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Stranded South Africans running low on medication and hope

MIRAH LANGER

When Capetonians Neil Plit – a severe asthmatic – and his new wife, Lauren, embarked on their honeymoon in Thailand early in March, they had been given the medical go-ahead following reports about the coronavirus in China. It was meant to be their dream trip, for which they had saved for two years.

The couple were on honeymoon when the coronavirus pandemic escalated, causing a shutdown worldwide.

Now, after agonising attempts to get home, they are the only guests left in the more than 100-room resort. While deeply grateful for the assistance of the caring hotel staff, the experience of isolation can sometimes feel like being in the film *The Shining*, says Plit wryly.

People who say that say the couple are stuck in paradise misunderstand the situation. “You aren’t allowed out in public, you can’t swim. We have been advised not to leave the resort.”

When after a few days in Thailand the coronavirus surged to a cataclysmic event, the Plits desperately sought to cut short their honeymoon. By then, ticket prices home had leaped to more than R100 000, beyond any normal means.

Eventually, the couple got tickets to return on 26 March. They drove two hours to Phuket Airport, and stood waiting in a queue so long, it took three hours just to check in.

“Our tickets were processed, our bags were marked and sealed, but as that

happened, a staff member came up and whispered to the lady at the counter. We were told that unfortunately, our country had closed its airspace to us, and we couldn’t travel,” Plit says.

The Plits decided their only recourse was to turn back to the resort, which has, since that day, assisted them in every way, including keeping a skeleton staff just for them, and reducing their rates.

Nevertheless they are far from home – and they feel it. Plit is unable to continue his work in property leasing and rental. Most tragically, the day after the couple were meant to

commercial airlines to plan a flight, the airlines assert that they don’t deal with private individuals to make arrangements like this.

“You read in the media that South Africa is doing this and that. However, they are saying one thing and doing something completely different. We are in a state of complete limbo. It’s hard when you see people from every other country getting back home. It doesn’t seem like we matter to the country. I know we’re not alone, but it’s been a sobering experience.”

The Plits are among 3 960 South Africans who found themselves stuck in foreign lands when South Africa’s borders closed. Half of them have since been brought home.

“We are now considering phase two of our project, which would be to get families in local communities to

adopt stranded South Africans, especially if they are in regions where there are very few of them and it’s becoming increasingly unlikely a plane will be able to access them,” says Darren Bergman, the chairperson of Home Away From Home, the support organisation grappling with how to assist those in dire need of getting home.

“People are becoming increasingly desperate. They are running out of chronic medication and money. The economic implications are a double-edged sword – not only are some stranded people

running out of money abroad, but their support systems back home are struggling financially too,” says Bergman. “Yet, they are expected to battle a defeated rand and economy, and send money abroad, increasing difficulties all round.”

Bergman says another initiative is to partner with the international humanitarian aid organisation, Magen David Adom (Red Shield of David), to get medication to people. They are also hoping to collaborate with Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders), to fill prescriptions.

For fellow Capetonian Tyron Brivik, stuck in Argentina since 7 March, a holiday with his Mexican girlfriend (whom he met during the 2010 FIFA World Cup) has turned into a traumatic entrapment.

“No real progress has been made. I don’t know when I will get home,” he says.

Most recently, the couple made a desperate attempt to cross the border to get to Brazil from where a South African repatriation flight was taking off. They were given a deadline to get to the airport, but with the time it takes to process the requisite permit and the 48-hour bus ride they would have needed to take, it proved devastatingly unfeasible.

Brivik is now trying to live day-by-day within sparse means that are quickly running out. “I’m just trying to be strong to be able to maintain sanity. I think I’ll wear a cape of the South African flag when I get back.”



Justine Segal and her colleagues before taking their flight home

Durbanite Justine Segal is one of the success stories. Originally, she was with a group of 47 employees of MSC Cruises that got stuck at Heathrow Airport while in transit flying from Miami to South Africa as the coronavirus lockdown was imposed.

Since then, just in time for Pesach, she was repatriated on a flight organised by DIRCO. She is in quarantine at a hotel. She’s “very lucky”, Segal said.

While Bergman is pleased about these efforts, he notes that not all repatriation flight have been up to the same standard. “[A recent repatriation] trip back from Rome was a wasted opportunity as there were only 88 people aboard a plane that had a capacity for at least a hundred more passengers.

“Had the logistics been better run by

Continued on page 16>>>



Neil and Lauren Plit at their wedding

fly home, Plit’s grandmother died.

“We couldn’t sit *shiva* [mourning] with the family. When something like this happens, you want to be together.”

He says they spend hours every day examining ways to get home. They are among hundreds of South Africans believed to be stranded in the region. Plit says they are caught in a catch-22 situation. While local representatives from the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) tell them they need to negotiate with

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Farewell to Rav Kossowsky, a Torah giant and a gentleman

JORDAN MOSHE AND JTA

Rabbi Zalman Kossowsky, an eminent Torah giant who left an indelible mark on the South African Jewish community, passed away this week in Florida in the United States at the age of 80.

Kossowsky, a former chief rabbi of Zurich, led congregations around the world in a career that spanned decades, even serving as the rabbi of Johannesburg’s Sydenham Shul between 1978 and 1986. He perpetuated a family legacy of which Johannesburg Jewry was very much a part.

“The Kossowsky name was very prominent in the history of Johannesburg Jewry,” says Yossy Goldman, the rabbi of Sydenham

Shul. “His father, Reb Michel, was the rav of the Beis Medrash Hagodol in Doornfontein, and a founder of Yeshiva College. His grandfather, Reb Yitzchok, was the head of the Beth Din here.”

Born in Tehran to Lithuanian refugees fleeing the Soviet takeover of the country, Kossowsky was raised in South Africa. He went to Israel for his rabbinic studies before moving to the US, serving at one point as a chaplain in the US Marines and working on his doctorate in sociology. He later returned to South Africa, where he played an instrumental role in the religious development of the Jewish community.

Says Goldman, “Reb Zalman was a colleague who carried himself

with distinction. Tall and well-groomed, his rabbinic garb was traditional and stylish, and his forte was his dedication to the pastoral care of his community. He served our community, then numbering well over 1 000 families, and he did it single-handedly with no associate or assistant rabbi. That was more than a full-time job.”

Rabbi Avraham Tanzer, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva College, knew Kossowsky and his family well, working closely with him and his father in the creation of the Yeshiva College campus.

“Like his father, he was very much part of Yeshiva College,” says Tanzer. “He taught there for years and was an integral part of the campus. He was an expert in *mikvaot* [Jewish ritual baths] and supervised the construction of our campus *mikvah*.”

Kossowsky not only taught at the school but was a member of its governing board for two years. His father, Reb Michoel, was also one of the



Rabbi Zalman Kossowsky,

visionaries who founded the Mizrahi shul on the campus.

Tanzer describes Kossowsky as wonderful human being and a brilliant rabbi, a person who was always involved with the community but was never loud or boisterous, leaving a sterling impression on every person he met.

“He was a giving human being who was very sensitive and quiet,” recalls Tanzer. “He loved people, and people

loved him.”

Kossowsky later served as a congregational rabbi to the Kenton Shul in London before accepting the role of chief rabbi of the ICZ (Israelitische Cultusgemeinde Zürich), an umbrella organisation representing Orthodox, liberal, and secular Jewish streams in Switzerland.

Alan Porter, who served on the Sydenham Shul council during Kossowsky’s time, says that the rabbi “had a profound influence on our religious understanding”.

Author and radio personality Howard Feldman remembers his “courageous” ability to handle difficult students when Feldman was as a pupil at Yeshiva College.

Concludes Goldman, “He will be remembered for his kindness, compassion, and loving character, treating everyone with genuine *ahavat Yisrael* [love for fellow Jews].”

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Hitler content makes light of Holocaust during Yom Hashoah

TALI FEINBERG

A spoof video of Hitler complaining that he can’t get coffee from Loof in Norwood, and a board game called *Secret Hitler* sold on takealot.com have both made light of the man who caused the Holocaust in the same week as Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day).

Amidst Facebook posts by community members marking this solemn day, a very different video did the rounds: a humorous clip of Hitler ranting to his generals that he can’t get coffee from shops in Norwood during the lockdown. It was created by local Jewish community members on the platform captiongenerator.com.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* on condition of anonymity, they said, “This video has been doing the rounds for many years, covering a range of topics. It was just a way to bring some humour and light-heartedness to these stressful lockdown times.

“We certainly wouldn’t want to offend anyone in our community deliberately. We are a very proudly Jewish family with strong ties to Israel. We apologise if we offended anyone, especially with the recent commemoration of Yom Hashoah.”

Meanwhile, a game titled *Secret Hitler* which explores the rise of fascism is available for purchase for R919 (on sale) from local online store takealot.com. In January, the game was removed from the shelves of three stores in Montreal,

Canada, following complaints from members of Montreal’s Jewish community.

In 2017, the origins of the game were discussed in the *New York Times*. It reported that in 2015, one of its creators, Mike Boxleiter, spent

Continued on page 6>>

Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
17:25	18:14	Johannesburg
17:54	18:46	Cape Town
17:09	17:59	Durban
17:29	18:19	Bloemfontein
17:25	18:17	Port Elizabeth
17:17	18:09	East London

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Torah Thought

Words which unite, words which divide

The Torah teaches us that “death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Mishlei 18:21), and much has been written and spoken – rightly so – about the negativity of *lashon hara* (negative speech). Every year, when the Parshiot Tazria and M’tzora come around, we revisit the terrible *tzara’at* (plague) which visited people who had been so corrupted by *lashon hara*.

This year in particular, as many sit inside social-media bubbles literally isolated from other human beings, we can reflect on the negative power of speech, but more importantly, on the life-force of the tongue.

The definition of *lashon hara* is that it’s true, and that it causes some type of damage to its subject. The damage could be financial, emotional, psychological, social, and so on. The purpose of these laws isn’t to shut us up permanently, but to help us navigate the perilous tightrope spanning two opposing options: mindless, yet harmful blather, on the one hand; and self-imposed gag-orders, on the other.

We must bear in mind that there is also a halachic requirement to speak

up in certain situations, even to speak *lashon hara* to protect ourselves or others from significant harm. We should ask a competent halachic authority if faced with this type of situation because they are numerous and complex, but we dare not lose sight of the fact that the Torah teaches us that either extreme is dangerous – complete silence in the face of evil is no less problematic than slandering every Facebook friend we have.

However, while building awareness of the dangers of *lashon hara*, we need to keep at the forefront of our Jewish consciousness and conscience the power of *lashon tov* (good speech) to do good.

The second Chassidic rebbe of the Gerrer Chassidim was Rabbi Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter zt”l. His masterpiece is his commentary on the Torah, the *S’fat Emet*, which means, “the language of truth”. He offers a profound explanation of the function of *lashon tov* within Jewish sociology, writing, “The main advantage of [the] human power of speech over animals is the ability it gives us to join together in a society which only happens via our speech ... and

Rabbi Ramon
Widmonte, The
Academy of Learning

this ability to speak is derived from the power of the soul ... because, from the perspective of the soul, all souls have one common root.”

One of the benefits of *lashon tov*, is that it helps bridge the infinite gaps in personality, ethnicity, parenting, and values which exist between different people. Lashon tov helps us to build a society in which different people can join together for noble aims in the holiness of diversity, in recognition of the fact that, as the *S’fat Emet* says, we are all soul-branches of one another.

Perhaps this year, when we are so bereft of human contact, we can appreciate his words a little better. Previously, we may have felt that we were each powerful, independent, strong trees, with no need for the numerous other weeds out there. But this year, with a little more humility, we may perhaps feel that we are not such strapping “oaks”, but rather all branches on one tree of community and humanity, interdependent and needful of each other.

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Elderly hunker down as COVID-19 enters Sandringham Gardens

NICOLA MILTZ

Saul Tomson, the chief executive of the Chevrah Kadisha, was at home with his family enjoying the second day of Pesach when he received the dreaded alert that one of the elderly residents at Sandringham Gardens had tested positive for coronavirus.

