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■ Volume 24 – Number 14 ■ 8 May 2020 ■ 14 Iyar 5780

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Gesher Fund – a lifeline for Jewish businesses

TALI FEINBERG

When Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein saw the devastation wrought by the coronavirus lockdown on South African Jewish businesses, he decided to do something to help.

Working closely with community organisations and business leaders, he conceptualised a relief fund that will offer interest-free loans to small businesses in the community that are battling to survive.

The Gesher Small Business Relief Fund is now being launched to assist majority-Jewish-owned small-to-medium-sized businesses in South Africa. It will endeavour to safeguard businesses, protect stakeholders, and preserve jobs while enhancing the stability of the Jewish community during this challenging period.

"Gesher means 'bridge' in Hebrew. The aim is to help members of the community get to the other side of these 'troubled waters', and land on their own two feet," says the chief rabbi.

The fund was established with generous commitments from the Donald Gordon Foundation (DGF) and other founding donors.

"In keeping with our father's long philanthropic tradition and his commitment to the Jewish and business communities, my brothers and I are humbled to be able to continue his legacy through his charitable foundation," says Wendy Appelbaum, representing the DGF.

"Our capacity to do so, by supporting viable businesses and all those who depend on them while they are suffering unprecedented challenges, is deeply moving."

Additional funding from like-minded philanthropists and foundations is being sourced. The other donors prefer to remain anonymous, and are all philanthropic South African Jewish families seeking to make a meaningful impact on the Jewish and wider community.

The chairperson of the fund is Martin Sacks, the chief executive of Westbrooke Group, and a member of the Chevrah Kadisha Board of Governors.

"We understand this is the largest amount of capital ever made available to the South African Jewish community in a business-support loan scheme," Sacks says. While the fund's donors and board have chosen not to disclose the amount, it's believed to be in the tens of millions.

His fellow board members are Anthony Brittan (partner at Family Partners LLP), Lawrie Brozin (director Nando's Group Holdings and Paycorp Investments), Mireille Levenstein (chief financial officer Long4Life), Sean Melnick (founder and chairperson of Peregrine Group and chairperson of Stenham), Adam Orlin (head of Investec for Business), Leonard Sank (chairperson Bradbury Finance), Jessica Spira (business development director Rand Merchant Bank), Ronnie Stein (non-executive director of The Foschini Group),

Marco van Embden (founder and chief executive of Timeless Africa Safaris), and Mandy Yachad (previous director of Peregrine Holdings and a Rambam Trust representative). Most have held long-term senior leadership positions in the community.

Board member Jessica Spira says she heeded the call to join the board of the new fund because she has seen through her work how severely small and medium-sized businesses have been affected by the crisis.

"There is major hardship out there. Just because one isn't below the poverty line doesn't mean one isn't struggling or desperate. This disease is non-discriminatory. It's affecting everyone, clearly the Jewish community as well. Those that are able to contribute must do so."

Fellow Gesher board member Lawrie Brozin says, "We've got a crisis, and if I can help in any way to alleviate it, it's an honour. It's a call to duty, and with the establishment

of this fund, it's all hands on deck. We are a blessed community – we are always looking out for each other. It's unique, and it's been a real eye-opener to see the talent that we have and the people that have thrown their hats in the ring to help."

He estimates that there are at least 200 to 300 Jewish-owned companies badly affected by the crisis. "How badly, we don't yet know. Being in business, I gather that it could be pretty serious, but we'll get through it."

"By safeguarding businesses during this period, we can preserve jobs for all South Africans and further our long-term mission of supporting the broader Jewish community," says Sacks. "We hope to keep as many people as possible from needing welfare, and enable them to continue to be productive members of the community, operate their businesses, and support their staff and other stakeholders. Our donors are mindful

of how these relief funds can have a positive impact on wider South African society," he says.

The fund is an independent, national entity that will draw on the operational and administrative infrastructure and expertise of the Chevrah Kadisha in order to quickly and effectively assist qualifying businesses across South Africa.

It's mandated to lend to majority-Jewish-owned small businesses that were intrinsically healthy prior to the crisis, but which are now facing financial hardship, and are likely to recover after the crisis once they get back on their feet.

"This is about combating an immediate cashflow crisis and helping to fund their operating and working capital requirements until their normal, pre-COVID-19 operating levels begin to return," says Sacks. "We have co-opted a group of 30 business people, bankers, and legal advisors to work with us in assessing the applications. All applications will be treated in the strictest confidence."

Any South African Jewish majority-owned SMMEs will be eligible to apply for a loan. "We know that not only SMMEs have been impacted by COVID-19, but bigger businesses may have elsewhere to turn. We are a last-resort lender, and advise applicants to consider their eligibility for the government led loan-guarantee scheme, which may be able to offer them loans on more appropriate terms and size before applying to us," Sacks says.

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Taking to the streets



After five weeks of being holed up in their home, an early morning walk is a breath of fresh air for the Lyons family of Melrose North.

Photo: Han Ossenbyver

As of this week, the SA Jewish Report may publish additional stories in its online newspaper. Check sajr.co.za for more to read.

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Elderly resident dies of COVID-19 in Cape Town aged home

JORDAN MOSHE

An elderly resident of Jewish old aged home Highlands House in Cape Town died on Saturday after testing positive for COVID-19, and five more residents have subsequently been found to have the virus.

This marks the first reported coronavirus death in a South African Jewish aged home. The first reported case was a resident of Sandringham Gardens in Johannesburg, who brought it into the home from a hospital. Highland House's management isn't divulging how the coronavirus got into the home.

On Sunday, the home's executive director, Harris Burman, told the Cape Town community that there had been a COVID-19 death at the home. He said the carers who had attended to this resident were in quarantine and awaiting testing. The home said at the time that no other cases had been identified.

In a subsequent update on Monday, Burman said that the resident (an 88-year-old woman) had been tested two days after taking ill, and had died two days later, before the results were known.

He stressed that the resident had been isolated from the onset of the illness. The floor on which she resided had been isolated from the rest of the home, and testing of other residents had commenced.

By Wednesday afternoon, however, it emerged that the tests had picked up further

cases of the disease. As of 14:00, Highland House had recorded five confirmed cases of COVID-19. A total of 363 tests have been conducted on staff and residents.

Burman said that the resident's family were sitting *shiva*, and wouldn't like to comment at this time about the circumstances of her death.

Family members of other residents took to social media to express their condolences, and share their concerns, many of them saying that the home had failed to protect its residents.

"They (SA Jewish old age homes) do incredible, groundbreaking work. The fact that we aren't sitting with elderly COVID-19 positive patients from the homes in intensive care is testimony to their efforts."

A woman whose mother resides at the home said that the management had asked that residents obtain masks, but wasn't enforcing it.

She said that though the broader community had been notified of the death on Sunday, management informed residents only on Tuesday.

"They were all in the dark," she told the *SA Jewish Report* on condition of anonymity. "They were told officially only on Tuesday before testing began, four days after it happened.

"It led to them hearing about it from outside [the home] and to rumours being spread. Surely they should have been told sooner?"

Burman confirmed that formal notification was given to residents only on Tuesday. However, he said that the majority of residents knew about it by Sunday via word of mouth, and that Highlands House was making every effort to address the outbreak.

Other Jewish old age homes across the country remain vigilant, screening staff and shielding residents as much as possible.

Sidney Lazarus, the president of the Beth Shalom Jewish Retirement Home in Durban, told the *SA Jewish Report* that the institution "had no cases of COVID-19". The home has conducted tests on residents and staff, and they have all been negative. There have been two deaths at the home since the beginning of the lockdown, but these were unrelated to COVID-19.

The home has 76 residents, and the average age is 85 years old.

Lazarus said that all staff including nurses, carers, cleaners, and chefs were housed on the premises or at the nearby Durban Jewish Club, to which they were transported by the home's transport.

Mark Isaacs, the executive director of Jaffa Jewish Aged Home in Pretoria, said that all staff and residents were abiding by the strict rules in place since the home closed its doors on 15 March.

"We've had no scares so far," he said, "and tested only one staff member, who proved negative. We've cut back on certain social activities and while it upsets people, they realise we're doing it for their safety."

The home has reduced the number of staff on-site, and certain remaining staff are housed in on-site quarters (spending one week on and one week off-site). Staff who arrive at the campus must use the main entrance, and are screened at reception.

Saul Tomson, the chief executive of the Chevrah Kadisha, said, "Every Jewish old aged home is doing everything in its power to protect residents, but ultimately, we are fighting an invisible enemy which makes it extremely difficult.

"Since this situation began, the Chev has been working closely with Jewish senior living facilities across the country and helping to co-ordinate efforts, share protocols and procedures."

Tomson said that accommodating 400 care and health workers at Sandringham Gardens on-site was impossible, but stressed that the Chev was constantly educating staff in multiple languages about the precautions they needed to take. It has also issued staff with the necessary protective

Continued on page 6>>

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Gesher and the root of giving

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



One of the most devastating effects of the COVID-19 crisis is its financial impact. The Gesher Fund has been set up in our community to address this specific challenge. It's founded on a core Torah value: that we are here on this earth to help each other.

From the dawn of creation, G-d said, "It's not good for a person to be alone." And He created Adam and Eve to help one another, to support one another. To be a human being, therefore, is to be connected to and concerned about others.

This is the basis for the great *mitzvah* (commandment) of *chesed* (compassion). According to our sages, the *mitzvah* is to emulate G-d Himself. "Be similar to Him," says the Talmud. "Just as G-d is gracious and compassionate, so too should you be gracious and compassionate."

We have an obligation to show *chesed* to every human being. But there's an extra level of responsibility within our own community. In the language of our sages, "every Jew stands surety for another". We are all guarantors for one other's well-being

through acts of loving-kindness, and especially through *tzedakah* (charity).

According to the sages of the Talmud, the highest level of *tzedakah* is to help a person be self-sufficient, to spare them the indignity of needing a handout. By providing a partnership or loan, we bestow on the recipient the dignity of being economically self-sustaining – the ultimate gift.

This applies especially when we can help someone maintain their financial independence. We learn this from the Torah verse: "...And you shall strengthen him ... so that he may live by your side." As the commentators explain, this refers to the great *mitzvah* to support a person before they become dependent on charity; to ensure that they remain financially independent.

Since the beginning of lockdown, the ability of business owners to maintain their businesses and hence their financial independence and dignity – and that of the people they employ – has been of great concern to all of us.

I've worked with business leaders

on this issue for more than a month, and seen first-hand our community respond to the call of this great *mitzvah*.

Working together, a remarkable coalition of business leaders, philanthropic foundations, and communal institutions have established a special fund to give Jewish-owned small businesses the support they so desperately need.

The newly formed Gesher Fund will offer interest-free loans to ensure that businesses weather COVID-19.

The beauty of the fund is that it helps people before they fall. Practically, it takes far fewer resources to hold a person up than to pick them up. By remaining on their feet, these businesses can continue to contribute to our own community and the South African economy at large, providing vital employment opportunities and fuelling economic growth. There's a dignity in that too.

Together, we can ensure that those under financial strain come through this crisis with their dignity intact.

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Design and layout Bryan Maron/Design Bandits – bryan@designbandits.co.za • Distribution Sandy Furman • Subscriptions Avusa Publishing (Pty) Ltd.
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BDS-SA splinters as global body backs new group

TALI FEINBERG

The anti-Israel movement in South Africa, which went under the banner of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions South Africa (BDS-SA) movement, has broken down. The international BDS movement has now officially backed one faction, casting the other to the sidelines.

BDS-SA announced in March that it was changing its name to Africa for Palestine (AFP). At first this seemed to be a simple re-branding, but it has now been confirmed by the co-founder of the international BDS movement, Omar Barghouti, that it has been removed from its place in his organisation.

