowled," reports a recent article on Schwarz in *The Guardian*, "and Oxford were all out for 167. He ended up as the tour's leading wicket-taker, with 96 of them at an average of 14.81 per wicket."

Upon his return to South Africa after the 1904 England tour, Schwarz did for others as Bosanquet had done for him. He generously shared his conjurer's secrets, and by the time the South Africans were ready to tour England again three years later, they arrived with a legendary four-pronged spin attack.

Team-mates Aubrey Faulkner, Gordon White, and Bert Vogler had all caught the googly bug. England batsmen found them tricky customers. Schwarz took 143 wickets on the tour, some finding him virtually unplayable. Those who knew him as the likeable mediocrity lingering on the fringes of Middlesex when he left five years earlier, couldn't believe their eyes.

As is the case with all those who broaden and deepen a tradition, whether in music, sport or the arts, Schwarz put

his own unique spin on what Bosanquet had taught him. He had started out as a medium-fast bowler before falling under Bosanquet's spell and it was natural for him to bowl his googlies at a brisk pace.

The speed at which he bowled added to the difficulty of facing him, and he carried on being a handful back in South Africa, particularly because coiled hessian (or matting) wickets were still widely in use and they encouraged the ball to grip, thus aiding spin.

Photos of Schwarz show why he was well-suited physically to spin bowling. He had long – almost delicate – fingers, perfect for imparting revolutions on the ball, and he was tall, so he let the ball go from a reasonable height, which added bounce.

Hard as he worked on his art, however, he was unable to master the orthodox leg-spinner. Had he been able to bowl the googly (with a leg-spinner's action) and the conventional leg-spinner, like, say, Imran Tahir, the Pakistani-born South African, he would have revolutionised the game rather than providing it with a charming footnote.

Having returned to England, Schwarz fought on the Western Front as a major at the beginning of World War I, later being promoted to the position of deputy assistant quartermaster general. He survived the hostilities, but in a cruel twist of fate, died of the Spanish flu seven days after the armistice had been signed in November 1918, the victim of a virus rather than war itself.



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