“That first call rocks you,” said Tomson, “I heard about it on *yom tov*. It was a shock, but it was a call we had been preparing for.”

He swung into action, and walked the kilometre it took to get to the aged home to make sure that all hands were on deck in the face of the potentially life-threatening crisis.

Sandringham Gardens and the other institutions of the Chevrah Kadisha went into early shutdown and isolation on 13 March well before President Cyril Ramaphosa imposed it on the nation. The idea was to safeguard elderly residents and those most vulnerable to COVID-19 as much as possible.

Because of the early interventions, the Sandringham Gardens shul was the only institution in the community that continued to have regular *minyanim* throughout the pandemic.

As the world’s synagogues shut their doors, it became a beacon of hope to many as elderly residents said *kaddish* on behalf of Jews locally and internationally. To date, the shul says *kaddish* for 1 200 people, and has named 15 baby girls since the start of the lockdown for families as far afield as Uruguay, said resident Rabbi Jonathan Fox, the group rabbi of the Chevrah Kadisha.

So, when the news spread that a resident had contracted the dreaded virus, the little haven of health and wellness for hundreds of elderly residents – including Holocaust survivors – was flung into crisis-control overdrive.

“Many of my staff were celebrating Good

Friday, for others it was *yom tov*, everyone was in some way celebrating with their families. We have a protocol about how to reach me if there is an emergency. By the time I got to Sandringham Gardens, all my senior staff were already in action as well as experts from the private sector



who had been brought in to consult to us, and protocols were being implemented. We were prepared, we had discussed scenarios. Everything was in place.”

The rest of the community got wind of the corona scare only after Shabbos on Saturday night, by which time the institution was already nearly two days into managing the crisis.

The home initiated the investigation on Thursday, 9 April. A resident had recently undergone surgery, and the home was subsequently notified that the surgeon who performed the procedure had tested positive for coronavirus.

The patient was recuperating from his surgery in the acute ward at Sandringham Gardens. He was tested, and the result was negative for COVID-19.

“As a precaution, all those who had resided in that acute ward with him were also tested. From that set of tests, one of the Sandringham Gardens residents tested positive for COVID-19. The resident was – and still is – completely asymptomatic, meaning that he is in perfect

health and showing no symptoms related to coronavirus. Nonetheless, he was transferred to hospital for ongoing monitoring and isolation,” said Tomson.

The institution has since carried out 76 tests including on 58 staff members and 16 elderly residents, all of which have been negative. The 16 residents have been kept in isolation at Sandringham Gardens, a process which hopefully ends this week.

The chev accommodates nearly 1 000 elderly residents in its facilities, who average 88 years old. Many are frail and require constant nursing care.

“The hardest part is to walk the fine line between being extremely vigilant about safety protocols and the psychosocial needs of residents. Many people in our care suffer from psychiatric conditions, and isolation and loneliness can cause all sorts of other concerns. The difficult part is finding the fine balance between maintaining the strictest protocols from a care, hygiene, access, and social gathering point of view, and achieving some sense of normality and structure in their lives. This is challenging.”

In a letter to residents and their families, the organisation explained how Sandringham Gardens had moved swiftly to deep clean the acute unit and other affected areas using high-tech equipment and standard hospital protocols. Additional cleaners were allocated to deep clean common areas. Tomson said the organisation focused on areas which might pose a higher risk, namely stair railings, light switches,

and elevator buttons.

Staff consulted virologists and medical personnel daily. Breakfast and lunch sessions were divided up into three different time slots to ensure fewer people in the dining room. Dinner was served to residents in their rooms. The Nosh Café, a popular gathering point for residents, was no longer furnished with tables and chairs to ensure less congregating. Furniture was removed from smaller lounges in assisted living and frail-care units to prevent people from gathering. Residents were asked to remain in their rooms as much as possible.

Activities take place in smaller groups. Counselling services and other activities have ceased for bigger groups, Tomson said.

Following the scare, the home continues to screen staff at every entrance daily, taking their temperature and checking that they are in good health.

“We have identified a small group of high-risk contact staff whose duties take them throughout the facilities. They will be tested on a weekly basis as a precautionary measure.” Random testing will be conducted on residents and staff as a precaution.

“Our social-services team is being vigilant about which residents might be in need of additional emotional support and counselling at this time,” Tomson said.

Residents who require vital hospital procedures are being kept in isolation for 14 days after their discharge.

Tomson commended the dedication of his staff during this “difficult and challenging period”.

At the time of going to press, the home hadn’t had any more positive tests for COVID-19.



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.



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



application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship may very well be approved!

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 has an in-depth knowledge and a full understanding of European immigration laws.

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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Community shrinking but resilient, survey shows

TALI FEINBERG

The South African Jewish community may be getting smaller, but it is stronger than most communities in the world, ensuring that it will survive well into the future.

“Yes, the community has declined in number over the past decades, but the smaller size belies a surprising degree of dynamism and regeneration within the community. The story is one of vitality and adaptation.”

That’s according to Associate Professor Adam Mendelsohn, the director of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town, which released the long-awaited Jewish Community Survey of South Africa (JCSSA) this week. The survey is the largest and most extensive study of its kind ever undertaken.

It finds that the Jewish population in the country has declined by about 20% over the past 20 years, mainly as a result of migration, but also due to the natural ageing process. The population now numbers “an estimated 52 300”, with the Johannesburg population at 30 000 (an equivalent of 58%), Cape Town 12 500 (24%), and Durban 3 400 (7%). Of the final 11%, most are located in the orbit of Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, with smaller communities in other cities like Pretoria and Port Elizabeth, and a scattering elsewhere.

Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics, the Australian census, and the census of England and Wales suggest that just more than 10 000 Jews may have left South Africa for Australia, Israel, and the United Kingdom (UK) between 2001 and 2015. Data from the JCSSA indicates that 15 245 Jews have migrated in total since 2001. The countries of residence of immediate family members who have left South Africa are Israel (26%), the United States (21%), Australia (20%), and the UK (20%).

Emeritus Professor Stephen Miller, a specialist in the social scientific study of

Jews who provided independent academic advice and feedback on the study, says, “The estimate of population size is no more than that, an estimate. But given the exceptionally careful analyses and comprehensive range of data sources on which it is based, it’s likely to be close to the true figure.”

The report, titled “The Jews of South Africa in 2019: identity, community, society, demography” is a collaboration between the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR), a London-based independent research organisation, consultancy, and think-tank; and the Kaplan Centre.

Distribution of the Jewish population in South Africa (2016-2019)

52 300
TOTAL POPULATION

58%
JHB

24%
CT

7%
DURB

For Mendelsohn, the most unexpected outcome of the survey was “the strength of Jewish identity in South Africa relative to other similar communities. We see this in a variety of measures, allowing us to conclude that overall, Jewish identity in South Africa appears to be stronger, and more religious, than in either Australia or the UK.”

The survey upends the preconception that South African Jewry is an ageing community. “The median age of the South African Jewish population – 45 years – is almost exactly the same as that of Australia. We have long heard that the

Jewish community is ageing. What the median age data reveals is that the pattern is more complicated. Far from fading away, there is evidence of demographic sustainability.”

He emphasises that the period since 2001 has produced “notable patterns of innovation, including the emergence of several new religious and cultural initiatives, as well as new ways of caring for the health and safety of the community. These include initiatives like the Community Security Organisation, Hatzolah, the Sinai Indaba, the Shabbos Project, the Jewish Literary Festival, the

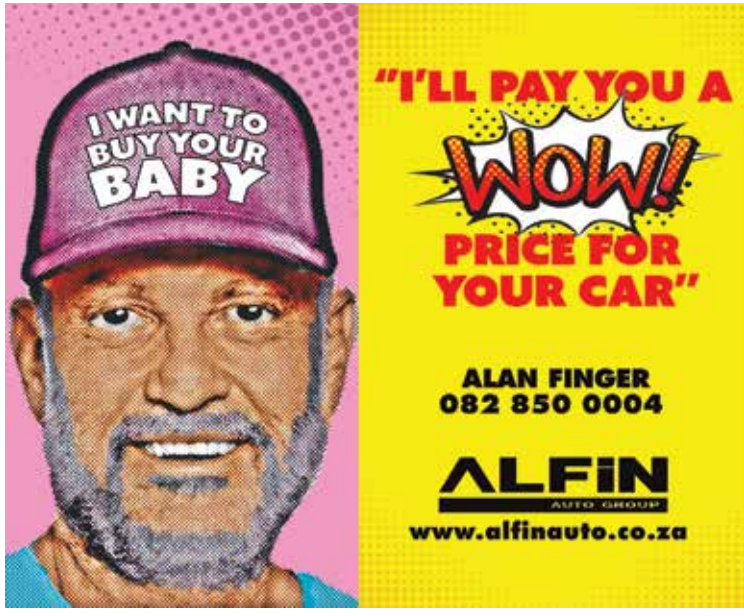
broader society,” Mendelsohn says.

Miller, who resides in the UK, agrees. “The British experience demonstrates that such trends don’t necessarily continue in perpetuity, and that the growth in the Haredi sector of the community can start to compensate for – or even reverse – the erosion of the mainstream sector.”

The study reveals that 89% of Jews in South Africa were born in the country, and 74% have a very or quite strong sense of belonging to South Africa. Sixty-one percent are satisfied with their life in South Africa, although 92% feel that anti-Israel sentiment has increased over the past five years, and 10% of respondents said they have had to reduce the size of their meals over the previous year because they didn’t have sufficient money to buy food.

Ninety-four percent say that unemployment is a “very big” problem in South Africa; a similar proportion says the same about government corruption and crime levels. Twenty-three percent of householders have been the victim of a burglary in the past five years, but only 5.3% of individuals have been the victim of an assault in the same time.

The study shows that the community has a strong Jewish and Zionist identity. Eighty-one percent attend a Passover seder, and 99% have circumcised their son(s). Eighty-eight percent in Johannesburg completely agree with



the statement, “I’m proud to be a Jew”. The equivalent proportion in Cape Town is 81%. “The low intermarriage rate (12%) immediately jumps out,” says Dr Kerri Serman, an applied experimental and behavioural economist and research fellow at the Kaplan Centre.

The community’s Zionism is demonstrated by the fact that 89% of community members have visited Israel, and 32% say it’s likely they will permanently settle in Israel at some point. Ninety-two percent agree that “Israel is the ancestral homeland of the Jewish people”.

“The position of South African Jews on Israel is similar to that of UK Jews in terms of attachment to Israel and self-definition as Zionist,” says Miller. “However, South African Jews are far less likely to support public criticism of Israel than British Jews.”

Seventy-five percent of school-aged Jewish children in South Africa attend Jewish schools, and 78% of community members said they had attended at least one Jewish communal event in the previous year. Seventy-four percent agree with the statement that “the organised Jewish community goes to great lengths to help the underprivileged majority in South Africa”.

“The survey highlights the extent of philanthropy within the community. For example, 81% of Joburg community

Continued on page 12>>

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Looking forward to a great new world



When President Cyril Ramaphosa told the nation on Tuesday evening that South Africa was never going to be the same again, his words sent shivers down my spine.

The government seems to have made plans to access billions to help us through this situation, or so it seems. Meanwhile many, many people – even in our community – are struggling.

However, as the lockdown continues and the number of COVID-19 deaths and infections increase drastically around the world, I wonder what this new world will look like, and whether it will be good for us. What impact will it have on us? How will it change the way we are, how we behave and see things? Will different things become important?

In this edition, we bring you the first in a series of articles on the Kaplan Centre’s brand new research into the Jewish community of South Africa. It’s a wealth of fascinating and extraordinarily relevant information, giving us real insight into who we are and what’s important to us. Over the next few weeks, we will dig deep into the research for you. I have yet to see such a comprehensive report on any community.

However, I can’t help wondering how different the findings would be if the research was done now.

Would we still be such migratory beings? Would we feel more a part of this country than we are said to feel? Would we be more bonded than before?