In a video released this week by Barghouti, he endorses a new organisation that he terms “our BDS South African coalition partners”.

Barghouti makes it clear that Africa for Palestine isn’t aligned with the national BDS movement. It appears that this old organisation (with a new name) is headed by Muhammed Desai, after he and his supporters were told they could no longer carry the BDS name.

“Some may ask what about the NGO [nongovernmental organisation] that has existed for some years now under the name ‘BDS South Africa’. This group is no longer part of the BDS movement,” he says on the video. “The BNC, which leads the BDS movement, has informed his group, which led BDS work in South Africa for many years with significant achievements, that it can no longer carry the BDS name.”

Barghouti explains that this is due to two factors. “First, mishandling and failure to properly investigate serious allegations of sexual harassment. Second, an unexpected and quite unfortunate official position by this organisation’s board, ending accountability to the BNC and by extension, to the BDS movement’s guidelines and ethical principles that are set by the BNC.” Both allude to the sexual harassment

charges made last year against BDS-SA Director Muhammed Desai.

The allegations go back to the night of 21 March 2019. The *Daily Vox* reported that visiting American academic and pro-Palestine activist, Professor Sang Hea Kil, alleged that Desai sexually harassed her and two other women while they were visiting Johannesburg. In May last year, Advocate Smanga Sethene cleared Desai of the sexual harassment allegations.

BDS-SA welcomed the findings. However, it was

allegations were proven.

“This sad development took place after months of private engagements by the BNC with a group of board members about the allegations, and after weeks of diligent and highly appreciated mediation efforts by Chief Mandla Mandela, with indispensable help from Shereen Usdin from South African Jews for a Free Palestine,” he said.

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, confirmed that “a group calling itself the South African BDS Coalition has formed



Omar Barghouti, the co-founder of the international BDS movement

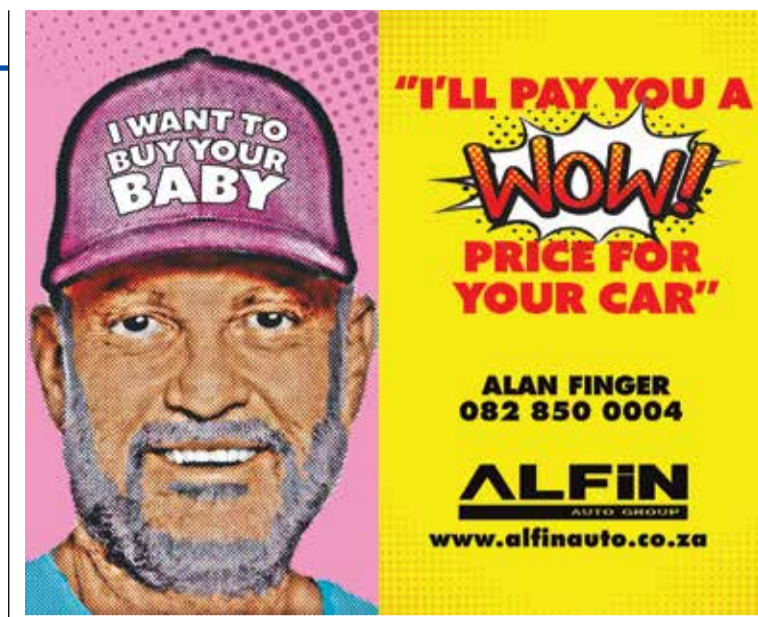
criticised by members of the Palestine Solidarity Movement for its handling of the matter. A statement issued on 8 April on behalf of several solidarity groups called on “organisations with a commitment to Palestinian solidarity and gender justice to actively distance themselves from the position adopted by BDS-SA”. They condemned the lack of a “victim-centred approach”.

This conflict eventually led to the splintering of BDS-SA, as described by Barghouti, “This sudden breach of years of mutual respect and clear-cut accountability came about after the BNC urged BDS-SA to conduct a fair victim-based investigation of the sexual harassment allegations in line with the movement’s principles, and to take the appropriate accountability and educational measures if the

with allegiance to the international BDS movement”.

Says Barghouti, “The Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) is proud to partner with our South African BDS coalition partners. Your coalition will lead BDS work in South Africa in co-ordination with the BNC and our global partners. We officially recognise this coalition as the only entity in South Africa that is affiliated to the global BDS movement and that can carry the BDS name.”

This has fractured the BDS movement in South Africa, dividing it into two groups that are likely to be in conflict with each other. “The [AFP] is weaker, with scandals [like Desai being accused of sexual harassment] besetting it,” said Professor Hussein Solomon in the department of political studies and governance at the University of the Free State.



Says Barghouti, “We are truly inspired, however, by the great efforts of our partners in South Africa, who for months have been working diligently and impressively to form this BDS coalition led by Chief Mandela, Mercia Andrews, Ronnie Kasrils, and representatives of Palestinian solidarity organisations. It will include representation from all major trade unions, social movements, and civil society entities.”

He has called on the coalition to “rise to the challenge of mobilising grassroots pressure on government to implement priority measures”. These include “holding South Africans who have enlisted in the Israeli occupation army accountable to legal prosecution for involvement in war crimes in accordance with South African law”, and “implementing the decision of the 2006 non-aligned movement Durban conference to ban all products of Israeli companies operating in occupied Palestinian territory, and to ban entry of all Israeli settlers into South Africa”.

So what does the future hold for BDS in South Africa? “The South African Jewish community shouldn’t expect anti-Israel sentiment or activity to disappear any time soon, even with the expected new government in Israel. But in the short term, there may be confusion about who speaks for ‘Palestine’ in South Africa, and thus a relative weakening as AFP establishes itself,” says political analyst Steven Gruzid.

Polovin says that the dynamics between the BDS factions and

their international masters are constantly shifting. For example, the Palestinian embassy in South Africa recently backed an AFP initiative to make masks, thereby separating itself from the new internationally-backed BDS South Africa coalition.

The groups are personality-driven, with Kasrils playing a leading role in the new coalition. It’s unclear who Mandela has chosen to work with. Either



“The world has moved on from BDS. In the Arab world, there seems to be an acceptance and an embracing of Israel.”

way, Polovin believes that the BDS groups will continue their radical and anti-Semitic agenda, with the added dimension of competing with each other.

Solomon believes that BDS’s moment has passed. “The world has moved on from BDS. In the Arab world, there seems to be an acceptance and an embracing of Israel. In the COVID-19 world, too, there are other priorities. Within the African context, single-issue movements like BDS are searching for relevance. Africa’s attitude towards Israel has changed, with [Israeli Prime Minister] Netanyahu visiting his African counterparts. In South Africa, in spite of ANC resolutions, our diplomatic contacts are still in place with Israel. BDS is searching for relevance in this new emerging world order.”

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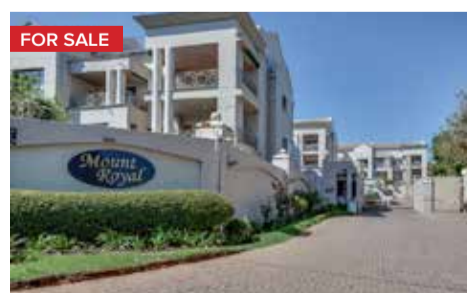
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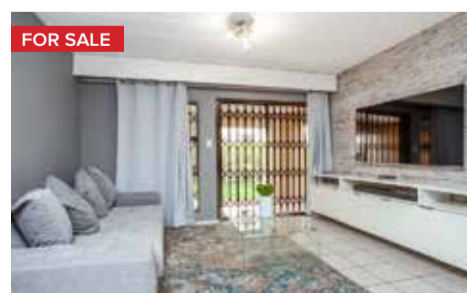
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Pharmacist who loved everyone dies alone from coronavirus

NICOLA MILTZ

There was an eerie stillness at West Park Cemetery in Johannesburg last week as two sisters stood two metres apart from each other wearing gloves and masks. They watched grief stricken as their beloved father, who died from COVID-19, was laid to rest.

Their heartache was made more unbearable by the notable absence of their mother, who had spent her entire adult life by his side. She is alone in hospital with the same cruel virus that took her husband of 51 years.

One lone family member who arrived to pay his respects said kaddish for retired pharmacist, Maurice Laffer, 80, who became the first member of the South African Jewish community to die from the virus. The Chevrah Kadisha made up the minyan.

This was surely not the send-off befitting an honourable, hardworking, loving man described by everyone as a “true mensch”. It was the brutal, lonely face of COVID-19 which robbed the family of all the usual comforting mourning rituals of human touch and face-to-face communal support.

Added to its immeasurable grief is the family’s concern that Maurice may have contracted the virus during a recent stay at a Sandton hospital. His daughters were fastidious about protecting their parents from the virus. They wrapped them in cotton wool, and ran circles around them refusing to let them out the house.

Maurice got sick in late March, and went to hospital for a couple of days complaining of chest pain. He went back to hospital on 7 April, and was placed in the intensive care unit (ICU).

“He had fluid around his heart and a small clot on his lung,” said his wife, Pearl, 73. She said he twice tested negative for COVID-19 and was put in the ICU, away from the coronavirus ward. No visitors were allowed. He showed slow signs of recovery, and was eager to go home.

On 14 April, the day he was discharged, the hospital released a statement to the media confirming that 12 staff members including seven healthcare workers had tested positive for COVID-19. The numbers testing positive steadily increased.

According to the family, they weren’t contacted by the hospital after he was discharged. “To this day, no track-and-trace protocols have been followed,” said Maurice’s eldest daughter, Beverley Greenhill.

“My mom nursed my father at home without wearing a mask or gloves. She would have taken precautions had she known he may have been exposed,” she said.

The family believe his medical treatment up until he was diagnosed with coronavirus fell short of the standard of care he exercised as a pharmacist his entire working life.

“My parents were in strict lockdown,” Beverley said. “They went to follow-up appointments, and my father kept complaining of shortness of breath. He was told he was fine. But his symptoms grew worse.”

Eventually he was rushed to a different hospital in the area, Netcare Sunninghill Hospital on Sunday, 26 April, where he tested positive.

He died two days later.

Maurice was a cancer survivor who still enjoyed daily walks.

“He told me it was his wish before he died one day to be in Israel for Yom Ha’atzmaut [Israel Independence Day],” said Pearl.

Sadly, he died at the start of this year’s Yom Ha’atzmaut celebrations in Jerusalem.

The family wants to remember the way he lived – his

gentle demeanour, kindness, integrity, and decades of taking the utmost care – not how he died, alone, with no family at his bedside.

They are tormented by images of him in his final hours. “We couldn’t see him, we couldn’t hug him to say goodbye,” said Beverley.

Her younger sister, Michelle Laffer-Liebson, said, “To know that he suffered after he helped so many unconditionally will haunt me until the end of my days.”

The chief clinical officer of the hospital where Maurice may have contracted the virus said that since the declaration of the pandemic, it had introduced stringent measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19, and had “acted swiftly in order to mitigate the risk to all involved”.

“Close to 1 000 staff members, allied health professionals, supporting staff, and doctors were tested, with the majority of these [90%] returning negative results,” the hospital said in a statement to the *SA Jewish Report*. In total, 90 individuals returned a positive result, four of these being staff members working in ICU. All associated doctors at the hospital tested negative.”

It confirmed that 83 people had recovered, with only two currently being treated in hospital.

“The thought that my father may have contracted this in hospital is horrifying,” said Beverley, “There are so many unanswered questions about the protocols followed.” Speaking from her hospital bed at Netcare Sunninghill Hospital, Pearl said, “When I was admitted, I asked to see the bed where Maurice lay. I felt a bit of peace. The same excellent team who looked after my Maurice now looks after me. They were there when he took his last breath.”

She recounted how she and her husband had been business partners throughout their marriage, and had never left each other’s side.