I wonder. Especially when we are told that the world and this country will never be the same again.

There are some who say we will become a much kinder nation of people, helping each other more, and being gentler with one another. That sounds great, but people are stressed financially, and have frustration they wouldn’t normally have. Granted, they aren’t rushing around because they can’t do so. And yes, there is a peacefulness in being home bound and not being able to have a packed day of events and meetings.

But there is great deal of financial and other stress, fear, claustrophobia, and loneliness. The idea of not being able to feed one’s children is probably a parent’s biggest fear. And yet, it isn’t just the greater population experiencing this. There are people in our community who were living comfortably until lockdown, and are now worried about their next meal, let alone school fees.

Going back to the research, I remember that when it was first leaked that the Jewish community might number about 52 000, people were upset and worried about this information getting out.

Surprisingly, I’m not sure it will have the same impact now. Does it really matter how many of us are here, or is it more important that we punch above our weight and are an incredibly strong and close-knit community? I would say the latter is way more important. I could be wrong, but somehow, I don’t think the numbers are even that relevant at the moment. We have far bigger worries.

The research compares this community to that of the far larger United Kingdom and Australian communities, and we come out so much stronger than they do, particularly in terms of our Jewish identity. If it’s a choice between a large, disparate community or a smaller, close-knit, powerfully Jewish community, I would take the latter any day. Wouldn’t you?

I attribute this to the fact that when our community first felt the impact of the coronavirus, we acted in the best possible way. The communal leadership gathered, and made decisions that were quickly – if not automatically – followed by the community. That’s who we are. We are a real community, bonded together by so many things.

There are two things I find outstanding about our community that are being recognised now. These are how we help each other and help others.

When we are in dire straits, there is always an organisation we can go to for help within our community. I marvel at the Rambam Trust, the Chevrah Kadisha, Yad Aharon & Michael, Koleinu, Hatzolah, and I can go on and on. They are there for us now, and they remain willing to help people in need. There are even a number of lifeline-type call centres so you never have to suffer in silence, and always have someone to reach out to. That’s just within the community.

Since the coronavirus hit South Africa, it’s amazing to hear of all the Jewish people who are out there, within or without organisations, doing whatever they can to make sure hungry people are fed, and have what they need to survive. I can honestly say that there’s no end to the kindness and outreach of this community.

Am I fearful of what will happen in our new world? No, I know that with this kind of community spirit, bond, and care, we will survive and thrive.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

*This week’s SA Jewish Report will be available at retail food outlets. Check our website, **sajr.co.za**, in the top right-hand corner, to see which outlets stock it. You are also always able to download a digital copy from our site.*

An Israeli marriage not made in heaven

In one of the most spectacular U-turns in Israeli political history, the former army chief and leader of the Blue and White party, Benny Gantz, on Monday night signed a coalition agreement with incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

For over a year and through three bitter election campaigns, Gantz denounced Netanyahu as divisive and dangerous to Israel, vowing never to sit in a government with him. Netanyahu derided Gantz as weak, slow, and entirely lacking in the skills necessary to lead the country.

Now these rivals-turned-partners – who still deeply distrust each other – have signed a 14-page “Coalition Agreement for the Establishment of an Emergency National Unity Government”.

The agreement’s goal is to make sure neither can trick the other out of the top seat, and it’s written in such a way that it’s difficult for either side to pull out. It guarantees Netanyahu the premiership for the next 18 months, and if the coronavirus is extended, for another six months after that, but no more. No early elections, no dissolution of parliament, or any other tricks that Gantz continues to fear Netanyahu might have up his sleeve will change the plan. The fact is Gantz will then get his chance at the rotating premiership, and lead Israel for the following 18 months.

During this time, Netanyahu will be his deputy prime minister. But, in reality, Netanyahu will continue to hold the real power as he’ll have the allegiance of three-quarters of the government.

Gantz really wants the premiership. And he no doubt concluded that this was the only way he’d ever get it. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak believes that Netanyahu has dirt on him and threatened to go public with it unless he agreed to the unity government. But who knows?

Gantz has certainly been heavily criticised in the past few weeks not only for his about-face in joining Netanyahu, but also for being outplayed and outmanoeuvred in his negotiation with the prime minister.

To be fair though, Gantz extracted a rigid power-sharing agreement with Netanyahu and took control of powerful government portfolios, with only 17 legislators behind him compared with 59 in Netanyahu’s right-wing bloc.

This leaves the prime minister with some explaining to do in his own backyard.

But so does Gantz. He’s likely to be forced to support legislation that in other circumstances he wouldn’t have. Many pundits agree that Gantz will have his moment in the sun but after this, his (short) political career will be over. Erstwhile supporters feel betrayed and dismayed.

In the coming years, as Netanyahu goes on trial for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust, Gantz will have to defend him remaining in office. Far from being the moral voice calling for the removal of an indicted prime minister, Gantz is now the indicted prime minister’s chief protector and defender.

For Netanyahu, first prize would have been the Knesset (parliament) passing laws granting him immunity from prosecution. Now he will have to stand up to the charges in court. But by agreeing to the unity government, he won the next best thing

**DATELINE:
MIDDLE EAST**

Paula Slier

– remaining in office throughout the court trial and should he lose, also during the appeal.

In essence, Netanyahu can continue to govern the country while appearing in court, and his agreement with Gantz will ensure that he remains in office throughout.

The polls currently favour Netanyahu, but things could have turned bad very quickly for him. That is, if he hadn’t reached a unity government with Gantz, and the country was forced to head to a fourth straight election campaign with a crippling economic recession on the horizon because of the coronavirus shutdown. He is extremely cognisant of this.

Another feather in Netanyahu’s cap is that he can now move forward with American President Donald Trump’s Deal of the Century. Based on the agreement the prime minister and Gantz signed, the latter will be unable to influence its implementation. From June, the Israeli government can, with Trump’s backing, bring a vote to annex parts of the West Bank. With a rightwing majority in the Knesset, it’s likely to pass.

According to the unity agreement, Gantz is not allowed to oppose, but he can abstain. Again, the former army chief is backtracking on earlier declarations he made against the annexation. But he says it’s more important for Israel to have a unity government that can deal with the coronavirus



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his political rival, Benny Gantz, have signed an agreement to form an emergency unity government

pandemic and prevent the country from heading to a fourth election.

Gantz’s Blue and White party sees itself as an opposition within an incoming government set to be the largest in Israel’s history. Of 120 parliamentarians, 52 will have a minister or deputy minister portfolio. There’s already some grumbling about this.

Amid the coronavirus crisis and soaring unemployment across the country, people are being guaranteed jobs which cost the taxpayer. In the grand scheme of things, it’s not an astronomical amount of money, but it’s enough for the public to complain about.

Although Netanyahu and Gantz have signed the unity government agreement, it can still fall apart. Netanyahu hasn’t yet collected all the signatures needed, and various legislation still needs to pass, including a law that sets in place the rotating premiership. Until that happens, the Blue and White party is unlikely to give its full support to Netanyahu. The mistrust runs that deep.

Hitler content makes light of Holocaust during Yom Hashoah

>>>Continued from page 2

the weekend watching the Steven Spielberg-produced World War II mini-series *Band of Brothers*, which inspired him to create a board game based on Hitler’s rise to power.

“I advised them not to call it that,” said Luke Crane, Kickstarter’s head of games, after the group used his platform to raise funds. “My exact words were perhaps a bit more colourful.”

Secret Hitler’s creators are aware that some consumers won’t find any humour in the game’s title, either because Nazis aren’t a laughing matter, or because of fears about the growing visibility of white supremacists and other extremists since the election of United States President Donald Trump.

The game makers haven’t been shy about linking the game to Trump. On their website, they advise those who “don’t think there’s anything funny or cool about fascism” to address complaints to the White House.

Takealot.com hadn’t responded to questions about why it had chosen to stock the game at the time of going to press. The query comes just eight months after this newspaper queried why the digital store stocked anti-Semitic texts like *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which it has since removed from its platform.

Milton Shain, a local anti-Semitism expert and emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town, says, “Satire

can be fine and I think the [video] clip is meant in that sense. I doubt it’s driven by anti-Semitism of any sort. But it’s insensitive insofar as Hitler still evokes – understandably and correctly – horror, and arguably shouldn’t be parodied in this way. There are still many people directly affected by Hitler’s actions. Survivors especially wouldn’t take kindly to this, and should be respected.

“The game is even more problematic. One wonders if the equivalent game between liberation fighters in South Africa and the security police would be accepted as a game,” he said “The sad reality, however, is that, with time, all horrors become subject to insensitivity.”

Fighting sickness, ensuring prosperity

MARC LUBNER, CEO AFRIKA TIKKUN

The COVID-19 crisis may be filling us with trepidation and concern, but South Africans are coming together in the most remarkable ways.

Days after our government implemented a lockdown, corporate-backed initiatives such as the Solidarity Fund were established. Organisations such as the Young Presidents Organization, a global network of chief executives, formed task teams designed to co-ordinate efforts amongst their members to offer intellect, guidance, and support across numerous areas.

Some members used their company assets to assist civil society and work in sync with government initiatives. Lauren Woolf, in collaboration with other partners, designed and implemented an ingenious way for South Africa’s best artworks to be sold and for the proceeds to go to artists struggling to cope with the socio-economic consequences of the lockdown. Similarly, Judge Sharise Weiner fills her days writing judgements and orchestrating a face-mask manufacturing programme for Afrika Tikkun, which will empower unemployed community-based workers.

However, in order for our goodwill to be sustainable, it must employ responsible kindness, a value that replaces knee-jerk reactions with longer-term programmes that remain once the immediacy of the COVID-19 threat has passed. How do we ensure that we don’t perpetuate a victim mindset by simply handing out food parcels during the lockdown?

Certainly, we need to respond to the immediate threat of this virus and do all we can to prevent or at least curtail its spread. Afrika Tikkun recognises the importance of social infrastructure such as community-based organisations that have supported their wider communities through stokvels, primary health support, and other initiatives.

When the COVID-19 lockdown was implemented, we immediately turned our centres into distribution points in the hearts of these townships. As our programmes came to a quick and premature close, we sent 10 000 children home from our centres equipped with a month’s supply of food, soap, and sanitisers. These were generously supplied by Pick n Pay and the Johannesburg Stock Exchange among other corporate and individual donors. Each pack included important information about the virus, hand washing, and where to seek medical support. Our social workers visited the elderly and vulnerable, and prepared them for what lay ahead. We also turned to community radio to transmit messages of positivity and support, and reassure communities.

Realising that the task was too great for our resources, we turned to partnerships. Organisations such as Pick n Pay consolidated our buying needs, enabling us to source in bulk at the best prices. The retailer known for the generosity of the Ackerman founding family got behind our efforts by enabling us to join its national Feed the Nation programme. This allowed us to package food hampers at its various stores, and enabled our organisation and affiliates to access these hampers in areas close to, and at times in, the very townships we serve. Krost Steel and Stallion Security offered additional transport to assist with deliveries.

Funding poured in from local and international donors, and expatriate South Africans gave back to their country of birth in a show of solidarity. Afrika Tikkun was selected to be one of the distributing agencies for the Solidarity Fund commissioned to provide more than 25 000 food packs within a week. Nongovernmental

organisation Rhiza Babuyile parked its mobile clinics at our centres, working tirelessly to offer testing and medical support for the Tikkun teams and beneficiaries. SA Harvest, a newly formed organisation which rescues food that would otherwise be wasted, delivered hundreds of meals to our Alexandra centre.

While the support has been overwhelming, we face the challenge of ensuring the sustainability of such efforts in a manner that doesn’t undermine but rather strengthens the network of community-based structures. By supporting such structures, we help build the leadership that will be so necessary in these environments post COVID-19. By

creating community-based programmes such as those making cloth face masks, and giving these organisations a channel to markets not previously open to them, we can make an impact on the high levels of unemployment.

Our concern today is COVID-19, but our real challenge is negating poverty altogether. We have seen how powerful we can be by working as one.



Marc Lubner, CEO Afrika Tikkun



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Entrepreneurs fight to keep businesses afloat

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

“I’ve taken strain in every possible way. I’m unable to meet my personal financial obligations and those of the business, where I haven’t been able to pay suppliers, banks, and most critically, staff.”

These are the words of Anat Apter, who together with her husband Menachem, co-founded Middle Eastern takeaway brand Anat in 1992. Under lockdown, many entrepreneurs are in similar turmoil.

From humble beginnings, Anat now consists of two bakeries and centralised kitchens that supply 25 franchised takeaway stores as well as various supermarkets. “Almost 600 people rely on this business,” she says. “I feel a great sense of responsibility.”

Through its bakery – designated an essential service – the business is supplying a fraction of its clientele and employing a handful of staff. “If head office collapses, it means the franchises can’t continue,” says Anat. “We’re trying to avoid this eventuality.”

The immediate future looks grim. “Most of our stores are in shopping centres, and people are understandably reluctant to be in these spaces,” she says. “So post-lockdown, recovery could take months. There could be a boom in delivery, but this would have to be huge to ensure the stores don’t operate at a loss.

“Our business could collapse in the time we’re waiting for a response to our many funding applications. We can’t afford that,” says Anat. That’s why they’ve launched a R3 million crowdfunding campaign to support staff and keep the business afloat.

For Nadine Hocter, the founder of corporate massage company Sheer Bliss, COVID-19 has been devastating. “Since mid-March, we haven’t had a single sale. All bookings were wiped out.

“Having the greatest impact is the feeling that what I’ve built though years of blood, sweat, tears and sacrifice is gone,” says Hocter. “Yet, I still have a brand, business acumen, and the knowledge I’ve gained.”

But Hocter isn’t moping. She’s investigating ways to reduce operating expenses, and has applied for the relevant government relief funds. “I’ve always run this business debt free, though,” she says. “I don’t see the sense of incurring hundreds of thousands of rands in debt considering the level of uncertainty about the future.”

Hocter is heartsore for the almost 60 therapists she employs across the country. “They are not on my payroll, they are subcontractors without the benefit of UIF [Unemployment Insurance Fund]. If I do get funding, I’ll pour it into loans to therapists which they can work off when

business picks up again.”

With remote working expected to remain the new normal after lockdown, Hocter’s adjusting her business model. “We’ll market home massages as much as possible,” she says. She is putting rigorous safety protocols in place to protect clients and therapists.

Rikki Kotzen, the owner of swim school Infant Aquatics Academy, has no idea when she’ll be able to resume operations. “Even after lockdown, we can’t open until the ban on sports activities in South Africa is lifted,” she says. In the meantime, Kotzen has been sending videos to families for kids to practice their skills outside of the pool.

While Kotzen used her business savings to pay her nine staff members for March and April, she can’t afford their May salaries if the school remains closed. “Even when we’re allowed to resume, it will be winter when we usually attract only

half our clientele,” she says. “People will also be recovering from major financial losses so extra murals won’t be a priority. Of our 131 families who attended in term one, only 23 families have paid for the upcoming

term. The cost of running a business like mine are far greater than you’d think. On average, it costs the swim school R100 000 a month to stay afloat. That’s just for one of my two premises.”

Kotzen has applied to the Oppenheimer Fund for salary relief, but hasn’t had any response. “There’s

only so much debt you can get into though,” she says. “The worst part for me as a business owner is the prospect of being banned for much longer. Then, I’m not sure whether I’ll have a team waiting for me.”

“*Men tracht und Gott lacht*,” says restaurant owner, Andrew Human quoting a well-known Yiddish saying meaning, “Man plans and G-d laughs.” Having always dreamed of owning a restaurant, the former Loeries chief executive bought Blind Tiger Café in Parkview in September 2019. “Of all the businesses, who wants a restaurant now?” he laughs ruefully.

Human’s neighbourhood café and bar is a popular night spot, but as the restrictions on alcohol and crowds began in mid-March, turnover rapidly decreased. “Mixing food and alcohol is what makes restaurants profitable,” says Human. “If we’re allowed only a maximum of 50 people including staff members, and can’t serve alcohol after 18:00, it’s not economical.”

Human anticipates similar restrictions after lockdown. His business will probably have to add breakfast to its offerings, but it won’t have a captive market on the popular high-end street.

For now, Human is paying wages to his 25 staff members but can’t continue indefinitely. While he has investigated selling frozen meals over the lockdown period, it’s impractical. “It costs me less to stay closed than to make some frozen meals that won’t cover overheads.”

Human says the only viable strategy is to sell vouchers through restaurant booking platform, Dineplan. “We’re putting a 10% added value on the vouchers which will cost us more when we reopen, but if it helps us with cashflow now, it’s worth it.” With a customer base largely composed of regulars, Human is praying he’ll get the support he needs from those still earning salaries.

has prompted several religious conundrums. In Israel, before Pesach, a debate ensued on whether Zoom could be used for the seder. Most rabbis said no, but a small group of Moroccan rabbis said it would be permissible if connected before the festival commenced. Services have been broadcast three times on weekdays on Haredi radio stations to accompany people in prayer, sanctioned by Israel’s Sephardi chief rabbi, but Ashkenazi authorities don’t consider this a *minyán* (prayer quorum).

Communities are struggling financially, and in the US, many Jewish community centres

have had to lay off workers. “Coronavirus could be a turning point for organised Jewish life. Umbrella organisations, shuls, and youth movements have had to reinvent themselves, and many have gone online. They will have to continue to work, live, and thrive in a situation with lower donations from their members,” Klein said.

Klein noted that South Africa’s Jewish community had shown leadership and had been proactive in shutting its institutions even before the president ordered the nationwide lockdown. It had learned from other communities’ tragic experiences.

“The worst part for me as a business owner is the prospect of being banned for much longer. Then, I’m not sure whether I’ll have a team waiting for me.”

COVID-19 ravages Jewish communities abroad

STEVEN GRUZD

The close-knit nature of Jewish families and communities and the physical proximity of rituals and customs has led to disproportionately high COVID-19 infection rates among religious Jews in many countries. The pandemic has also stoked the fires of anti-Semitism.

So said Israeli journalist Zvika Klein on a Zoom webinar hosted by the South African Zionist Federation and the Israel Centre this month.

“Jews around the world have unfortunately been in worse situations compared to other communities in general,” said Klein, who consistently covers diaspora communities in the Israeli media. “Jewish communities were among the first to have a major coronavirus infection problem. Initially they had higher proportions of infections than the general population in the United States, United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Sweden, for example.” This has, however, changed as the virus has spread to poorer communities.

Klein pointed to the festival of Purim on 10 March as a major reason for the rapid initial spread of coronavirus through synagogues. It preceded government decrees on social distancing, self-isolation, and lockdown. “Hugging, kissing, and closeness to family heightened the risks of infection,” Klein said.

He also remarked that conspiracy theories blaming Jews for the pandemic have swirled on the internet. Some claim that Jews invented COVID-19 just so Israel could cash in with a vaccine. High infections among religious communities have prompted accusations that Jews think they are special and don’t have to listen to the rules.

Italy was the first European country with a major COVID-19 outbreak. On 20 April, Italy had almost 179 000 cases and more than 23 600 deaths. Many younger Italian Jews have emigrated or work in other parts of the world, so it’s an aging population with many of the elderly

succumbing.

Italy was among the first to advise on key halachic questions, forbidding close contact and kissing the Torah, mezuzah, or tallit. The chief rabbi of Rome decided that Megilat Esther could be read over the internet. The community secured kosher meat for Pesach only at the last minute as its usual *shochetim* (slaughterers) couldn’t travel from Israel.

France’s 450 000 Jews, the largest community in Europe, was also hard hit by the virus. France had almost 113 000 infections and 19 718 deaths by 20 April. Its rabbinic authorities closed the mikvehs and stopped circumcisions. Kosher food ordered for Pesach got stuck due to flight interruptions and travel bans.

The UK hasn’t been spared either. By 6 April, 55 Jews had died due to coronavirus, 2.3% of the confirmed national figure at the time. The country had 120 000 cases and 16 000 deaths by 20 April.

In Sweden, with a small Jewish community, Jews have died at a rate 14 times higher than the general population. Many were Holocaust survivors over the age of 80. “But it doesn’t just infect old people,” Klein said. “Hospitals worldwide are full of men in their 30s. This should remind us all to be careful and obey the rules.”

Counting Jewish coronavirus cases in the US is difficult given the different levels of religious observance and assimilation. But the Chassidic community has been severely affected, Klein said. A big challenge for the ultra-Orthodox is that “they have been educated that science is bad, and now they are supposed to listen to scientists”, said Klein. It’s important to engage this community in a different way, and Israel has created a YouTube channel providing health information in Yiddish. In US Haredi communities, “It took a very long time to see a behaviour change. Funerals and weddings still drew large crowds even after social distancing warnings were issued.”

“After coronavirus, will halacha be at the same place it was before?” asked Klein. The pandemic



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Inner resources after external isolation

OPINION

BENJAMIN BLUMENTHAL



“Everyone back on the bus!”

Thursday, 19 March, started with those words, cutting short our much-anticipated Grade 7 marine day outing, and ended with the closure of our school. Many more schools would follow suit in the days to come.

By 08:00 the next day, school work was posted online, and by Monday, live Zoom lessons were in full swing, delivering real-time teaching to scores of excited pupils. Herzlia has been using online educational platforms like Google Classroom for several years, so the transition from bricks and mortar teaching to online learning was far more seamless than it was for most schools.

The days following the national lockdown would present a host of challenges, personal and professional, and no one would be exempt. They have forced everyone to face their reality, whatever that may be.

Mine is the fact that I’m a 39-year-old husband, father, teacher, and avid outdoorsman. What’s an outdoorsman, you ask? It’s someone who gets ratty if he hasn’t had his nature fix. Five weeks in a small flat (gulp!) – like I said, this lockdown was going to pose different problems for different people.

My garage has become my refuge, a therapy couch if you will. Equipped with basic exercise gear (mat, kettlebells, skipping rope, and punching bag), I’m amazed what can be accomplished in a small space. My afternoon workout is the carrot dangling at the end of every day. Each family member has their own workout time, giving important routine to our day.

A typical day in lockdown is something of a juggling act. My wife is also a teacher, so our online lessons take preference, with more mundane chores like eating and cleaning slotted somewhere in between. We take turns to cook dinner, take off the table, wash up, and end off with a family game.

At 20:00, we have a ritual of acknowledging the heroic work being done by essential workers. We clap and whoop from our balcony along with so many others in the neighbourhood, and for a short time, we feel unified.

After almost a month under lockdown, we are trying to adopt certain principles which, through trial and error, seem to make living in cramped conditions easier. These include:

- Some days are better than others;
- Make peace with uncertainty because it’s going to be here for a while;
- Try to be in the now;
- Laugh at the whoopsies and irritations (we don’t always succeed, but it’s getting easier);
- Take it one day at a time;
- Be kind to yourself and to those around you, we are all sharing this space and doing our best in this extraordinary situation we find ourselves;
- Make things fun (think Mary Poppins’ “spoon full of sugar”); and

Limit social media, it rarely leaves you feeling good.

I often think about a video I saw of Israeli politician and activist Natan Sharansky explaining how he survived years of imprisonment in a Russian gulag, four years of which were spent in solitary confinement.

Can a person cultivate that type of mental strength, or is it just a case of having it or not? There are days when I have limitless patience and feel grounded, and days when despair starts to creep in.


If this lockdown has done one thing, it’s forced me to look in the mirror and face myself, warts and all, and to smile and accept them with grace.

• Benjamin Blumenthal is the head of Grade 7 at Herzlia Middle School, and a science and biology educator. He is married to Taliah, also a teacher. They have a young daughter.