They began their journey in Maurice’s home town, Brakpan, where Maurice opened Benn’s Pharmacy. They then moved to Johannesburg, where they opened Manor Pharmacy at the Morning Glen Shopping Centre in Gallo Manor. Then they bought

the popular Galleon Pharmacy in Hyde Park Shopping Centre.

Ruth Lasarow, who did her internship at Manor Pharmacy, said, “Maurice treated everyone as if they were the most important person. He made people feel special.”

Shelley Sass, who did her internship at Galleon Pharmacy, said, “Maurice taught me everything I know today. He was a scholar and a gentleman, a true mensch who loved everyone.”

Rabbi Mordechai Abraham of Tzedoka Vechedes became friendly with Maurice about 20 years ago when Maurice was undergoing treatment for cancer.

“He was one of the most humble, selfless people I have ever met. We enjoyed each other’s company very much. I was broken when I heard he passed away.”

Joan Struck said on Facebook, “He was always so kind and beyond caring. One day, the night nurse left my father-in-law’s insulin out of the fridge. Maurice opened his pharmacy early, and hand delivered the insulin to my house. What a *tzadik* [righteous person].”

The family has expressed its deepest gratitude to Hatzolah, Dr Richard Friedland of Netcare, and the staff at Sunninghill Hospital, and Dr Despina Andreanis.

“We are grateful to friends and the community who have showered us with so much love, albeit from afar. Our father always told us life is for living, one never knows.”

• The family requested that the *SA Jewish Report* not name the hospital where Maurice may have been exposed.

However, it was definitely not the Netcare Sunninghill Hospital.



Maurice and Pearl Laffer earlier this year

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South African Jewish Report

The source of quality content, news and insights

A community that cares when the chips are down

As we end our first week of level-4 lockdown, I don't believe we have greater freedom in spite of some of the bans being lifted. There just seems like no end in sight.

People's initial peacefulness has now become a type of trauma and, for some, depression has set in.

It all stems from a real sense of fear for our future. We don't know what our world will look like when the lockdown finally ends.

As a journalist, it was upsetting to read about Associated Media Publishing closing down after 38 years of the Raphaely family bringing out a host of phenomenal magazines. Then, the news that Caxton's magazine section was also dying, losing another 10 magazines, was devastating. Effectively, the magazine industry in South Africa is dying.

Look at the aviation industry. Comair, once a proud Jewish family-owned business, has filed for business rescue. Meanwhile, South African Airways, already in dire straits before COVID-19, has begun the process of liquidation. While there is talk of a new airline being launched down the line, this industry is also in tatters.

Imagine just how many people are now unemployed in these two industries, and how many families are going to need help to survive.

We can see why depression may be setting in, along with the trauma of having very little control over our future.

But then, I turn my focus to our small community. In good times, we challenge each other, sometimes picking on people for having divergent views and competing against each other. Yes, you can say we are your regular dysfunctional extended family.

However, like family, we may disagree, but we still care deeply about one another. Words can be cheap, but in this community, people actively care.

I say this because on our front page this week, we have a story that warms my heart. It's proof of what I'm trying to say in a way that I never thought possible.

Back when coronavirus first became a reality in South Africa, our chief rabbi started worrying about what might happen to us. Knowing that there are a large proportion of entrepreneurs among us, he had a sense that COVID-19 was going to cut deep. It had the potential not just to hurt, but to maim us.

He began speaking to people with a lot of clout. He spoke to people with lots of money, sewing the seed for a fund to help small-to-medium-sized businesses that were going to need rescuing.

Now, it's one thing for a spiritual leader to talk, quite another for others to rally around the idea and make it happen.

I know that for various reasons there is a big mask over the amount of money set aside in the new Geshur Fund to rescue businesses. However, I have it on good authority that it is worth tens of millions of rand, and it will be able to take care of many, many businesses in dire need.

Very wealthy people often have a bad reputation for being stingy. I'm sure you have heard it said that those people are rich because they don't share. However, clearly, there are a large number of wealthy Jewish people who are so different. They care, and want to help. I'm so grateful for such people, who will keep our community afloat.

Then, there are hugely successful business people who have agreed to sit on the Geshur board to decide who is given loans to save their companies. I know a few of them, and I know just how busy they are. They have to make appointments to see their own children, but they have made time to get involved in this venture, which will be time consuming. Why do they do it? Simply because they care. Is it going to help them in any way? No. It's not about them, it's about the community, and saving our businesses.

So, yes, our community can argue. Yes, we can bitch and moan. However, I know I said it last week, and I repeat it again, we have the most extraordinary community in the world. A community with an enormous heart.

So, we may get depressed. We may be traumatised. We may be going through a whole host of unpleasant experiences.

But I, for one, am extremely grateful that I was born into this community because we look after our own without neglecting others.

Last week, I did something that was extremely difficult for me to do. I asked the community to help keep our newspaper afloat.

I have been astonished at the response. With its kindness came some of the most beautiful messages about how much our newspaper means to people's lives. I have been bowled over at their gratitude.

I have received messages from some I least expected to hear from. They paid tribute to this newspaper, and what it means to them.

As an editor, there are few things that mean as much as knowing that what I and my incredible team do is appreciated. We certainly put our heart and soul into bringing this newspaper to you. So, thank you very much.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Please look on our website, sajr.co.za to check which outlets you will find the SA Jewish Report. Alternatively, you can read or download a digital version of the newspaper with additional content from our site.



Anti-Semitism on its way out in the Arab world

OPINION

PROFESSOR HUSSEIN SOLOMON



My name, Hussein Solomon, captures my diverse identity. I'm a practicing Muslim who, on account of my paternal grandfather, has Jewish blood flowing through his veins. This heritage is further complicated by the fact that my father was brought up a Christian, and sought to enter the priesthood.

As a child, this triple Abrahamic tradition in my family has always fascinated me as I attended a Catholic school, singing in the choir and going to *madrassah* (educational institution) after school. I revelled in being able to attend mass and *jummah* (the sermon before Friday prayer).

As an academic and as a Muslim, I tried to use my own mixed heritage to build bridges through inter-faith dialogue and as the editor of a newspaper I began – *Islamic Focus*.

As a Muslim writing in this Jewish newspaper, nothing saddens me more than the enmity displayed by the adherents of our two faiths. In this charged, polarising atmosphere, the bridge-builders between our two faiths are often viewed with suspicion or open hostility.

Such hatred of the proverbial other is understandable given our chequered history, but it never makes it right.

Anti-Semitism on the part of the Arab world is a shame on our collective humanity, and it's something I have fought against. There is, however, reason to hope on account of the values change sweeping throughout the Arab world as a result of the processes of urbanisation, modernisation, and globalisation facilitated by modern technology.

Arab society, according to the latest evidence from the World Values Survey and Arab Barometer, is becoming more secular, liberal, and egalitarian in its values, moving away from religion, tradition, and ethnocentrism.

In the process, Arab society is getting more tolerant of the proverbial – be it non-Muslims, Americans, other Westerners, or indeed the state of Israel. Support for recognising Israel as a state has reached unprecedented levels.

Arabs are also increasingly embracing their Jewish heritage. A million Jews used to reside in the Arab world before the majority were unceremoniously forced to leave their homeland on account of the establishment of the state of Israel. Today, in both Egypt and Lebanon, the state is investing millions of dollars to restore synagogues.

Iraq, meanwhile, seeks to renew contacts with Iraqi Jews. Sudan's minister of religious affairs, Nasser Aladin, has also pleaded for Sudanese Jews who have emigrated to return to their country. All this highlights growing tolerance in Arab society – a refreshing break from the past.

The Arab Youth Survey of 2019, which was

conducted in 15 countries in the Gulf, Levant, and North Africa and involved 3 300 face-to-face surveys, found that 18 to 24-year-olds in the region were becoming more secular, blaming religion and sectarianism for various conflicts in their region.

Moreover, 66% believe that religion is playing too big a role in the Middle East, while half agree that the "Arab world's religious values are holding the Arab world back". Explaining this change in attitude, Mohammad Shahrour, an academic at the University of Damascus, says that the region's youth are confronted with a "deep intellectual dilemma when it comes to reconciling conservative teachings with the world they inhabit". In addition, he says access to the internet has "allowed them to keep pace with worldwide developments, opening their minds to virtually all cultures and civilisations".

Other polls such as that conducted by *BBC News Arabic* not only reinforce this trend, but point out the implications for Islamist organisations. The BBC's polls involved 25 000 people from Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen.



Sheik Imam Mohammed Shchata, left, and Rabbi Albert Gabbi talk during a public assembly for religious tolerance on 11 September 2010, in Philadelphia

The survey demonstrated that trust in Islamist groups and organisations fell calamitously across the Middle East, North Africa, Afghanistan, and Pakistan region. In Jordan and Morocco, trust in the Muslim Brotherhood declined 20% between 2012 and 2019, whilst in Sudan, support for the Brotherhood dropped further by 25%, from 49% to a mere 24%. Support for Ennahda in Tunisia also declined 24%, whilst Palestinian support for Hamas declined to 22% from 48% over the 2012-2019 period. Increasingly moderate Islamic alternatives are being sought.

This values change suggests that Islamic fundamentalism is on the wane in the Arab world, and that anti-Semitism, too, may well be on its way out. I write this article in the context of a world facing a grave challenge as a result of the coronavirus. Now, more than ever, we need to find our common humanity and let go of the hatred, bigotry, and intolerance.

• Professor Hussein Solomon lectures in the department of political studies and governance at the University of the Free State.

Elderly resident dies of COVID-19 in Cape Town aged home

>>Continued from page 2

equipment, masks, and hand sanitisers.

"Since the Pesach incident, we have broken meals into three sittings for breakfast and lunch, requiring residents to maintain a two-metre distance at meals," said Tomson, "Dinner is delivered in takeaway containers to residents' rooms."

"We need to balance physical protection with the psycho-social needs of those we care for," he said. "The decisions we take are researched and calculated, based on regular external consultation with an independent medical advisory committee and a virologist to ensure that we meet the highest standards."

"Intelligent, calculated, and compassionate decision making takes into account the multitude of complex factors involved in protecting the needs of residents, emotionally and physically."

Respected pulmonologist Anton Meyberg commended the Chev and Jewish aged facilities for their stringent approach to dealing with the virus. "The elderly are most at risk, and are the ones we need to protect," he said. "Even if it means being harsh in looking after them."

Meyberg maintains that residents should wear protective masks, even in the facility. "If they leave their room or come into contact with medical workers, they should wear a mask. It's important."

He believes South African Jewish aged facilities aren't just meeting standards, they are going beyond them.

"They do incredible, groundbreaking work. The fact that we aren't sitting with elderly COVID-19 positive patients from the homes in intensive care is testimony to their efforts."

Denis Goldberg: principled to the last

TALI FEINBERG

Few could imagine African National Congress (ANC) stalwart Denis Goldberg, who lived most of his life as a communist and anti-Zionist, at a Bnei Akiva *machaneh* (camp). But less than 10 years ago, he travelled a great distance to be there.

Goldberg, who died at the age of 87 in Cape Town on 29 April, struggled with his Jewish identity, but this mellowed somewhat in later years. Ilan Solomons played an important role in this transformation.

The son of left-wing, immigrant parents, Goldberg was born in 1933 and grew up in Cape Town. "He faced anti-Semitic attacks at school, which contributed to his growing political awareness," says Solomons. "I first met Denis in 2010 at a screening of the documentary *Comrade Goldberg*. He was also launching his autobiography.

"He signed a copy of the book, and we struck up a conversation. My friend, Benji Shulman, and I spoke to him for about an hour. That was Denis: he had all the time in the world to speak to people. We were involved with the South African Union of Jewish Students, and asked if he would be interested in speaking to university students. He was excited about it, and we went ahead with it.