Seismic shifts and aftershocks

OPINION

DAN BROTMAN



Late last month, my board took the difficult decision to close down the educational travel company I co-founded four years ago with Investec. We felt it would be preferable to going into debt, given that international travel will be one of the last aspects to return to normal once this pandemic subsides.

In spite of my company closing down, I’m grateful for my privilege compared to the majority of South Africans. Unlike most, I have ample space in my home to exercise and be on my own, and can afford nutritious food and private healthcare. I also have access to high-speed internet and technological devices that enable me to communicate with the outside world whenever I wish, including with my family in the United States, with whom I recently enjoyed two Passover seders via Zoom.

As a naturally-introverted, young, and healthy individual whose basic needs for survival are being met, the fear and anxiety I’m living with in lockdown are less about the actual pandemic and more about how the societies in which we live may emerge worse-off as the result of the collective trauma we have experienced.

Growing up in the Boston area in the early-2000s, my generation was taught that if we excelled in high school, we would be accepted to a prestigious university, which would then automatically lead to a good job. Having graduated from university a decade ago in the midst of the global financial crisis, my peers and I soon discovered that the straight-forward path to a fulfilling life that we had been instructed to follow was no longer applicable in a world that was undergoing seismic shifts.

Many of my peers graduated without a job lined up, and were forced to move home with their parents, sometimes taking unpaid internships or jobs that did not require an undergraduate degree.

I, too, realised that the rules of the game on which I had been raised were now obsolete. But, I viewed this period of despair and uncertainty as an opportunity to start following my own truth. In 2010, at the age of 23, rather than move back into my parents’ home and face a potentially bleak future, I threw caution to the wind and flew to Israel with one suitcase, where I worked at a call centre for four months and slept on my friend’s couch in Jerusalem. I then followed my heart in April 2011 to Cape Town, where a combination of fate and luck enabled me finally to start building a new life.

Almost a decade later, it feels as if history is repeating itself. The universal truths we once took for granted, such as unfettered globalisation and cross-border mobility, the idolisation of entrepreneurship and risk-taking, and a push towards small government, now seem to be out of fashion, but we haven’t yet learned the new rules of the game.

When people ask me what I plan to do next, I don’t know how to respond, as I’m unsure what the world will look like, even once a vaccine is discovered. The collective post-traumatic stress disorder we may carry could result in us deciding to continue conducting the majority of our business, social, and spiritual lives online.

Governments may balk at suddenly having to relinquish the enhanced power and invasive tools to which they became accustomed during the pandemic, leading to authoritarian tendencies worldwide. Immigration may be severely curtailed as the world experiences unprecedented unemployment, limiting upward mobility for skilled and unskilled economic migrants. Partaking in international travel, either for business or leisure, may become socially unacceptable, prohibitively expensive, or too logistically complex for the middle-class. Countries may focus on decreasing their dependence on global supply chains and trade to the greatest extent possible, resulting in a rise of ultra-nationalism and racism. Such potential scenarios, whether realistic or imagined, make me fear the day when lockdown ends.

This pandemic has also given me time to reflect on inequality and risk. At times I find myself reading international news and envying the residents of developed countries whose governments can afford to fund overly-generous stimulus packages. These cash payments help the recently unemployed pay their bills and highly subsidise employee salaries so that companies can avoid retrenchment. In fact, I have a friend in the US who has recently been granted a temporary leave of absence due to COVID-19, and is now earning more from federal and state unemployment benefits than he earned when he was working.

The residents of developing countries, whose governments usually don’t have the resources to fund such a generous social safety net, are often left to their own devices. These governments are often dependent on donations or funding from high net-worth individuals, non-profit, and/or multilateral organisations to provide some semblance of a social safety net for small businesses and the unemployed. The pandemic has raised questions about whether working or running a business in a country with a weak social safety net is, in fact, too high a risk, given the possibility of future global health, environmental, or financial catastrophes.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Connecting with Judaism centres me at a time when the world feels so uncertain, and I’m grateful that our religious leaders have adapted so quickly to using video conferencing tools. I also surprisingly feel calmer when watching documentaries about past global traumas, such as the 1918 Spanish flu and the world wars. In the first half of the 20th century, entire generations were confronted with global challenges that forced them to put their lives on hold or suspend their careers for years on end.

However once those cataclysmic events ended, many of them went on to build happy and productive lives. If our parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were able to rebuild after having put their dreams on hold for years, then so too can we emerge from this pandemic and rebuild an even brighter future.

• Dan Brotman is a native of Boston, a graduate of the University of Oregon, and has been living in South Africa since 2011. He co-founded an educational travel venture that took 1 000 South African business leaders to ten of the world’s most innovative countries.

Planning, preparation, and paranoia

OPINION

TIMOR LIFSCHITZ



My husband Marc and I believe that as a registered nurse and an advanced life-support paramedic, we need to play our part as essential service workers in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it doesn’t reduce our feelings of anxiety.

When the coronavirus started making the news, it was terrifying to see the extent of its spread and the death rate. When South Africa got its first positive case, I knew that transmission was inevitable.

When lockdown started, we recognised that we needed to start examining our lives. First, we updated our wills, including discussing what would happen if we both died. This included making sure that we knew each other’s passwords and the policies or debits we were responsible for. This was imperative as we have two little girls, a four-year-old and an 11-month-old.

As we continue working, we are grateful to have our nanny living on the property with us to take care of our girls.

I feel disheartened that I can’t spend much time with them, and I can’t do all the fun activities with them I found online. My oldest is bored at home, and is getting more screen time than I’m comfortable with, but I’m trying to let go, and just keep her safe and loved. She moves onto new activities quickly, and I can’t keep up. She picks up on our conversations, and knows that she has to stay inside as there is a virus, and that mom and dad wear masks when they go out to work.

This is one of the reasons we have decided to send her to my mother-in-law for the remainder of the lockdown. I will miss her, but recognise that it’s best for her right now.

Our youngest will stay with us as I’m still breastfeeding. I was considering whether to wean her, but I know how beneficial breast milk is especially in combatting the coronavirus, so I’ll continue to do so. The problem is that, because I’m so anxious, my breast milk supply is diminishing, and it’s difficult to express at work.

I have made sure to plan meals until the end of the month with the food available in the house.

Marc and I now sleep in separate bedrooms to minimise exposure because of the high-risk work we do. When we arrive home from work, we take our shoes off before entering the house, sanitise our hands, and shower before interacting with the girls.

We are taking supplements to support our immune system. We have also discussed giving one another drips with high doses of vitamin C, but haven’t done so yet.

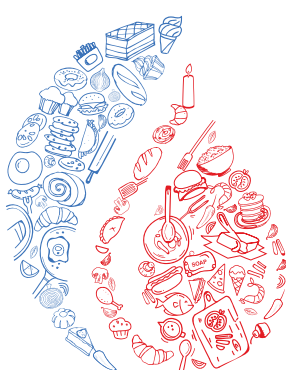
While we try our best to make living at home as normal as possible, our anxiety is hard to deal with. Marc wakes up in the middle of the night, and I struggle to fall asleep. The conspiracy theories and research studies are stressful, and I don’t know what to believe most of the time.

The hardest part is that we were considering whether to try for another baby, but we need to put those plans on hold until we know what the situation will be in a few months’ time.

• Timor Lifschitz is a registered nurse, midwife and certified lactation consultant.



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South African Jews are on the move

JORDAN MOSHE

Migration, whether within South Africa or beyond, is on the rise among South African Jewry. Whether they’re relocating to Cape Town or Tel Aviv, South African Jews are looking for a life that better suits them.

According to the findings of the report compiled by the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR) and the Isaac & Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town, migration and emigration present a pressing issue for the local Jewish community.

“Emigration is a huge challenge, not just in terms of the numbers that have already left the country, but also the number of people who say they are considering leaving in the future,” Dr David Graham, senior research fellow at the JPR and the author of the report told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.

“In that context, the community’s perceived ‘existential threat’ differs notably from others, where chief existential concerns relate to assimilation, anti-Semitism, low fertility, and ageing. That isn’t to say these aren’t issues in South Africa, it is just that emigration drowns out these other issues.”

Statistics show that about 37% of

survey respondents said they were likely to move from their current location in the next five years, whether to a different suburb, city, or abroad. The main factors influencing the decision to leave South Africa are geography (with Joburgers being most likely to relocate), age, and marital status.

A total of 43% said that they had considered leaving South Africa

undeniably high in both absolute and relative terms,” said Graham. “And data revealed by the survey suggest this will continue.

“We don’t have the data to say, but the motivation is fairly simple: when Jews feel safe and secure, they tend to stay put; when they feel threatened or insecure, they seek to move.”

Graham said that countries go through different upheavals in different time periods, and South Africa’s Jewish population is by no means unique in this respect. “The desire to migrate corresponds directly with the perceived intensity of the societal problem to hand, but also the ability to leave and impediments to doing so are important considerations,” he said.

According to the findings, the top reason given by respondents for wanting to leave the country was concern about the future of South Africa, including political stability and the government. This was followed, at some distance, by concern about personal safety and crime, with the desire to live in Israel ranking third.

Access to international spaces and opportunities also seems to be a determining factor. Natan

Pollack, who emigrated to Amsterdam a year ago, said that he didn’t run from South Africa so much as run towards an opportunity elsewhere. A co-founder of technology and innovation immersion venture En-novate, Pollack sought a new opportunity elsewhere after leaving the company in 2018.

“I wanted to compete against young professionals at a global level, so it was important to be somewhere that gave me a sense of global competition,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*. “Another consideration was the diminishing value of the rand, and though it wasn’t certain, I felt it was a safer bet not to limit myself financially.”

In spite of his affinity for South Africa and its Jewish community, Pollack wanted to tap into a more global mindset, feeling that European countries offered greater diversity and alternatives. Today he works at Mambu, a fintech company which innovates banking systems.

“I think I’ve found a lot of what I wanted. Beyond the access to new spaces and experiences, the change in physical safety has played a huge role in reducing anxiety and improving daily well-being,” he said.

South African Jews aren’t looking for opportunities only overseas. A total of 38% of respondents said they would move locally, with some of them saying they were likely to move to a different region of South Africa. More than half of this sub-group preferred Cape Town, a fact illustrated by the report’s suggestion that a net population

flow away from Johannesburg and towards Cape Town took place in the five years preceding the survey.

Said Graham, “Compared to Cape Town, Johannesburg is more religious, close-knit, and wealthier, but it’s also more concerned about crime, less mobile, and keener to leave.”

While the main reason given for moving to a different part of South Africa was a better lifestyle, Jews have also found job satisfaction in Cape Town. Gavi Ziegler, who relocated from Johannesburg to Cape Town with his wife in 2018, said that his move to take up the role of campus rabbi at Phyllis Jowell Jewish Day School brought a notable improvement in his quality of life.

“The lifestyle is definitely better,” he said. “Weekends are like a holiday, and when you return to work on Monday, you really feel like you’ve had a break.

In spite of keenly feeling the considerable difference in the size of the Jewish community, Ziegler said he was able to express his religiousness comfortably and meaningfully. In fact, while the report suggests that Cape Town is less religious, Ziegler said that the social awareness of religious Jews in Cape Town felt greater than in Johannesburg.

“If you are religious here you feel that your actions make a difference,” he said. “Your voice is heard, and you feel the contribution that you make. While the community is smaller and religious people may be more isolated, they are proud, and you can feel their impact.”

Crime stats are low – but that’s not how we see it

TALI FEINBERG

The commonly held belief in the Jewish community that we are under siege from crime isn’t a reflection of reality, according to the newly-released Jewish Community Survey of South Africa (JCSSA). The truth, according to the research, is that only 5.3% of community members have been the victim of violent crime in the past five years.

Furthermore, less than a quarter of respondents (23%) have been the victim of a burglary in the past five years. However, as many as 87% of respondents believe crime is a big problem.

CAP Chief Operating Officer Sean Jammy said these statistics aligned with organisational data. “The finding that people’s perception of crime doesn’t mirror reality is consistent with CAP’s anecdotal experience. We are committed to continue to beat crime in all of our communities, and are focusing on communicating better so that perception mirrors reality.

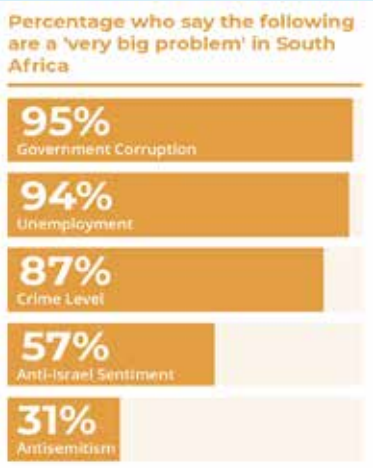
“Crime throughout CAP’s communities has been stable for the past five years,” Jammy said. “There are variations in methodology, but in general, crime hasn’t escalated and in some areas, has decreased significantly thanks to CAP’s approach and our active community members.”

Jammy believes that the perception that violent crime is higher than it actually is follows the advent of instant messaging groups and other forms of social media.

“These have resulted in crime being communicated extensively and often inaccurately.

“We encourage our community to be more critical about how crime is reported, the groups they are members of, and to strive to contextualise the crime they hear of. CAP issues a weekly newsletter to each of our communities with verified crime reports as well as lessons learned and security tips.”

In spite of the concern about crime, the survey shows that most Jews are settled and feel part of the wider South African society,



with 74% having a “very” or “quite strong” sense of belonging in South Africa, and 61% feeling satisfied with their life in the country.

While gender-based violence has been in the spotlight recently, only 9% of Jewish women say they have been harassed in a public setting like a street or a shop in the past year, and only 3.9% have been the victim of a violent assault in the past five years. In fact, more Jewish men (6.9%) said they had

been victims of violent assault than women in this time period.

In spite of this reality, male and female members of the community still feel unsafe. Sixty-six percent feel unsafe walking alone in their local neighbourhood after dark: 79% of women, and 51% of men. Overall, 68% of respondents in Johannesburg, and 61% in Cape Town feel this way.

Half of all respondents believe that crime has increased in their neighbourhood over the previous five years. While this is the case with 63% of Cape Town community members, only 43% of Johannesburg community members believe this.

The younger people are, the less likely they are to believe that crime has increased. Thirty percent of people in their twenties believe crime has risen compared with almost 60% of people in their fifties.

Yet, only 17% of community members see crime as their primary reason for wanting to emigrate. Respondents were asked to list the three main reasons why they would move to a different country in the next five years. In all three cases, the top reason given was “concern about the future of South Africa [political stability/government]”. One in three (33%) gave this as their primary reason for wanting to leave South Africa, followed, at some distance, by “personal safety concerns/crime”.

Those who said they had been assaulted in the previous five years were considerably more likely to consider leaving.a

Community shrinking but resilient, survey shows

>>Continued from page 5

members donated money to the Chevrah Kadisha in the 12 months preceding the survey,” says Serman.

“The survey has captured a moment of uncertainty in the collective communal mindset,” she says. “For example, 15% of respondents indicate that they are likely to leave South Africa within the next five years. Moreover, 43% have considered leaving South Africa in the year preceding the survey. While this might not necessarily reflect intent, it does speak to a feeling of uncertainty and impermanence.” The preferred destination for would-be emigrants is Israel (51%), far ahead of any other country or location.

Serman points out that “the community has a high rate of self-employment, with almost one out of five respondents being self-employed. Looking forward, this makes it vulnerable to the economic pressure associated with COVID-19.”

Mendelsohn says that while challenges lie ahead, “What I take to be heartening is all the evidence that points to resilience and adaptability. Yes, the Jewish population of South Africa may well be smaller in ten years, but there is plenty to suggest in the data that our community will

still be a lively, creative, and dynamic one.”

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Office of the Chief Rabbi, Chevrah Kadisha, South African Board of Jewish Education, and South African Zionist Federation said in a joint statement, “We are heartened by many of the findings of the survey. We look forward to engaging further with the two institutes responsible for the report and, in particular, to better understand their demographic estimates which have been based on various assumptions and which we believe require further examination and testing. Having a more exact idea of the demographics of the community will play a vital role in future planning.

“The story of the Jewish community in South Africa has always been less about large numbers and more about vibrancy, creativity, and perhaps above all, a shared loyalty to and identification with the Jewish people and their heritage, including their connection to the state of Israel. What is particularly heartening about the results is how they demonstrate the resilience and vitality of South African Jewry.”

Farewell to intuitive property dealmaker, Marc Wainer

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

“To me, he was just dad, pops, or much as he never warmed to it, my ‘old man’. The world will never be quite the same again.”

These were the words of Jordan Wainer in tribute to his late father, property mogul Marc Wainer, who passed away aged 71 on Monday as a result of a heart attack.

Sadly, Jordan, who lives in Australia, was unable to attend the funeral on Tuesday of this industry icon who started off his career as a greengrocer, due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

“Today, I begin the rest of my life poorer for not having my best friend and confidant a phone call away, but richer knowing that my parents are reunited and can continue their 40+ years together. Over the past eight months, I have watched him take each day as a battle to survive without his darling wife by his side,” Jordan wrote in a LinkedIn tribute.

“I believe that for all his unyielding strength, he ultimately succumbed to a broken heart.” Wainer’s wife, Lesley, passed away eight months ago.

“Dad taught us all so many invaluable lessons which will be shared and reshared for generations to come,” Jordan’s tribute continued. “If you had the privilege of working with him, you would know that for him in business, a handshake was enough, and of course finding good people and backing them wholeheartedly was the key to his success.”

Wainer, who grew up in Sydenham, Johannesburg, was the recipient of the Absa Jewish Achiever Listed Company Award in 2013.

He was a close friend and business associate of the Ellerine family for 30 years,

businesswoman Dionne Ellerine told the *SA Jewish Report*. Wainer had worked in the Ellerine Bros offices for the past six months since retiring from Redefine Properties which he founded in 1999 and listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange in 2000.

Redefine became South Africa’s second biggest listed property fund, with Wainer overseeing deals from Australia to Eastern Europe without ever having a formal education, according to *BusinessLive*.

“He was an intuitive dealmaker in the property industry,” Dionne recounts. “He would work out the details on the back of his cigarette box and afterwards, when the commercial teams analysed it, their figures would tally with his.

“He was my dad’s [Eric Ellerine’s] partner for 30 years. We never had a written contract between us – he was the most honest partner,” said Dionne, a director of Ellwain Investments, the property company the two families founded together.

Eric was, in fact, quoted on the cover of the book *Making my Marc: Lessons from a Life in Property* that Wainer wrote, saying, “Marc Wainer is one of the best dealmakers in the South African property industry that I have ever had the pleasure of dealing with.”

Said Dionne, “His word was his bond. He always used to call bankers ‘crooks in suits,’” she laughs, “yet he worked closely with them. That was Marc.

“He had the ability to take very complex issues, make them simple, and find the opportunity in the deal.”

One of the best deals Wainer was involved in over the years was the purchase of the Canal Walk Shopping Centre in Cape Town for Hyprop and Ellerine Bros.

Wainer had a heart attack ten days ago, had stents inserted, but succumbed to a second heart attack on Monday morning. “When I spoke to him on Sunday, he said he was bored,” Dionne said. “He was raring to go – we had so

investment,” she said. “He said he wished he had found it ten years earlier.

“He was even more active in that area since his retirement.” Due to this interest, some in the industry dubbed Wainer ‘Marco Polo!’

Wainer was generous with advice and mentorship, giving back a “tremendous” amount in line with his desire to make South Africa, to which he was deeply committed, a better place. His Mentorship Challenge was the vehicle through which he channelled his efforts in this regard.

“It was his passion to impart knowledge to people in the property industry,” Dionne said. Wainer’s son, Jordan, writes that with all his accomplishments, “he wholeheartedly felt that his greatest legacy was his work with the Mentorship Challenge and inspiring the next generation of leaders and change makers.”

At an early stage of his career, Wainer displayed his characteristic “path less travelled” approach. In 1973, he was appointed manager of the Kempton City Shopping Centre, one of the first of its kind in this country.

He later said that he got the job because he was the only candidate who had actually researched the centre before his interview.

Dionne said that Wainer was an “amazing” father who “really looked after his children. He spoke to them a few times a day – he would even take calls from them in the middle of a board meeting.

“He is going to be sadly, sadly missed,” she said. “It’s a loss for me personally, and a loss for the property industry.”

He is survived by four daughters, Stacey and Hadene in Johannesburg, Jody and Kerry in Australia, Jordan, and 10 grandchildren.



many deals on the go. He had more energy now than he had ten years ago.”

Wainer was Dionne’s mentor in the property industry, and they sat on many industry boards together.

“Poland was his passion in terms of property

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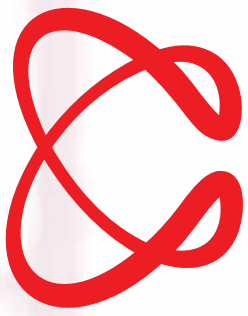
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Holocaust survivors relive a very different lockdown

NICOLA MILTZ

Moments before Pesach started, a freak electrical fault plunged Holocaust survivor Joseph David Matzner, 84, and his wife into darkness for the duration of *Yom Tov* and Shabbos, which took him back to the time he was a child in hiding in France.

“It looked like 1943,” he said. “We had no electricity and of course, communication was cut off.”

The fact that he had no electricity because of a water leak in the upstairs flat above his was an “nuisance” which compounded the lockdown, he said.

However, the Matznerns of Cheltondale got through it with characteristic resilience and grit.

“Neighbours helped to salvage our food, so it was easy to survive the food part. The thing is to be inventive and dance. Dancing is the most important thing – to dance your way through life’s difficulties,” said Matzner, who was born in Strasbourg, France, and survived the Holocaust by being hidden in convents in Lourdes, Pau, and Les Naves until he was retrieved in 1945.

To this day, he doesn’t delve too deeply into his past.

“I don’t like to recall it. It’s of no use whatsoever. I spent three years in lockdown in convents and other places. That’s the way I grew up. It’s difficult to go into details.”

However, “This does remind me of those times, and what it can do to a person. It’s not easy, the connections. For many, a lockdown is atrocious, even for those who have never experienced it before. It’s better to be positive, if one can do that.”

Holocaust survivors are among those most vulnerable to coronavirus. In normal circumstances, spending time with family is their “chicken soup”. However, social distancing

has intensified feelings of isolation. This year’s lonely Passover *sederim* and virtual Yom Hashoah commemorations have weighed heavily. The annual Yom Hashoah events would usually offer them the opportunity to meet up with the only people in the world who truly understand the horror of what they experienced.

Shirley Sapire of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre said most survivors feel lonely.

“They feel cut off from the world. Some who are used to driving suddenly find themselves confined, unable to do their shopping or go to the hairdresser. We call on them once or twice a week to make sure they are ok.”

Sadly, those who are healthy and active are now no longer able to enjoy the monthly meetings at the Holocaust & Genocide Centre, where they gathered for entertainment and companionship.

However, Sapire said most of them say that they have lived through far worse.

“They are all pretty stoic, enduring this time without complaining,” she said. “There is a sense that this is nothing compared to what they lived through.”

Irene Klass, 88, who was a child in the Warsaw Ghetto, said this was a lonely period in her life. Used to playing Kalooki with friends, having her hair done once a week, and driving to the shops, she is now confined to her home in a retirement village where she lives alone. Her two daughters and grandchildren live overseas.

“All I can do is read, watch television, and listen to the radio. I also speak to friends on the phone. I try to walk twice a day. It’s quiet, I don’t see a soul, the exercise is good.”

Lately, she said, she has been flooded with recollections of her youth.

“Memories of being in the Warsaw Ghetto have resurfaced. When you are a child, you don’t

experience it the same way as an adult. We were four people living in one small room. We couldn’t go out, we couldn’t do very much at all. They say history repeats itself, but this is altogether a different enemy we are fighting.”