"We also arranged for a screening of *Comrade Goldberg* followed by a Q&A and book signing at the Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre (RCHCC), which drew a substantial crowd. People loved hearing his story. During the same trip, we arranged a meeting between Denis and Rabbi Ben Isaacson, who was an important and often lone anti-apartheid voice in the rabbinate. Denis thanked Rabbi Isaacson for all he had done at great personal cost to himself.

"That year, I was a *madrish* (leader) at Bnei Akiva, and I suggested that even though Denis was a completely secular Jew, his story would be of great value to us. And so it was that Denis drove more than 390km to and from the Bnei Akiva campsite," says Solomons.

"It was a miracle. Not only was Denis prepared to drive that distance to speak to young people, but he was a lifelong non-Zionist, secular Jew. Bnei Akiva was, and still is, a religious Zionist youth movement, and by all standards, you couldn't find two more polar opposites. But he was very impressed with camp, and said that the spirit of volunteerism was something that should be emulated throughout South Africa. He spoke to an absolutely packed Bnei Akiva shul on Shabbos afternoon."

It was the beginning of a deepening engagement with the Jewish community. Says South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director Wendy Kahn, "The doors on both sides were always open. While there were areas of disagreement, he was forthright and engaging, always willing to speak and participate in initiatives aimed at furthering the cause of democracy and social justice in South Africa. It was a relationship that the SAJBD greatly valued."

Goldberg has always loomed large as a symbol of sacrifice and struggle for his niece, Democratic Alliance Member of Parliament Madeleine Hicklin. She says he was dedicated to the dignity of others above all else.

"We were both children of activist parents, and both didn't want to automatically follow in their footsteps," says Justice Albie Sachs, who knew Goldberg all his life. "We both went to the University of Cape Town, where he was an avid rugby player. Then we became active in the non-racial Modern Youth Society and in the struggle," recalls Sachs.

"While I was a talker, Denis was a doer," says Sachs. "He went underground, became an Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) member, and used his practical skills as an engineer to

prepare for the armed struggle.

"He married Esme Bodenstein, and they had the most open home in Cape Town. Everybody went there, no matter what colour they were, at the height of apartheid. It was a spirited home – full of laughter, energy, and defiance. I think Denis held onto some of that spirit during everything he endured after being arrested," says Sachs.

On 11 July 1963, the security police raided the secret MK headquarters Liliesleaf farmhouse in Rivonia. Goldberg was arrested along with several others including four other Jews, all of whom have since died.

He was sentenced to four terms of life imprisonment. At 31 years old, he was the youngest of those sentenced.

Goldberg was sent to Pretoria Central Prison, while the others were sent to Robben Island. Being apart from his comrades was tough, and he was mostly alone in his cell. Both his parents died while he was incarcerated.

"I was seven when Denis was arrested," recalls Hicklin. Having a family member so dedicated to his cause wasn't without its hardships. Hicklin's mother came to South Africa from Vilnius in Lithuania. "On the very day of his [Goldberg's] arrest, they revoked her permanent residency," Hicklin says. "My cousins and aunt came to live with us before going into exile in the United Kingdom (UK). I would hear Esme crying every night," recalls Hicklin.

She says Goldberg's children, Hilary and David, struggled without

their father, although they visited him in prison as much as possible. "I would drive them there. The last time they would see him before going back to the UK was always the hardest."

Hicklin has always been proud of her uncle. "When we were kids, we would hear about the *swart gevaar* [black danger] and the communists at school. I remember standing up on my chair and saying, 'You know nothing. My uncle is Denis Goldberg. He is my hero.' I had such admiration for this man and what he stood for."

Hicklin recounts how Goldberg's daughter, Hilary, eventually settled in Israel, where her kibbutz set up a committee to try to get her father released from prison. Herut Lapid, who campaigned for the release of Jewish prisoners worldwide, became involved. Under further pressure, the South African government released Goldberg after 22 years in prison. He went to Israel, where he struggled with the notion of a Jewish state. "He battled with his Jewish identity his whole life," says his niece.

He soon left for the UK, where his family attempted to restore the years it had lost. There were joyful moments, such as Hilary's wedding, and tragedy – Esme died in 2000, and Hilary passed away a year later.

Hicklin recalls that her aunt never wanted to return to South Africa after all the trauma she suffered as a result of her husband's incarceration. But Goldberg eventually remarried Edeldgard Nkobi, and returned to Pretoria and then Cape Town. Nkobi passed away in 2006.

"Again, in a very practical way, he assisted the ANC, working under the water affairs and forestry portfolio," recalls Sachs. "A few years back, he was dismayed by aspects of our political leadership, but then overjoyed when the worst elements of corruption were removed."

Goldberg settled in Hout Bay, where he began to realise his dream of an art and culture education centre for disadvantaged youth.

Sachs saw Goldberg a number of times over the past year, where they spoke on various platforms. "Even though he was battling cancer, he was extraordinary. He definitely felt that he had fulfilled his life's purpose."

Hicklin last saw her uncle at an event in 2019. "He was always extreme in his beliefs, and willing to sacrifice anything," she says. "He was an incredibly principled human being."



Denis Goldberg



Denis Goldberg stands next to a photograph of Nelson Mandela at Liliesleaf farm in Rivonia

Photos: Ilan Ossendryver

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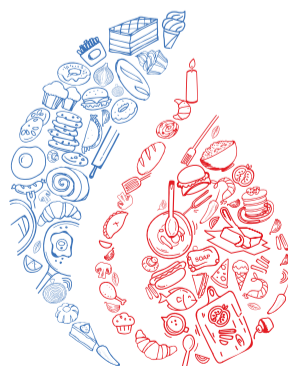


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Cape Town woman experiences Exodus 2.0

TALI FEINBERG

"It was Pesach 2.0 – being trapped in *Mitzrayim* [Egypt] during a plague, and waiting for the Red Sea to open the way home," says Capetonian Beverley Joffe, who found herself stranded when the world went into lockdown.

Joffe travelled to Egypt in March for maxillofacial dental surgery, which she chose to do there because of the reduced cost. "I couldn't take the chance of not having the full treatment, [as I need] articulation and strong vocal projection for work," she says. She is no stranger to the region, having travelled extensively in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, and training in Eastern classical dance arts, yoga, and natural healing.

"I was supposed to have dental surgery seven years ago, suffering from extreme dental pain for much of the time since," says Joffe. But her mother's health took priority, and she spent the past few years caring for her until she passed away.

"It was only after we put up her stone that I started working on plans to fulfil my now way-past-urgent dental procedure. In spite of the virus starting to spread panic around the world, I landed in Cairo in March."

Soon after her surgery, Joffe found herself stranded. "At first, the Egyptian government spoke about a two-week shut-down of the airport. This appeared manageable, until that period was extended to mid-April.

That date was pushed to the end of April, and now the authorities have stopped making announcements altogether.

"Even before the end of March, the hotel where I was staying informed us that it was closing, and I needed to check out. That was the date of my first contact with the South African Embassy in Cairo. We [the stranded South Africans in Egypt] were told we should all stay in hotels close to the embassy at our own cost, and there was nothing further it could do other than report our situation and await direction from the government.

"As more South Africans gathered in Cairo, the embassy informed us it would attempt to work on our repatriation, and we all joined a WhatsApp group. The embassy announced that it had secured a charter flight on South African Airways (SAA), but it was cancelled 36 hours prior to departure. We freaked out. It became really difficult for the group to manage the hotel costs and maintain a positive outlook at this point," says Joffe.

"I began talking to a friend about coming to Israel across Sinai. She phoned the authorities, and was told it wasn't possible. This was when I reached out to Stuart Diamond of the Cape South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD). I explained that I was stranded, healing from surgery, and in a perilous financial situation.

"Stuart replied immediately. I breathed my first sigh of relief since

leaving my house. The sensation of the branches of the Jewish community catching me in free-fall was immense.

"I was still swollen and fighting infection. Perhaps if I didn't have an infection, I would have taken the first bus to the Menachem Begin Crossing and yelled into Eilat until something manifested! But I wasn't in good health, which made the situation even more dangerous. All that was left for me to do was to attend virtual shul, and keep reaching out and wait for Hashem's hand to point me forward."

Slowly, the wheels began to turn. "The South African Embassy in Cairo worked day and night on the lines of red tape as far as its jurisdiction would allow. Stuart worked tirelessly, and I'm sure many more individuals and organisations that I wasn't even aware of were pushing for the safe repatriation of all 43 South Africans stranded in Egypt," she says.

"I learned of Darren Bergman and the Home Away From Home project just days before I flew. When I contacted him on a mobile number attached to a repatriation circular sent out on our WhatsApp group, he replied, 'You've been on my radar for a while!'"

Joffe says SAA has also been a massive part of the repatriation process. Due to the airline flying charters taking citizens of other countries home and moving cargo,

Beverley Joffe



it was able to offer a financially manageable charter flight at R7 000 per person. The charter flight from EgyptAir was billed at about R150 000 per person.

Meanwhile, her students in Cape Town and across the world helped to keep her financially afloat.

She eventually boarded her SAA flight home on 22 April. "The minute we boarded the SAA plane, it felt like being on South African soil. It was a celebratory take-off, with the whole plane cheering. At OR Tambo, we were the only activity in sight. We were stamped inside the airport, and taken back to the tarmac. We collected our

bags, and boarded the organised transfer to the government-arranged quarantine."

Joffe has remained in quarantine together with the other passengers and flight crew on the top floor of a Johannesburg hotel. She was released from quarantine on 6 May and will stay at a friend in Pretoria until she can catch a bus back to Cape Town, which she hopes will happen on 9 May. "Nurses came twice daily to check our temperature. I'm still fighting infection from the surgery, but thankfully, the SAJBD has put me in touch with a specialist with whom I have had a virtual consultation."

She still needs to get home to Cape Town after her enforced quarantine.

Diamond told the *SA Jewish Report* that the minute Joffe reached out on Facebook, both the Cape Board and Bergman worked closely with her, providing spiritual and mental support and looking at the logistics of getting her home safely.

"There was a host of communication with spheres of government here in the Cape, nationally, and in Egypt. Even now that she is back in South Africa, we are constantly in touch with her about her medical and dietary needs, giving her all the support we can. We're also trying to help other Capetonians."

"We can be brave and fearless, but we are nothing without community," Joffe says. "Our interconnectivity makes us a thousand times stronger."

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Get back to work to stave off economic meltdown, business leaders urge

JORDAN MOSHE

"The economy of South Africa is akin to a patient arriving at a hospital. We don't know if it's going into intensive care or serious monitoring. This patient will need serious treatment, stabilisation, and some kind of vaccine that will cure it of the problems it will live with for the next year or two."

If the economic prognosis of respected banker Colin Coleman is any indication, the road ahead for South Africa is going to be long and bumpy. The former chief executive of Goldman Sachs was one of five South African experts who on Sunday night unpacked the financial reality faced by our country in the wake of COVID-19.

He was joined by Stephen Koseff, the former chief executive of the Investec Group; Sandile Zungu, the president of the Black Business Council; Andile Mazwai, the governor of the National Stokvel Association of South Africa; former chief executive of Standard Bank, Jacko Maree; and Nazmeera Moola, the head of SA investments at Ninety One (formerly Investec Asset Management).

Moderated by Howard Sackstein, the chairperson of the *SA Jewish Report*, the panel addressed the financial implications of the virus, and devised ways to kickstart the South African economy. Thousands of viewers tuned in to watch the discussion on Zoom and YouTube, including Finance Minister Tito Mboweni.

Said Coleman, "The global economy is expected to experience a 3% contraction in 2020. The United States shed 30 million jobs in six weeks, and is facing a 6% contraction. The speculation is that South Africa's economy will shrink between 6% to 8%."

"That type of scenario is a massive shock to the global economy and South Africa. We need to plan for a significant range of negative shocks, some of them worse than others."

Moola said that under level-five lockdown, only 33% of the economy which generates revenue for the fiscus was functioning. "Under level four, we think it opens up only another 5%-8%," she said. "Forty-two percent of the economy is closed. Just on our arithmetic, that means minus 42% growth for the period it stays closed."

She continued, "We need to figure out how to open the economy in a responsible way because we can't function [like this] for a prolonged period. We need to balance health risks with economic risks. That's how we move forward."

Koseff agreed, saying it was hard to predict what the situation would be in six months' time.

"We don't know what kind of economy we're going to have," he said. "One is grateful that there was a lot of support from the central bank and more recently the fiscus to make sure we don't kill off capital formation in the country. It's a question of how we get out of lockdown while considering health issues and economic damage."

The major financial issue in six months' time will be the reality of more than a million people who will be out of work, said Zungu. "It's not difficult to comprehend," he said. "The hospitality industry, where the bulk of small, medium, and micro enterprises are located, is practically non-operational. If you add it all up, it talks to a gloomy

situation."

He also emphasised the deepening issue of inequality which the situation had exposed.

"We've always spoken about the triple challenges of inequality, unemployment, and poverty. It has become clear in the past five weeks how deeply inequality runs in South Africa. It's going to deepen, and [the situation] is also turning into a socio-political crisis. People are queueing for stipends and rations daily, and an empty stomach forces people to see nothing to lose."

In spite of their desperation, however, many seem to understand the need to increase economic activity



gradually rather than all at once. Mazwai said that people understood why they needed to remain at home and hold back on going out to earn a livelihood, challenging though it may be. Similarly, Zungu believes that civil unrest shouldn't be a concern, and in spite of flare-ups of tension, sense will prevail.

Pre-recorded messages from numerous business icons were shared. They suggested various ways in which President Cyril Ramaphosa might approach the problem. These included Geoff Rothschild, the former chairperson of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange; Cape Union Mart founder Philip Krawitz; Mike Abel, the co-founder and chief executive of the M&C Saatchi Group, and others.

"We need the country to get back to work, and we need to protect, as far as possible, the immunocompromised and elderly," said Abel. "But the rest of the nation needs to get back to work if we want to stave off growing poverty. We went into COVID-19 economically crippled, we've suffered a downgrade, and have no money. The only way out is to get people working again."

The panel agreed that government should chart a course that balances economic priorities with health concerns, taking into account inequality and supporting vulnerable sectors

"We have to trust that government will have the data on which to make the calculations," said Coleman. "There is a trust factor between the population and government that's at play."

"We will have outbreaks [of infection] in South Africa as the opening takes place, and there will be a significant increase in infection at level four. There is a dynamic interplay between opening up and health consequences that we need to be aware of."

To date, more than 17 000 people have watched the discussion, either live or recorded. Sackstein said the public response had been astounding, and the panel was treated seriously by those who watched it.

"The panel highlighted that government will need to ramp up its efforts as poverty is clearly a pressing issue," he said. "It was also clear that additional measures will have to be taken in the sectors hardest hit, including the hospitality and restaurant industry."

He has no doubt that the opinions shared will be heard by government, not least because the Presidential Economic Advisory Council requested a copy of the recording moments after the discussion ended.

"Government listens to what people are saying," Coleman said. "It's hard to get a message through, though, which is why we provided a platform for almost direct contact with those in charge. There are many possible solutions, and they need to be considered."

King Davidians Zoom to the rescue

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

They may be stuck at home, but that hasn't stopped a group of teenagers from King David High School Linksfield (KDHL) from helping the less fortunate.

The group of about 20 King Davidians aged 16 to 17 is raising funds for charity by holding Zoom webinars that appeal to different interests, thus allowing participants to give and receive in turn.

Name Y-MAD (Youth Making a Difference), they are organising at least 12 webinars on topics ranging from exercise classes, yoga, to boxing, art, cooking, a challah bake – even a Fortnite tournament for those obsessed with the game. Entrance fees range from R50 to R100 per event, but participants can donate more if they want to. Events are advertised on Facebook, Instagram and conventional media, with sign up via Google, and payment on the BackaBuddy platform.



The funds raised go to support the non-profit Nashua Children's Charity Foundation (NCCF), which supports 75 charities including orphanages, day care centres, squatter camps, an informal settlement, and child-protection centres.

The NCCF's most critical issue is how to feed children on lockdown who can no longer access school feeding schemes. The need for assistance has also increased as a result of the general rise in joblessness.

"The demand for food way exceeds our monthly budget," says Helen Fraser, NCCF operations director. This is a huge statement from an organisation that conducts large charity drives supplying goods as various as groceries, cleaning materials, toiletries, school supplies, and housing infrastructure. It needs funds urgently – and fresh ideas.

"Helen approached me [Copans has been volunteering for the organisation for the past year] to come up with a fundraising concept. She wanted to tap my 'youthful brain' for something different," says Jade Copans, in Grade 11 at KDHL, and the spokesperson and organiser of the group. "We wanted to find a way for people to give and to receive."

"Jade and her team are beyond incredible," Fraser says of the King David group. "They are innovative, and want to help. They have visited the organisations we support. We contacted her to do something different. When they mentioned they might need help contacting celebrities, within two seconds, we had [boxer] Brian Mitchell on board [Mitchell will be conducting one of the webinars]."

The group is aiming to raise at least R20 000 from the initiative. It has already raised R14 000 from individual donors. The first webinar, on Tuesday night, is a "bar class" (a cardiovascular workout session) and already has 20 participants signed up.

"We're excited about it," says Copans. They are appealing across the spectrum to youngsters and adults, and are tapping participants for suggestions. They are also tapping their vast parent and friend network to find experts who can convene sessions. To date, nobody has turned them down.

Copans is no stranger to welfare. As well as volunteering for the NCCF, she is involved in the school's outreach committee. She knows reaching decisions isn't easy, but encourages the participants to work together (on WhatsApp) to find common ground by understanding that it's for a greater cause.

"Even though you can't go out and do it yourself, there are ways to have a positive impact on people's lives from home," she says of the group of teenage philanthropists – and as a message to teenagers in general.

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Uniting colour and cardio for charity

JORDAN MOSHE

As hundreds of exercise enthusiasts puffed and panted, world-renowned artist Conor McCreedy stood at his canvas and painted. They were on the same online exercise panel.

While those watching him continued to exercise, their eyes were drawn to his brush as it swept across the blank surface, leaving striking lines of blue. As odd as this exercise routine may sound, it was an exercise in charity, uniting colour and cardio to support those in need.

To top it all, the auctioned painting went to the royals of Monaco for a substantially large sum.

This unique event last Monday was one of several initiatives conceived by brothers Andrew and Paul Rothschild, the co-founders of SWEAT1000. SWEAT stands for Specialised Weight Endurance Athletic Training, and the 1000 represents the number of calories burned in a ground-breaking hour-long workout.

Since the onset of COVID-19, these exercise enthusiasts have

worked tirelessly to find ways to keep people fit and give to charity.

Their exercise platform has offered members regular workouts as well as frequent free training opportunities for anyone wanting to exercise, attracting about 6 500 people.

“We’ve tried to bring people together,” Andrew Rothschild told the *SA Jewish Report*. “Because people can’t get to gym, we wanted to make online workouts as interactive as possible.”

To this end, they have invited several local celebrities like former cricketer Morne Morkel, rugby star Bryan Habana, and others to appear in their sessions, giving people a unique opportunity to work out with sports stars.

“We wanted to make celebs more approachable, and show people that they are human as well,” says Rothschild. “This situation is a great leveller, showing people that no matter what you do or where you come from, we’re in this together.”

Another initiative is to offer free online exercise sessions to doctors and other healthcare workers as a small token of appreciation from SWEAT1000 to those committed to fighting the pandemic.

Says Rothschild, “They strive to look after us, so it’s important to look after them as well. We’ve had more than 150 medical workers from around the world use the platform.”

As good as these initiatives were, Rothschild wanted to help the less fortunate as well.

SWEAT1000 decided to use the platform to raise

money for charity.

“I wanted to help the Pick n Pay Feed the Nation campaign, and thought about getting Conor, who is a friend of mine, involved,” says Rothschild.

“He lives in Switzerland, but happened to be stuck in South Africa because of the lockdown.”

Born in South Africa, McCreedy is a contemporary artist known for his abstract paintings and for prominently featuring the colour blue in his work. Rothschild asked him to paint while he conducted the workout session. Attendees would bid for the painting during the session, and all proceeds would be donated to Feed the Nation.

“Conor created a unique piece which featured the South African flag in his signature blue style,” says Rothschild.

In the end, the royal family of Monaco bought the artwork. The family shares a bond with South Africa, with Princess Charlene having been born in Zimbabwe and relocating to South Africa with



The painting by Conor McCreedy auctioned by SWEAT1000

her parents in 1989.

“The painting was actually bought by the Princess Charlene Foundation,” says Rothschild. “Her brother, Gareth, is a good friend of mine, and often tunes in to my workouts. He saw the painting and really wanted it, so he called me and bought it outright for an undisclosed amount.”

While the original has been sent to the royal residence, Rothschild made 100 facsimile prints available for purchase to the public as well. Each of them sold for \$100 (R1 871). Added to donations made during the session, the proceeds were given to Feed the Nation, enabling the support of more than 100 families in need.

Gesher Fund – a lifeline for Jewish businesses

>>Continued from page 1

“However, we will consider giving applicants a bridge until they are in a position to receive longer-term replacement funding elsewhere. We are deeply aware of and sensitive to the immediate funding needs these businesses have.”

Asked about businesses that were viable before the pandemic but may not be able to operate for a long period of time, such as those involved in schools, events, travel, and hospitality, Sacks says, “If that business is from a sector that has been hardest hit, it doesn’t rule them out. At the same time, if applicants are better suited to Chevrah Kadisha assistance or Rambam Trust advances, they will be assisted in that direction.”

Applicants can now visit www.gesher.org.za, and apply for interest-free loans of R50 000 to R750 000. These will be issued for 12 to 30 months to fund short-term working and operating capital requirements including staff salaries and wages. Loans may not be used for other purposes including the repayment of legacy borrowings or to fund new initiatives.

“We have set up the most efficient process we could in the short time allowed,” Sacks says. “We hope it will be a seamless application exercise, and that applicants will hear back in about a week. Our teams are ready to go, and we are looking to move quickly. Emergency funding is useful only if it arrives timeously, and we understand the urgent requirements for cash.”

Saul Tomson, the chief executive of the Chevrah Kadisha, says, “When the Chev was approached by some remarkable donors to assist, we immediately appreciated the urgency and value of such an initiative. In spite of our team being extremely stretched [in the protection of vulnerable residents and increasing assistance to families in need], we allocated significant time and energy into making Gesher a reality. It’s our fervent prayer that Gesher will succeed in its mission to keep viable businesses going. In those instances where Gesher can’t assist, the Chev will be here waiting to ensure that no Jew gets left behind.”

The chief rabbi says he is particularly grateful to those who contributed their time and expertise to the initial phase of getting the concept off the ground, as well as the generous donors, community leaders, and industry experts who have made the fund a reality. He clarifies that his aim was to establish the fund, but he won’t be involved in the assessment of applications or the distribution of funds.

“We have the most amazing community: business leaders, philanthropists, and people who really care and want to make a difference,” Goldstein says. “Whenever there is a need, people come forward. There are many examples over the years of our community offering their talent, generosity, skills, and vision to overcome challenges. This is one of those times.”

Creating a refuge for refugees

JORDAN MOSHE

When mother and dance teacher Romy Petersen sees injustice, she doesn’t simply express sympathy. She does something about it. She juggles her responsibilities as a mom and teacher with campaigning for the rights of refugees. But, she wouldn’t have it any other way.