Helene Sieff, 83, is a cancer survivor, and has hurt her back.

Born in Brussels, she lived as a Catholic child with Josine Bobricheff, a Righteous Among the Nations, who hid her and looked after her during World War II.

“I experienced a lockdown once in my life as a child. I never thought I’d experience it again in my wildest dreams. Although there’s no comparison,” she said.

“I’m trying not to feel sorry for myself because there are many worse off, but it’s not easy. I feel like a trapped rabbit in a hole who wants to go out but instead pops its head up, looks left, looks right, and goes back inside again. I can’t move, I can’t go anywhere, I can’t do anything. I’m imprisoned all over again, but I’m a survivor.”

Well known Holocaust survivor and educator, Don Krausz, 90, is in good spirits.

“I have a vast library, and find that after a lifetime, many books of interest are worth

reading again. Being retired I can’t say that it has made a great difference to my life except that my girlfriends don’t call as often and I’m forbidden to visit them.

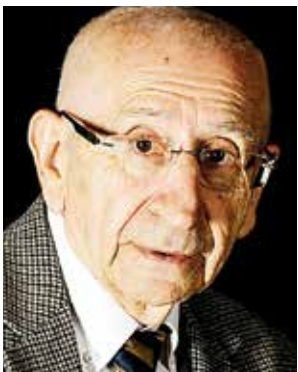
“Having been a loner since the war, I don’t need much company, and besides, I was blessed with 52 years of happy marriage. I still drive, and I’m only two blocks from the Killarney shopping centre. When I run short, I scrounge from friends and neighbours. This isn’t a difficult time for me. In the camps we ‘lived’ on one slice of bread with trimmings for breakfast, no lunch unless one was sent out to work, and a litre of boiled water called soup in the evening. No meat, fat, oil, potato, or much of anything else.

This gave us on average three months of ‘life’ after which the menu was changed to lead or cyanide.

“With this kind of background, I can’t say that lockdown upsets me much. I don’t feel anxious or uncertain even though I relive the Shoah every night, but that has nothing to do with the virus.”

Said Matzner, “I pray we will come out of this with renewed strength to face a new world. It’s an historic time.”

Photographs by Julian Pokroy supplied by the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre



Joseph Matzner



Irene Klass



Don Krausz

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.



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!

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 has an in-depth knowledge and a full understanding of European immigration laws.

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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Yom Hashoah hits home with virtual broadcast

JORDAN MOSHE

“Going out to work outside camp one morning, we saw trucks lined up on the railway line. Little faces peeped out. We felt completely helpless. We knew what would happen in a few minutes time when they would be chased out to the gas chambers.”

With these words, the sense of dread felt by Holocaust survivor Miriam Lichterman was shared with more than 8 000 people on Yom Hashoah this week. Perhaps even more extraordinary was the fact that they weren’t listening to her at the traditional annual ceremony at West Park Cemetery, but in their homes around the world.

“We wondered why the world was keeping quiet,” said Lichterman. “We couldn’t do anything. We couldn’t even save ourselves. We were helpless.”

Her testimony was part of a unique ceremony hosted by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) on Tuesday, in which the tribute to the victims of the Holocaust was held online for the first time in our community’s history.

“This year is different to the physical, live ceremonies the SAJBD has organised and you have all participated in for decades,” said Mary Kluk, SAJBD national president. “In these stressful and uncertain times, the unique feature about today has been the way we came together as one united community from across South Africa to prepare the ceremony.”

Today, we remember the six million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust, and honour our beloved survivors.”

SAJBD National Chairperson Shaun Zagnoev said that in spite of the fact that no physical ceremonies were taking place this year, modern technology ensured that we could come together in remembrance.

“While we are physically separated, we can at least see and hear together,” he said. “This year’s ceremony could be the most nationally inclusive ceremony our community has ever held.”

Jews around the country contributed towards the memorable event. The poignant Yiddish melodies sung by the daughter of Holocaust survivors, Zola Shuman, and Leigh Sussman resonated as powerfully as any live performance, as did Yael Meltz’s rendition of the Hebrew classic, *Keli Keli*.

Galit Harris, the granddaughter of survivor Stella Salome, recounted her forebear’s harrowing ordeal and extraordinary escape from

Stranded South Africans running low on medication and hope

>>Continued from page 1

the local department, we could have been in contact with surrounding South African embassies where other stranded South Africans could have taken advantage of this flight.”

In a statement on 18 April, DIRCO said it wanted to “assure all South Africans stranded abroad that it is doing everything within its powers, to facilitate their return back home”. It said its efforts were “constrained by the restrictions imposed by different countries”.

“We deeply empathise with all who are still stranded abroad including in Peru, Indonesia, Thailand, and other countries. We would like to make an appeal for everyone to remain patient as we explore options,” the department stated.

Lunga Ngqengelele, a spokesperson for the department, confirmed that getting South Africans out of Asian countries was particularly problematic at the moment.

The hold-up is in getting permission from different countries for flights into their airspace, yet “some countries have just shut off their borders; you can’t even get someone to speak to”.

Nevertheless, he says South Africans officials are engaging in “serious negotiation” to reunite the rainbow nation.



Nazi brutality. In spite of suffering tremendous loss and pain, Salome emerged triumphant.

“There are many heroes in the story,” Harris said. “These youths can all be an inspiration to kids today, and we can honour them by telling their stories.

“As we lose the last of the survivors, all that will remain will

be their stories. It’s up to us youth to tell these stories, and keep them alive for generations to come.”

Perhaps for this reason, the ceremony included pre-recorded testimony from local survivors, all of whom shared parts of their harrowing ordeal in Nazi concentration camps. In a virtual forum, their testimony was as

From Poland with love – the untold story of a Holocaust heroine

MIRAH LANGER

She’s a diminutive and elegant 84-year-old, the proud mother of two sons and a gathering of grandchildren, a feisty, fierce patriot of Poland, and an admiring Zionist, an energetic explorer, and a sharp-thinking intellectual.

She’s also a Jew. And a Catholic. Wanda Helena Albinska, born Rotstein, is a Holocaust survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto. She has her mother, Halina Rotstein, to thank for saving her life, and her son, Luc Albinski, for dedicating the past few years to telling the story of their family history.

“I would call her mamushka or mama,” reminisces Wanda about her connection to her mother during her childhood in Kutno, Poland, before the darkness of the Nazi regime stifled their lives.

“My mother was tolerant, and she loved company. She was also very contemplative. She engaged in life from a cultural and moral point of view. She was always interested in other people and their needs. At school, she would always help the other students who struggled with their work.

“Later, when she had my [three] brothers and myself, from the beginning, she taught us. She would read us stories. I felt very motivated. By the time I was five years old, I could already read the books.”

By the time Wanda was five, she was also already an inmate of the Warsaw Ghetto. Her father had fled from the region owing to his connection to the now exiled Polish government, and her mother, a doctor, was working tirelessly in a ghetto hospital to try to stem the suffering of her people.

In 1942, her mother organised to have her children smuggled out of the ghetto with friends. However, she decided that she would stay, continuing to help all those who were under her care.

Wanda and her brothers were taken in by various friends of her mother. Central to saving Wanda’s life was Dr Andrzej Trojankowski. In particular, Wanda became close to his wife, Stefania, a devout Catholic. In 1945, Stefania decided to have the children baptised, also giving them false names and papers. In the years that followed, Wanda was enrolled in a Catholic

children’s home.

Wanda recalls these years as nurturing, stimulating, and happy. “The directors of the home knew that I was Jewish. It was a beautiful home, and very pleasant. I had good friends.”

Wanda would go on to study chemistry at university. She soon met her beloved husband, Wojtek Albinski, on holiday at a cafe. They had an adventurous life living in Iraq, Paris, Switzerland, Botswana, and South Africa. Wanda cherished the experience of becoming a mother to her two sons. She continues to commute between Poland and South Africa.

However, Wanda would never see her mother again. In September 1942, Halina made an extraordinary decision. Having twice turned down the chance to be saved, she elected to go with her patients when they were deported to Treblinka. She would have been gassed almost immediately upon arrival. She was 35 years old.

Halina’s decision is one that Wanda has mused over all her life, coming to accept its complexities.

“On the one hand, I have thought, ‘How could you leave us – three small children, and a baby?’ It must have been some kind of madness. I could

never do this. I would go to death with them, but I would never abandon them. I would never want to live without them.”

Maybe, ponders Wanda, “She was experiencing such desolation and felt such responsibility for all these people dying in the

hospital in the ghetto where all these dark and inhuman things had occurred. Perhaps she didn’t want to survive anymore, or maybe she couldn’t abandon those people, she felt so close to them.”

Simultaneously, Wanda has the deepest admiration for the strength, dignity, and humanity her mother displayed at this time of horror.

“I’m proud to have such an extraordinary mother. She really was amazing, displaying courage, selflessness, and goodness. I would like my children and grandchildren to take her as an example.”

Wanda’s father was exiled to Russia and was never able to return to Poland. For the rest of his life, he never spoke of Halina again, except to say, “She was a saint.”



Wanda Albinska with her son Luc Albinska at the March of the Living 2018

For decades afterwards, the story of Wanda’s Jewish origin and her mother’s profound choices remained untold.

“After the war, no-one spoke for the next 40 years. Nobody wanted to remember. They tried to forget as soon as possible.”

Wanda and her husband decided not to tell their sons about their wartime experiences. The children were brought up Polish Catholic.

As such, for Luc, it was a shock when during a trip in 1990 to cousins in America, they told him of his Jewish roots. He became intrigued by this information, and so began an extensive journey into the past. Most recently, it has culminated in him writing a book, *The Varsovian Covenants*, and serving at the helm of a documentary on the subject, titled *Nobody Told Me*.

Wanda and Luc say that his pursuit of the past has been a profound experience. The two have travelled this newly opened road together quite literally, jointly attending the March of the Living in 2018 and the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre’s Poland and Germany study tour last year.

The multiplicity of identity has brought depth and meaning to their lives.

Wanda says that above all else, she remains Polish first. “Catholicism and Judaism have a lot in common for me,” she says. She embraces beliefs of redemption and compassion. “These are beautiful ideas. That you can try and perfect your character if you do something wrong; and that you can work hard to help others.”

“I love my identity,” shares Luc. “I can understand the Polish Catholic point of view, and I can understand the Polish Jewish perspective. I love things that that are double barrelled – it promotes richness and understanding.”



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The Power to Surprise

Selfishness is so last year

In many ways, the story of COVID-19 is a story of relevance and perspective. Ask many of us about our hierarchy of needs in January 2020, and I suspect that some of the priorities listed might not appear on a list crafted at the end of April 2020.

I know that the “pyramid” I would have completed at the beginning of the year wouldn’t look anywhere near the same as the one I would fill in today. For one thing, I would have taken schooling, the attendance of shuls, and spending time with family not living at home for granted. I would have simply considered them “a given”.

The shift isn’t only a personal one. It has an impact on how we function in the broader society as well. It’s fascinating to look at the brand appropriateness of so-called celebrities during this time. It has become evident that unless they contribute to bettering society, they have simply ceased to be relevant.

The image posted by Madonna as she soaked in a bath contemplating the “one-ness” of the struggle, or of Julia Roberts, who decided that she would walk among us without make-up to show how so-darn-normal she is, and of Ellen DeGeneres complaining that she feels imprisoned in her \$24 million mansion, were particularly telling. If we are to be kind, they were perplexing in just how tone deaf they were. But if we are to be honest, we could consider them downright nauseating.

With the passing of a few short (or long) months, articles that refer to the labelling of bathrooms as male or female have all but disappeared.

Social media outrage and the focus on things like identity politics has been replaced

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



by genuine care for each other. Without any discussion, it has become clear what the priorities need to be. Very simply, we need to care for ourselves, our families, the elderly, and the less fortunate. Because, although many of us might not be living in a \$24 million mansion overlooking Malibu, we’re still living significantly better than others are.