“I can’t bear the injustice foreign nationals face every day in South Africa,” Petersen told the *SA Jewish Report* on Monday.



A qualified field guide and conservationist, this wife and mother of two devoted her life to the cause in the wake of the xenophobic violence which gripped the country in 2008.

“Some people sit back and say, ‘shame’, others donate money,” she says. “For me, that’s not enough. I feel I have an obligation to do something. It’s an impulse I can’t control.”

Petersen is one of the five dedicated team members of Afrika Awake, a non-profit organisation formed in 2013 to address xenophobia in South Africa and support survivors who lost loved ones in the violence. Since the onset of the lockdown, she and her team have worked tirelessly to support refugee and migrant communities across the country, bringing food, support, and hope where it’s most needed.

She hit the ground running before lockdown began, she says. “When schools closed, we immediately thought about the demographic we usually assist – refugees. I also have a soft spot for urban-resource miners and car guards, so I got thinking.

“I went shopping and, looking around the parking lot, I wondered what would become of the car guards if we went into a full-scale lockdown. How would they support themselves and care for their families?”

After raising some funds on Facebook, Petersen set out to supply the vulnerable in her area with hand sanitiser and mielie meal. When lockdown came, she realised that she would have to do far more to bring relief to the countless individuals who depend on Afrika Awake to

meet their basic needs.

“So many people are starving, and many of them are foreign nationals,” Petersen says. “We help South Africans as well as foreigners without discriminating, but the fact is that foreign refugees are last on anybody’s list right now. They need our help more than ever.”

By partnering with the African Diaspora Forum, Afrika Awake was able to connect with local groups of foreigners, asking community leaders to provide lists of those in need. Representatives of Nigerian, Rwandan, Congolese, Bangladeshi, and Somalian communities were just some of those who asked for help, desperate to meet the basic needs of hundreds of people.

Over the past few weeks, Petersen and the team have provided numerous food parcels, e-wallet payments, and supermarket vouchers to innumerable applicants. They have also helped to support feeding schemes in Tembisa and Alexandra by supplying them with soup, providing a nutritious and filling meal to countless orphans and refugees, the elderly, and homeless.

“The sad reality is that our demands are great, and our funds too little,” Petersen says. “We give R200 in vouchers to people, reaching more people by giving them a little less.

“It’s heart-breaking to send such tiny amounts of money. How far can R200 really go? Still, you can’t believe how grateful people are. Someone we helped wrote to us to say that the R200 felt like a million rand to him. It makes a difference.”

None of the organisation’s members draws a salary. They rely solely on the generosity of the public. While they have responded to more than 200 requests to date, their list of appeals remains long, and continues to grow daily.

“It’s heavy stuff, and you wake up knowing that thousands out there need help,” Petersen says. “So many people say they are struggling to stay in lockdown. Try being poor and not South African, then you’ll know what struggle really means.

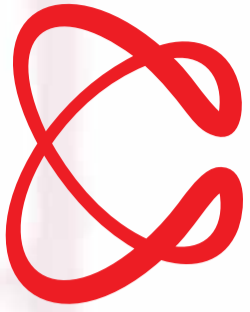
“In spite of our brilliant Constitution, South Africa remains xenophobic to the core. But we are all human beings, and no human being is illegal,” she says, pointing out that she doesn’t care if those needing her support are documented migrants or not.

Many question why Petersen doesn’t support the impoverished in the Jewish community, and have challenged her decision to support refugees when many of them are undocumented.

“Our community is sensational,” she says. “I never have to worry about the Jewish community. Yes, there are those in need, but no Jew will be allowed to starve.

“Foreign nationals are, without doubt, the most vulnerable and least likely to be on anyone’s list especially at this time. Ninety-nine percent of foreigners in the country want to be registered, and the system just doesn’t work for them with so much corruption and other obstacles.”

She urges those who can assist to do whatever they can. “Every bit really helps. We are like professional beggars. I ask anyone who can help to give something. What if I were a refugee in a country that hated foreigners? I could only hope someone would help me. That’s why I need to help them.”



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Jewish youngsters less tolerant of anti-Semitism

TALI FEINBERG

South African Jews, particularly youngsters, have become far less tolerant of anti-Semitism, says Associate Professor Adam Mendelsohn, the director of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town.

Furthermore, 20% of the respondents to the recently released Jewish Community Survey of South Africa (JCSSA) said that they felt discriminated against because they were Jewish in the 12 months prior to the study.

Ninety-two percent of respondents feel that anti-Israel sentiment in the country has increased over the past five years, and 74% feel the same about anti-Jewish sentiment. Just more than 10% say they have personally witnessed an anti-Semitic incident in the past year, while 8.8% have personally experienced an anti-Semitic attack in the past year, mostly involving verbal insult or harassment.

"We're living in a moment where we are acutely sensitive to anti-Semitism, in large measure because of the resurgence of anti-Semitism in America, the failure of the Labour Party in the United Kingdom under Jeremy Corbyn to address anti-Semitism within its ranks, and violent attacks on Jews in France, Germany, and Belgium," says Mendelsohn.

"This sensitivity has been accentuated by the very real surge of hate online, and particularly on social media. I suspect that this sensitivity has filtered into our local context. Jews, and particularly younger Jews, are less likely to tolerate the sort of occasional, petty, and niggling – but nonetheless unpleasant – incidents that they might have once laughed off or excused as examples of ignorance rather than hate. Younger Jews are also much more likely to be active on social media, and

Tolerance and acceptance felt by South African Jews



perhaps also much more assertive and confident about their Jewish identity."

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) reported at the end of January 2020 that the number of anti-Semitic incidents in South Africa had, in fact, dropped to a 15-year low in 2019.

Responding to the data, David Saks, the associate director of the SAJBD, says, "It's essential to distinguish between actions [negative things done to Jews], discourse [prejudiced things said about Jews], and sentiment [negative attitudes towards/beliefs about Jews]."

It's in the more easily measurable category of actions/incidents that South Africa has consistently recorded significantly lower rates of anti-Semitism than most other diaspora countries. Moreover, the nature of the incidents recorded overwhelmingly tends to be less grave than elsewhere. For example, the United Kingdom recorded 123 violent attacks on Jews in 2018 and 145 the previous year. South Africa recorded just one in each of

those years," says Saks.

"The JCSSA looks at the community's perceptions of whether anti-Israel sentiment and anti-Jewish sentiment has increased over the past five years. The SAJBD wouldn't dispute the fact that negative attitudes towards both may well have increased, or at least have been perceived to have increased during this period. However, it remains a demonstrable fact that up until now at least, negative sentiment isn't leading to direct action to any great extent.

"It's also worth pointing out that while still considered to be a cause for concern, anti-Semitism was listed by respondents as only ninth amongst the social and political issues said to be a problem in South Africa, well behind government corruption, crime, and unemployment. Anti-Israel sentiment is more of a problem, coming in at fifth, but that doesn't come as a surprise."

Two out of three respondents believe that anti-Semitism on the internet, in political life, and in the media are fairly or very big problems in South Africa today. Almost three quarters of respondents believed these three items have increased at least a little in the previous five years.

"Anti-Semitism on the internet is a global problem obviously," Saks says, "and may well be

on the rise. No academically rigorous studies have been conducted that show whether South Africa is any worse or better than other countries in this regard."

Regarding political anti-Semitism, he says, "There have been a number of instances in the past year in which African National Congress spokespeople in the Western Cape, the Economic Freedom Fighters, and certain trade unions have made overtly anti-Semitic comments. It's probably true therefore to say that this kind of anti-Semitic discourse is more common than in previous years, but it still surfaces only rarely, especially since the advent of the [Cyril] Ramaphosa presidency.

"With regard to anti-Semitism in the mainstream media, this is a misperception. In reality, it surfaces very rarely. My sense is that people are conflating anti-Israel bias with more overt forms of anti-Jewish prejudice."

Last year, the anti-Semitism watchdog Anti-Defamation League's (ADL's) Global 100 survey reported that 47% of South Africans harbour anti-Semitic attitudes. The SAJBD called this report "deeply misleading and unreliable".

Says Mendelsohn, "Contrary to the ADL's study, I don't think we live in a country where anti-Semitic views are pervasive. Most South Africans think very little about Jews on a regular basis."

Lag B'Omer finds the fire within

OPINION

RABBI DOVID HAZDAN



I was setting up the *tefillin* (phylacteries) booth on the Venice Boardwalk in Los Angeles in the late 1970s. I was a teenager, hoping to capitalise on the throngs of people expected that Sunday, and to afford as many Jewish men as possible the opportunity to put on *tefillin*.

I remember the scene: humans of every ilk – runners, skaters, people walking dogs, dogs walking people, skateboarders, tourists, and the much anticipated parade of real-life elephants. There were people on soap boxes, espousing political opinion.

I wore my black hat and jacket in the blazing sun, and somehow blended into the great diversity of people and persuasion. I was intrigued by the atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance that made me feel at home amidst the mayhem.

Reflecting afterwards, I realised that the tolerance shown on the Venice Boardwalk wasn't born out of love and brotherhood, but indifference. Everyone was too caught up in themselves to even notice the men saying the Shema in *tefillin*.

We are about to celebrate the powerful and mystical festival of Lag B'Omer on Monday and Tuesday, 11 and 12 May.

This festival commemorates events in the life of Rabbi Akiva and his students. The Talmud teaches us that these students didn't practice adequate mutual respect, and tragically lost their lives in a plague. In just more than a month, Rabbi Akiva lost 24 000 students. The plague came to an end on Lag B'Omer, a cause for gratitude and celebration.

Rabbi Akiva's great teaching was to love your neighbour as yourself. He saw this as the cardinal principle of the Torah. It's strange that his own students seem to have missed his key message. Why weren't they imbued with the mission statement of their teacher?

Actually, it was the very fact that they were so passionate and focused on the *mitzvah* (commandment) to love your fellow as yourself that led to their failure. Had they been indifferent towards each other, it wouldn't have been a problem. But, in fact, the care and love that they had for each other compelled them to direct each other with unrestrained zeal. They felt that it was dishonest to embrace a view that they regarded as a deficient perspective of their master's teachings.

"G-d is exacting to a hairsbreadth with

the righteous." Because of the calibre of the students of Rabbi Akiva, Hashem judged them by the highest standards, which resulted in the devastation of the plague.

What's the message that we can derive from the students of Rabbi Akiva and the story of Lag B'Omer?

On the one hand, we need to learn to care for one another intensely. Our tolerance should never be the product of detached indifference. We need to be deeply concerned to enlighten and teach meaning, truth, and purpose. We need to care to our very core about having a positive impact on our neighbours.

But at the same time, we can't let this diminish the respect and love we have for one another. Rather than standing in judgement, we need to accept our fellow human beings and embrace them with empathy and understanding.

For a variety of reasons, children would play with a bow and arrow on Lag B'Omer. The bow represents the rainbow, G-d's sign of his covenant that he will never destroy the world. Others attribute the custom to the time of the Romans, who had banned the study of Torah. At that time, teachers and students would disguise their intention to learn Torah by pretending that they were venturing into the forest to hunt with bows and arrows.

The message of the bow lies in the fact that it extends our reach way beyond the length and strength of our arm. The principle of the bow precedes rocket propulsion. It's predicated on the fact that the more that you draw the arrow towards yourself, the further it will reach.

Chassidus derives the lesson that the closer we draw the tension inwards, towards our own heart, the more powerfully we can affect the world beyond. Social influence begins by journeying into ourselves.

This year, we won't be at the community-wide *schmooza* (get together) celebration in the Great-Park forest. We will celebrate together on Zoom on Monday night. But let's not allow physical social distancing to diminish one iota of our passion, love, and concern for one another.

• Rabbi Dovid Hazdan is the rabbi at Great Park Synagogue and the dean of Torah Academy.

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The Power to Surprise

UK's new Labour leader 'failing' to crack down on anti-Semitism

CNAAN LIPSHIZ – JTA

The new Labour Party leader in the United Kingdom, Keir Starmer, still can't quite get over the Corbyn hump.

Shortly after his election to head the party a month ago, Starmer promised to implement a zero-tolerance policy on anti-Semitism. For British Jewry, it was a refreshing new start after the last leader, Jeremy Corbyn, left the stain of a years-long anti-Semitism scandal.

But Starmer's vow has quickly been put to the test, and after a controversial call involving two Labour legislators, leading British Jewish organisations now say he is failing it.

First, a few weeks ago, Starmer promoted three legislators who have strained relationships with the Jewish community to leadership positions in Labour. Some saw it as a warning sign, while other analysts said the move was needed to stabilise the party in a post-Corbyn landscape.

Then, on Wednesday, two of Labour's most prominent legislators – Diane Abbott and Bell Ribeiro-Addy, its previous shadow interior and immigration ministers respectively – addressed an online meeting that featured well-known activists who have been kicked out of the party over anti-Semitism.

The call, first reported by the *Jewish Chronicle*, was organised by the pro-Corbyn far-left fringes of Labour under the auspices of a newly formed group called Don't Leave, Organise (the group's name is a call to the far left). It included Jackie Walker, who was ousted from Labour in 2019 for numerous negative statements about Jews, including that they were "chief financiers of the sugar and slave trade".

According to Walker's website, her father, Jack Cohen, was a Russian Ashkenazi Jew. Last month, she wrote on Facebook that Starmer "only talks to Zionist Jews and the Tories at synagogue". Starmer's wife, attorney Victoria Alexander, comes from a Jewish family, and has family in Israel. Starmer told the *Jewish News* that he hoped to travel soon to Israel with their two children.

"I absolutely support the right of Israel to exist as a homeland," he told the newspaper. "I support Zionism without qualification."

Also on the call was Tony Greenstein, who is Jewish and was expelled in 2016 over anti-Semitism allegations. He has called Israel "Hitler's bastard offspring", and helped mainstream the anti-Semitic pejorative "Zio".

During the call, participants defended Ken Livingstone, a former London mayor who in 2016 said Hitler "was supporting Zionism before he went mad and ended up killing six million Jews".

Livingstone left Labour in 2018 amid pressure to expel him. Ribeiro-Addy and Abbott didn't address anti-Semitism during the



Labour Party leader Keir Starmer

Photo: Leon Neal/Getty Images

call, according to the Campaign Against Antisemitism, a Jewish watchdog that has been at the forefront of the community's fight with Corbyn.

In his only response to the call, Starmer told the *Bury Times* that he was "looking" into it.

"What I've done since I've been leader of the Labour Party is to take the first opportunity to apologise for the way we've dealt with anti-Semitism in the party, to build links with the Jewish community, to begin to get to grips with the cases," he said. "Obviously we're looking at the circumstances of the meeting last night, but the most important thing is to build that relationship. And I know that's going to be a difficult thing to do."

An official Labour Party statement had stronger words.

"The previous comments made by some of the individuals on this call are completely unacceptable," it said. "These are not people who support the values of the Labour Party. This is being made clear to the Labour MPs who attended the call in the strongest possible terms, and they are being reminded of their responsibilities and obligations."

This didn't satisfy the Campaign Against Antisemitism.

In its strongest rebuke of Starmer so far, the watchdog group branded Starmer's handling of the scandal "a failure to discipline" the legislators, proceeding to say it "condemned Sir Keir Starmer for failing to take action".

Instead of "tearing anti-Semitism out by its roots, Sir Keir has welched", Gideon Falter, its chief executive, said in a statement. "Through his inaction, he is telling Britain's Jews loudly and clearly that his apologies are meaningless, his promises will be broken, and MPs who consort with even the most notorious expelled activists still have a place on the Labour benches."

The president of the centrist Board of Deputies of British Jews had similar feelings.

"We would urge Labour to take swift and decisive action to show that this is a new era rather than a false dawn," Marie van der Zyl wrote on Thursday. She called the legislators' attendance at the meeting "completely unacceptable" even for ordinary members of Labour, much less legislators.

Labour Against Antisemitism, a group critical of Corbyn and his legacy, also attacked Starmer.

"His decision to remind the two

MPs of their responsibilities is an inadequate measure that fails to meet the standards he agreed to just a few weeks ago," the group wrote. By not disciplining the two legislators, Starmer "demonstrated a disappointing level of moral and political cowardice".

Starmer has good reasons to tread lightly. His first weeks as Labour leader have been a walk on a precarious tightrope.

On the coronavirus crisis, he has attempted to criticise the ruling Conservative Party while demonstrating solidarity with the government.

On the anti-Semitism front, he has had to balance flushing out the controversy, and appealing to the many Corbyn loyalist holdovers.

"[If] Corbyn loyalists are made to understand they have no place in Labour under Starmer, that's simply making sure they'll misbehave," one Labour activist told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency earlier this month.

In spite of the hiccups, Starmer has taken several strong steps to distance himself from the Corbyn era, and British Jews have noticed.

Four days into his tenure, Van der Zyl said in a statement that he had achieved "more than his predecessor in four years in addressing anti-Semitism within the Labour Party".

Within days of winning the internal elections, Starmer had set up meetings with leaders of major Jewish groups in a stated effort to mend relations that had effectively been frozen under Corbyn.

Starmer has also removed several Corbyn nominees from Labour's governing body, the National Executive Committee, and demoted Richard Burgon, a Corbyn loyalist who in 2014 said that "Zionism is the enemy of peace". Burgon was Corbyn's shadow justice secretary, the party's point man for the justice portfolio.

"I know that the failure of the Labour Party to deal with anti-Semitism has caused great grief in Jewish communities," Starmer said in a video greeting for Passover on 8 April, in which he apologised for the failing.

"If you are anti-Semitic, you cannot and should not be in the Labour Party. No ifs, no buts."

High-tech masks for Hatzolah



Michael Sieff (pictured left), the new national executive director at the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) donated cutting-edge Israeli medical-grade masks from Israel's Sonovia Tech to Hatzolah on Tuesday. The SAZF sourced medical-grade masks made from a special new anti-pathogen fabric to help stop the spread of the coronavirus. Hatzolah's Operations Director Bernard Segal (right) said the masks would enable Hatzolah to continue doing essential services.

Torah Thought

In dark times, look on the bright side

This coming Tuesday, we will celebrate Lag B'Omer. It's a day that marks the passing of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, a great Torah scholar and Kabbalist who lived in the second century. It also marks the end of the plague which killed many of Rabbi Akiva's students.

The day is usually marked by joyous communal gatherings and events. I was talking to a congregant who was despondent about the current state of affairs, and the reality of a virtual Lag B'Omer.

It reminded me of a story told of two Chasidim, one named Chaim and the other Dovid, who lived in Odessa and travelled to see Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson, the sixth rebbe of Lubavitch. Chaim entered, and the Rebbe asked him, "How are things in Odessa?"

Still seated in the waiting area, Dovid could hear their conversation.

"Thank G-d, Jewish life is growing in the city. Of course, there are challenges, but on balance, things are good," Chaim replied.

Dovid was dismayed at this sugar-coated version of reality in Odessa. Why had he failed to mention all the problems the Jewish community was facing?

He heard the rebbe give Chaim two roubles in gratitude for supporting his work and in appreciation of the good report.

When Dovid entered, the rebbe, too, asked him, "How are things in Odessa?" Determined to tell the truth and set the record straight, he described the bleak state of Odessa Jewry, particularly the young people who had become corrupted by the worst that big city life had to offer.

The rebbe thanked Dovid for his report. But he didn't offer two roubles or even one. Shocked, Dovid exclaimed, "The rebbe asked, 'How are things in Odessa?'"

Rabbi Pini Pink, Chabad Greenstone



I told the truth. I'm rebuffed, while another is rewarded?"

"Do you think I don't know how things are in Odessa?" the rebbe responded. "That's not why I asked. The purpose of my question was to see in which Odessa you live."

In these times, when we face unprecedented challenges and so much is unknown, the question we need to ask ourselves is which world we live in. Is it the world of doom, gloom and despair, or is it the world of hope and positivity?

Let's internalise the message of Lag B'Omer, which is unity and joy. Let's make sure that we are in the right headspace, and try to share this with all those around us. A simple phone call to check in on someone can make their day. Let's show G-d that even during these difficult and trying times, the Jewish people are unified and strong.

Pandemic proves a maze for labour law

OPINION

GAIL BLACHER



Adapting labour law to lockdown is no less daunting than finding one's way up to the summit of Mount Everest. We are in uncharted territory, attempting to navigate our way through a myriad of laws and statutes that were never intended for that purpose.

As a labour-law advocate, how do you respond when an employee calls to say, "My company says that we won't be receiving our salaries for the lockdown period"? Or even more frightening, "We're required to work from home over the lockdown period, but won't be paid, and have been told to be grateful that [the company] isn't retrenching."

One has to have an understanding of the impact of the situation on the employer, who is ill-equipped to address this scenario, as well as the frightening predicament of the employee.

There are a number of options and opportunities in these and other scenarios.

The issue of paying employees their salary during lockdown has both legal and moral aspects. In terms of the legal principles, the government has declared a national lockdown due to an unexpected and unforeseeable occurrence, thus certain employees can't tender their services. So, in terms of the legal principle of "supervening the impossibility of performance", the employer isn't bound to pay the employee if they aren't working at all.

It's a different scenario if the employee is able to continue on a "work-from-home" basis, as then the employee is still able to perform.

The employer can, however, look at options other than not paying the employee at all – especially in terms of the moral obligation to alleviate the financial hardship of the employee – such as a reduction in salary.

I have, however, had a number of people phone me, bemoaning, "What do I say when my staff refuse to accept a 30% pay cut for the next few months?"

The employer could, after an honest and open discussion with the employee about the financial scenario, suggest a reduction in salary for a time period, and secure agreement on this or the possibility of using this layoff as paid annual statutory leave.

It's always best to negotiate these changes with your employees, if at all possible, to avoid any later dispute relating to unilateral changes to the terms and conditions of the employment contract.

If the employer has had to close all or part of the operation for a three-month period or less, he or she has an obligation to apply for Temporary Employers Relief Scheme (TERS) benefits on behalf of employees. This will certainly assist with the pressure on employers to pay their staff.

This obligation falls on the employer in order to discourage high numbers of people (employees) going in person to apply at the department of labour. The application should be made before the end of the lockdown period.

The question that's no doubt in many people's minds is whether the TERS COVID-19 claim is the same

as claiming from the Unemployment Insurance Fund (UIF).

The TERS claim is used when the employer has implemented

businesses may find that they require a longer-term solution, and are either closing their doors or can't afford as many employees, or are using



temporary layoffs due to the lockdown, not paid salaries, partial payment, or forced annual leave. UIF benefits occur in circumstances of retrenchment, and where the employer has closed their operations permanently, resulting in loss of employment.

As a result of the global pandemic,

technology instead of employees. I have frequently encountered employers who simply advise their employees that "you no longer have a job".

Retrenchment is in effect a no-fault dismissal, but employers are required to follow a highly prescriptive procedure as set out in our Labour

Relations Act. Failure to comply with this procedure will, without doubt, lead to the CCMA (the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration) or Labour Courts.

Employers are required to follow a consultative approach with their employees, and consider all alternatives before finalising retrenchment.

In cases of retrenchment as a result of operational disruptions caused by the virus, our courts will want to see what employers did at the time of the spread of the virus to mitigate against the risk of retrenchment.