The delightful story of Captain Tom, a 99-year-old veteran in the United Kingdom who hoped to raise £1 000 for the National Health Service by walking up and down his yard (aided by a Zimmer frame), is a magnificent example of this global shift. He isn’t sexy, his dress style is a little outdated, and he isn’t a man of financial means. And yet he has raised millions of pounds and has become the face of all that is good in the world. Had he tried to do any such thing in January 2020, there is little chance that we would even have heard of him.

Political parties, much like celebrities, face a similar challenge of relevance. Those who have traded on identity politics and outrage as currency instead of the genuine objective of bettering life for South Africans have all but disappeared, while those who have been prepared to roll up their proverbial sleeves and help out will be rewarded for their efforts.

COVID-19 has brought into sharp focus what is and isn’t important. In a matter of a few weeks, so much of what we might have considered to be important very clearly no longer is. And that can’t be a bad thing.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies Virtual Yom Hashoah, real community spirit

At the time of writing, we are preparing to join community members throughout the country in commemorating Yom Hashoah. Among the things that make this year’s ceremony truly unique is the sad reality that for the first time ever, it’s not possible for the community to come together in shared spaces around the country. Instead, we must all make do with marking this important day in front of our computer screens in our own homes.

On a more positive note, it’s also the first time that there will be one single, combined ceremony for the community as a whole into which all the regions and stakeholders have had input. I commend all those involved in putting together this virtual Yom Hashoah event, in particular our national president, Mary Kluk, who so ably headed up the process.

The lockdown period designated by the government to last until the end of April is about to enter its final week. However, we all need to be aware that this doesn’t – and can’t – mean that afterwards we can expect things to return to “normal”. We have to be realistic and recognise that this is only the first necessary step in what will inevitably be a very long process. It will continue to be incumbent on people to protect themselves and those around them from contracting and spreading the virus. All measures involving social distancing, hygiene, and public gatherings will need to be strictly observed for a long time to come.

Among the most pressing challenges the country faces is to support the most vulnerable members of society who are unable to pursue their livelihoods as a result of the lockdown. Here, we can be proud of the sterling efforts by individuals and organisations in our community, including many members of the board’s councils, in contributing to this critical national effort. Alongside these efforts, we continue to do everything we can to help our own community cope with the stress and uncertainty resulting from the lockdown.

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

ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



I have been involved in helping Jewish business owners take whatever steps they can to maintain the sustainability of their enterprises. In this regard, I have been in regular communication with ORT Jet, a local support structure for small-business owners and people with business ideas, which amongst other things offers advice and support for SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises) affected by COVID-19.

For further advice and information on COVID-19, I again urge everyone to make full use of the SAJBD’s COVID-19 Jewish Community Platform. This has become a valuable resource in helping our community weather the crisis, providing regular updates and communal guidelines on a wide range of issues, a hotline, and details on how those willing and able to contribute to alleviating the crisis can get involved. The platform can be accessed on our Facebook site, or by consulting the menu on our website (www.sajbd.org).

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

100 years young

Helen Richfield, the wife of the late Leslie Richfield of Kenilworth in Cape Town, on 25 March celebrated her 100th birthday in excellent health.

Spare me a few rand?

There’s a cell phone-made video circulating the radio waves of a man in a car spraying sanitiser on the cupped hands of a beggar instead of filling them with coins. A future satirist might find this fitting material, but on the streets in the era of COVID-19, it’s no joke.

If you drive down the busy Barry Hertzog Avenue in Emmarentia in the early morning, you will see homeless people emerging from under the trees in the park alongside the road where they build small fires. If you proceed up the road towards the shopping centre, there’s a good chance you will be approached by a beggar, asking for money.

Will you do what you might have done a couple of months ago? Will you look around in your car or handbag for a few rand? If you will, are you still comfortable touching money, which the COVID-19 specialists tell us is potentially covered in virus?

You might ignore the man and stare straight ahead with pursed lips, as if he didn’t exist, while waiting for the traffic lights to change. Many people have done this for years. If your window is open, the beggar might approach you and appeal directly to your face with a tragic story of need.

There is genuine pity felt for the beggar living from hand to mouth in the lockdown. But are you afraid if he ignores the two-metre rule in his quest for money from you? Are you more afraid if he wears a face mask, or if he doesn’t?

These seem like bizarre questions from a crazy dream, but are real in today’s context. Hopefully, one outcome of this pandemic may be that the serious problems which should have been addressed long ago by the government and others might be tackled more urgently: how to uplift beggars humanely, and not endanger the people they beg from. There are solutions,

TAKING ISSUE

Geoff Sifrin



complicated as they may be. Thousands of food parcels have been collected by nongovernment organisations for distribution to poor families without work or other means of survival. Within the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands have lost jobs; hunger is rife. Even here though, among the poorest segments of society, the homeless beggar often still falls through the cracks.

He is mostly invisible to the driver on his way to the supermarket. Or he is an irksome reminder that if there are beggars, all is not well in society, and there is work to be done. When there is a downpour in Johannesburg and everyone rushes inside for shelter, the beggar, draped in a dirty black rag remains in the street. He hopes that one driver will have enough sympathy to open their window to the elements and drop a coin or two into his hands. How he survives against the elements is mysterious to most.

The difference now, with the coronavirus, is that his health affects the health of people in cars or those in the streets who ignore him. There are many ways to address poverty, but it needs urgent attention.

But there is also, for the first time, an ironic converse to the situation. What if you, in your luxury sedan, have just returned from overseas, are carrying the virus, and unbeknown to you, you are contagious? As the beggar in the street extends his empty palm to you, together with your couple of rand, you give him something else: a case of COVID-19 to take home to his fellows.

In this topsy-turvy reality, nothing is as it was.

Can’t say happy birthday face to face? Donate a mask!

When Joanne Hooghuis couldn’t be with her daughter, Siobhan Wilson, on her birthday, she did the next best thing, she donated masks to underprivileged communities.

Hooghuis, who lives in Pretoria, decided to donate almost 2 000 masks, the equivalent of one for each week of Wilson’s life, for her birthday. She bought disposable medical masks and cloth masks that will be handed out via pastors and churches connected to the South African Friends of Israel and underprivileged communities.

This was the perfect gift for her daughter because Wilson is a board member and volunteer at Cadena SA, a Jewish non-profit organisation which offers cost-efficient, sustainable solutions for people affected by natural disasters around the world.

The organisation recently began a campaign to make cloth masks to help fight the coronavirus pandemic.

“Cloth masks can have a significant impact in stemming the rate of infection of COVID-19 when used correctly, especially in overpopulated areas where social distancing is challenging,” said Mendi Grauman, a director at Cadena



Joanne Hooghuis with her mask donation
SA. Grauman is involved in the organisation’s campaign to sew and distribute cloth masks in areas where they will have the greatest effect. “This is a time where something as small as a bottle of sanitiser or a mask could mean the difference between life and death for a family. There is no such thing as a small amount in a case like this. Every bit helps,” he said. You can also help Cadena by volunteering to sew cloth masks or by making a monetary donation. Contact Grauman at operations.sa@cadena.ngo or call him on 082 893 7233. Alternatively, leave a message on the Cadena South Africa Facebook page.

ORT Jet helps small businesses in distress

ORT Jet is offering to help Jewish businesses in distress navigate the process of applying for government and private-sector assistance. Volunteers who have the skills to navigate the process of applying for benefits have offered their assistance.

Many small businesses need help with the documentation and follow up required as the process is complex.

“If you are struggling to understand the available initiatives or how to access them, you are encouraged to make contact with ORT Jet,” says ORT Jet Business Development Manager Helene Itzkin. “You

will be assigned to one of ORT Jet’s mentors, who will guide you through the process.”

ORT Jet will also offer webinars to help business owners fill in the documentation. In addition, the organisation’s mentors will be available to offer business advice.

The ORT Jet COVID-19 committee consists of Ellis Falkof (ORT SA chairman), Steve Zagey (ORT Jet chairman), Robert Cohen, Jason Schmulian, Ilan Rabinowitz, Shaun Zagnoev, Elisha Lurie, and Frank Davidson.

• *Businesses can contact Helene Itzkin via email on helene@ortsa.org.za*



Sports Page

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A sporting life during lockdown

LUKE ALFRED

Jewish sportsmen are coping with the demands of the COVID-19 lockdown in broadly similar ways, although each brings to the pandemic an adaptation of their own.

Zac Elkin, the Western Province cricketer, for example, has headed off to the family apple farm in Elgin.

As far as fitness is concerned, Elkin has opted to be gentle on himself. He's been playing cricket continuously for 18 months, he says, so the lockdown period has provided an opportunity to "re-charge the batteries".



"I walk on the farm for 45 minutes a day," says Elkin, "and I meditate for about 20 minutes in the morning because I feel that the lockdown is more of a mental rather than a physical battle. Other than that, I've made a deliberate effort not to do any strenuous exercise."

Elkin, a frontline batsman who is thrilled to have been awarded a professional contract by Western Province for a year starting next month, says that looking back on this past season, he realises he was running on empty during what turned out to be WP's last match of the season. "I was pretty knackered [against Eastern Province] in Port Elizabeth," he says. "I felt pretty jaded."

In Elkin's case, the 18 months of constant cricket occurred because the last two South African seasons sandwiched a season playing professionally in The Netherlands, something which has fallen away this year because of the lockdown.

"There are financial implications in that,

obviously," he says, "but all this down time has given me time to reflect and consider how I might have done things differently. I've been thinking a great deal about going out for 96 against Gauteng in a match in Durbanville in February, to be honest," says Elkin. "I tried to go to my century with a four, but the ball went straight up in the air and I was caught."

For those who know their cricket history, 96 was a bewitched number for Adam Bacher. He went out four short of what would have been a debut Test century on two occasions – against Australia at home and Pakistan away – scores that still rankle.

Looking back on his time as a professional cricketer brings both pride and mild heartache for Bacher, the latter because it would have been handy if he had known then what he knows now.

"As a younger player, your mind is always all over the place. You're either lingering on your regrets or thinking too far into

the future. Nowadays, meditation helps calm me down and root me in the present. As well as meditation, I do a mid-morning exercise routine for about 30 minutes most days.

"We're very fortunate to have a long 15 to 17 metre-long driveway with a slope," he says with a chuckle. "It's a good place to run. When I'm not running, I'm throwing to our eldest son, Dean, although that's quietened down as the lockdown has continued. I'm not sure, to be honest, if all that throwing to him is good or bad for my arm."

About 14 years ago, Bacher picked up a copy of Robin Sharma's *The Secret Letters of the Monk who Sold his Ferrari* and read it through the night. He was playing for the Cobras at the time and living by himself in Cape Town, and the message in the book hit him with the force of a thunderbolt.

As luck would have it, he retired two months after he read it, so never had an opportunity to practise its lessons as a

cricketer. He has, however, practised them as a human being, a husband, and a father – and, in a general way, is using them now.

He has found transcendental meditation invaluable in lockdown. It keeps him mentally balanced and for that, in these challenging and frightening times, he is exceptionally grateful.

Colin Nathan, the boxing trainer, gym owner, and member of MTK, the boxing management company with a global reach, has found the enforced rigours of the lockdown useful because now he can't be tempted onto an aeroplane.

As a result, he's confined to home, and can spend more time with his wife and family. "This is a very spiritual time for me, coming out of Pesach and thoughts about the ten plagues," he says. "I'm thinking we could still

be in for quite a rough ride, so what's the rush?"

Nathan exercises for "pretty much an hour every day", skipping, shadow-boxing, and doing weight-training at home. He watches what he eats, stays away from carbs and highly processed food, and generally eats a protein-rich diet full of meat and vegetables.

He's in contact with his boxers on a daily basis, often via WhatsApp, but confesses that he's chomping slightly at the bit. "I really miss the live fighting," he says. "I also miss the fighters, the hussle and the bullshit because, let's face it, boxing attracts its fair deal of bullshit, doesn't it?"

"That aside, it's been precious not to be on the road."

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