Retrenchment can also be an expensive option in certain instances, with the employee being entitled to a severance package of one week in every year of employment.

Yet another issue that has been raised during lockdown concerns the "work-from-home" scenario, with employers complaining that employees "do nothing while they are on lockdown, they don't

communicate with the office, and don't respond to calls or messages".

The guidelines on this are that the employer should ensure that the employee has all the tools required to work from home, and should advise the employee that the same work ethic and disciplinary codes, procedures, and policies will apply as if the employee is in the workplace.

While this may answer some of your immediate questions, it must be understood that the law and issues relating to COVID-19 are in a state of flux and new issues are developing. After the virus, there will be legal consequences resulting from the effect of the COVID-19 for years to come.

• Gail Blacher is an advocate of the high court of South Africa specialising in labour law, and runs a company called RIGHTSATWORK advising on employment-related issues.

Natan Sharansky is using his 'Jewish Nobel' winnings to help vulnerable people affected by COVID-19

MARCY OSTER – JTA

When Natan Sharansky learned in December that he would become the eighth Genesis Prize honoree, he decided he would use his \$1 million (R18.7 million) prize money to promote issues to which he has devoted his life: human rights and Zionism.

That was before the coronavirus crisis.

Now, Sharansky, the former Soviet dissident who has become a prominent leader in Israel, and the Genesis Prize Foundation are announcing that his winnings will instead go to organisations fighting the pandemic and to support the individuals most affected by it in Israel, the United States, and seven other countries. They also announced a new competition to reward Israeli innovations working to stop the pandemic.

The coronavirus is a "new challenge, a new enemy", Sharansky told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). His other interests, he said, "can wait a little bit".

In Israel, the grants will fund nine organisations working to help the most vulnerable populations affected by the pandemic and advance medical and scientific innovation. Grants will also help isolated and elderly Jews in Rome, Madrid, Paris, Moscow, the United Kingdom, Ukraine, and Belarus. And they will fund research at two universities in New York, and support grants made by a Jewish loan society.

Sharansky, 72, spent nine years in a Soviet prison, half them in solitary confinement, and he kept himself sane by playing chess in his mind. He has been helping Jews around the world during the pandemic by speaking to Jewish schools, groups, and communities about living in isolation.

"Freedom is inside of yourself," Sharansky told JTA. "If you can fight for the things you really believe, then you are free."

Last month, Sharansky made a three-minute video offering five tips on living in isolation that has been seen by tens of thousands of people. Prior to talking to JTA on Sunday, he spoke to the Bulgarian Jewish community on a Zoom call. He

admitted that two months ago, he didn't know what Zoom was. Now, he considers himself an expert.

Sharansky, who serves as chairperson of the Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy, acknowledged the rise in anti-Semitism brought about by the pandemic. Prior to that, he spent nine years as chairperson of the executive of the Jewish Agency for Israel. He also served in four Israeli governments, holding ministerial positions as head of his Yisrael B'Aliyah party, formed to help integrate new immigrants into Israeli society.

The Genesis Prize, known as the "Jewish Nobel", was started in 2013, and is financed through a permanent \$100 million (R1.87 billion) endowment. The annual award honours "extraordinary individuals for their outstanding professional achievement, contribution to humanity, and commitment to Jewish values." Previous winners of the prize include New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft, former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and musician Itzhak Perlman. US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg received a lifetime achievement award from Genesis in 2018.

The Israeli organisations receiving Sharansky's Genesis grants offer a variety of services to a wide range of populations. They are:

- 1221 Assistance for All – an emergency response service in Jerusalem for Jews and non-Jews during the pandemic;
- The Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel, after a 40% increase in domestic-violence calls;
- Aleh Negev, which supports children with severe disabilities whose schooling has been disrupted;

- Terem Public Clinic, which provides medical services to the residents of south Tel Aviv, including many asylum seekers and those in the country illegally who don't have access to health care;

- Enosh Israeli Mental Health Organisation, which is responding to an increasing number of people requiring mental health services;
- Migdal Ohr, which supports high-risk Israeli prisoners sent home during the pandemic;
- Two projects in partnership with the Jewish Agency for Israel: volunteer service at Machon Shlichim working with the elderly and at-risk youth, and funding interest-free loans for Israeli nongovernmental organisations through Ogen; and
- The Weizmann Institute, which will use the grant to fund research to develop a COVID-19 vaccine.

Grants will also help send volunteers to assist the isolated and elderly members of the Jewish communities affected by COVID-19 in Rome, Madrid, Paris, and Moscow through Moishe House, an international organisation working with young adults; and to assist 130 Hillel student volunteers working with Jewish elderly and homebound in six cities in Ukraine and Belarus. A grant to Jewish Care in the United Kingdom will provide protective equipment to staff working with isolated and impoverished elderly people who are especially vulnerable to the virus.

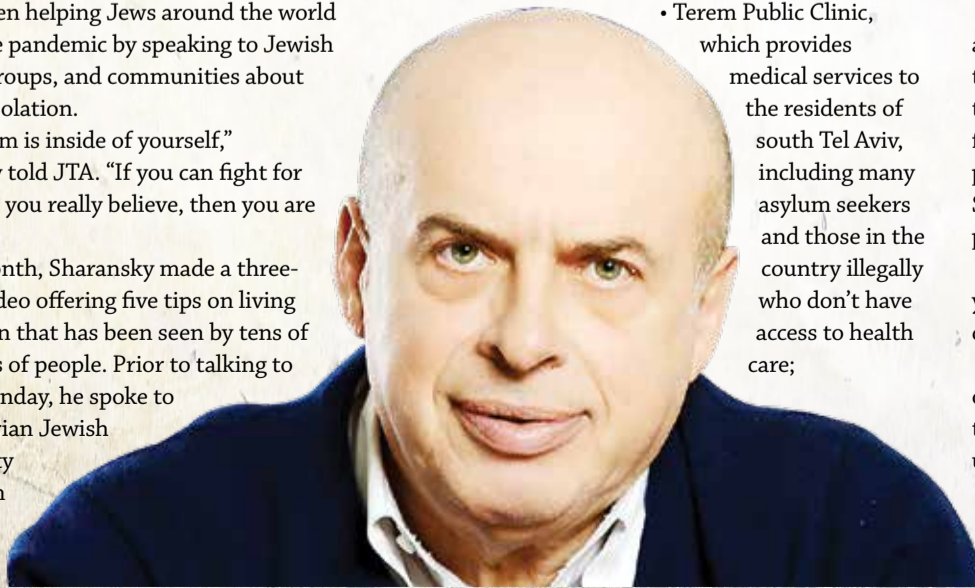
Grants in the US will fund research at the Columbia University Irving Medical Center to mitigate medical complications of coronavirus; a competition for students at New York University Tandon School of Engineering to solve physical challenges presented by COVID-19; and support for Hebrew Free Loan, a non-profit organisation that is distributing no-interest loans to people in New York who require emergency assistance because of the economic disruption caused by the pandemic.

The Genesis Prize Foundation also announced a special competition in honour of Sharansky that will recognise Israeli companies working to combat COVID-19 and prepare the world for future pandemics. Start-Up Nation Central, a non-profit organisation founded by philanthropist Paul Singer, will run the competition with Genesis to promote the Israeli innovations globally.

Sharansky said he hoped the pandemic would yield positive effects for the world, even as it causes death and devastation.

"I hope there will be much more unity in general of people all around the world," he said, and that the moment would hopefully increase "our understanding that there are things we can fight and defeat together".

Natan Sharansky is the eighth Genesis Prize laureate



Need for expertise a contagious disease

One of the challenges created by the lockdown is time management. For those who are able to work remotely, the added pressure of virtual meetings, assisting children with schooling, and Netflix, all contribute to this problem.

There is, however, an additional factor that can't be ignored: our COVID-19 education. In years gone by, we were hardly expected to have a working knowledge of cardiology.

We weren't expected to be able to debate treatment protocols for lymphomas, and we wouldn't be expected to be able to debate the pharmacological advantages of one drug regime over another. We wouldn't receive alerts about research into vaccines and treatment, and would never be so bold as to post our medical opinion on Facebook unless we were actually qualified to do so.

On Saturday night, I received a link to an interview with some professor from Stellenbosch University. Although it hit my WhatsApp repeatedly, it was my wife who insisted that I watch it. Because she wouldn't take no for an answer, I attempted to comply.

I struggled to get past the first minute as the interviewer was appalling, which is what I told my wife when I finally gave up. "It's important," she insisted, "We need to be knowledgeable about this." Which sounded sensible, until I considered what she was saying.

It's clear from our behaviour and the amount of time that we engage in learning about COVID-19 that we do feel the need to educate ourselves. The question is why.

To be clear, I'm not referring to obtaining knowledge about the behaviour of the disease, as that obviously informs our own behaviour, and will potentially protect us and our families

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



against the disease. Rather, I'm referring to the details of the medical aspects of COVID-19 that would be unlikely to interest us if it were any other illness.

Our need could arise from a number of factors. It might simply be borne out of anxiety. Although knowledge protects us, there is the sense that the more we understand, the less scary it is. The more we read, the more we create the illusion that we are in control. That calms us and reassures us.

It might arise from our lack of confidence in the medical fraternity. Through no fault of their own, those on the frontline have been forced to learn through hands-on experience, and aren't equipped with years of data, studies, and information about the behaviour of the virus.

As lay people, however, it's easy to confuse lack of training about the specifics of this illness with lack of training in other areas that become relevant to the treatment of COVID-19. What follows is that we somehow feel that we need to "step up" our knowledge to assist in this area.

In no way am I advocating that we don't educate ourselves. On the contrary, my weekly Sunday podcast with Dr Anton Meyberg attracts many thousands of viewers each week, and is designed to provide the latest information.

What I do suggest is that we become more discerning about our sources of the information, and that we don't stress if we aren't qualified as immunologists when this is all over.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Anonymous angels build caring culture

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) continues to engage in efforts to alleviate the impact, economic and otherwise, of COVID-19 on the Jewish community and population in general. Now that we have begun a phased lifting of the lockdown, we have posted regular guidance on critical issues relating to the financial relief available, and as always, I urge everyone who has been affected to make full use of this resource.

All South Africans have been hard hit by the lockdown, but some have been more badly affected than others. I was recently contacted by a community member who became aware via a domestic employee of the dire situation of those unable to earn during the lockdown period, and who wanted to help.

I referred this individual (who asked to remain anonymous) to the Angel Network, a social-outreach initiative run by a dedicated group of Jewish women that has been doing extraordinary work over the past few months. As a result of a substantial donation from the individual concerned, the organisation, with logistical assistance from Moishe's kosher butchery in Fairmount, Johannesburg, has delivered more than 900 food parcels to needy families in Alexandra, with each parcel providing enough for a family of four to live on for two weeks.

The Alexandra project is one of many critical relief efforts that Jewish community members have been involved in since the lockdown was imposed. It's further representative of countless similar initiatives,



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



great and small, that South Africans across the board have launched in response to the crisis. Among those heading up significant projects are members of the SAJBD Gauteng Council, and some of its work can be read about on its Facebook page.

Much of what is being done is taking place under the Community Action Network (CAN) initiative. This is based on a decentralised, bottom-up approach, in which ad-hoc volunteer associations focusing on emergency poverty relief are put together within existing community structures or networks. Initially implemented in the Western Cape, it has been brought to Gauteng with great success by the Angel Network and Gauteng Together.

The real point of it all, though, is what's being done, not who is doing it. At this time of unprecedented stress and hardship, we have seen people of all backgrounds throughout the country quietly and almost always anonymously getting on with the job of helping others in need.

If COVID-19 and its inevitably difficult aftermath motivates us to build a culture of doing good deeds and helping those in need, and if South African communities emerge more united as a result, then lasting good will have come out of it.

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

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

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