

# South African Jewish Report

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■ Volume 24 – Number 17 ■ 22 May 2020 ■ 28 Iyar 5780

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## SA woman's anti-Semitic outburst shocks SA Jewry

TALI FEINBERG

On 16 May, a 28-year-old South African athlete and bodybuilder, Simone Abigail Kriel posted a deluge of anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish conspiracy theories on social-media platform Instagram.

South Africa's foremost anti-Semitism expert, Professor Milton Shain, said Kriel's outburst was "an astonishing anti-Jewish tirade, the likes of which we hardly hear today".

Kriel lives in Pretoria and is relatively well-known in fitness circles. She identifies as Christian. She has about 3 000 followers on Instagram, and was brand ambassador for fitness brand PSN Lifestyle. The company ended the deal after complaints from the public about her anti-Semitic posts.

In a long and often nonsensical tirade, Kriel wrote among other points, "The f\*cking Jews are greedy as f\*ck, and they will wage war against countries and races based on lies and deception to get what they want. It was the Jews that bombed, raped, sodomised, and burned all people in Germany alive. Hitler is innocent. Our history has been twisted to favour the Jews without question."

"There is a special place in hell for them. After what I've just watched, the religion is just as corrupt as the souls they embody. Here is

the link on how Europe was raped by the Jews." She shares a link to an 11-hour "documentary" titled *EUROPA: The Last Battle*, one of a plethora of conspiracy theory films on the web.

She talks at length about "Jewish Bolshevism" and "the Rothschilds", Jews striving for a "new world order", and Jews controlling the media.

David Saks, the associate director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), says, "This is one of the more blatant, in-your-face instances of anti-Jewish hate speech that we have seen in this country for some time. It depicts Jews as an intrinsically and irredeemably corrupt, malevolent, and destructive element in human affairs throughout history. Propagating such sentiments in a public forum constitutes, in our view, a clear violation of the Jewish community's right to dignity and equality, and the board is dealing with it on that basis."

The SAJBD gave Kriel until close of business on Tuesday, 19 May, to remove the offending material and post an unequivocal apology to the Jewish community, failing which, legal and/or other appropriate action would be taken against her. On Wednesday, 20 May, Saks said, "Unfortunately, Ms Kriel has failed to apologise in the set time. We will be assessing the various legal options available to us to decide on the best way to

proceed."

Kriel told the *SA Jewish Report*, "I didn't go look for them [these films], they just happened to pop up on Facebook. Out of curiosity, I had a look." She elaborated that she had been in a relationship with a Jewish man for three years, and it recently ended. "The family denied their blessing for us to be together based on my ethnic background ... because I wasn't of pure Jewish blood. Nonetheless, for three years, I've participated in most Jewish holidays, weddings, and synagogue proceedings, regardless of family issues."

"Keeping in mind that I know the faith well and considered

conversion at some stage, I came across the most disturbing information that absolutely infuriated me," she said. She believes "the Holocaust was a set-up, executed by Hitler's men, at the cost of millions of Jewish lives. I think most Jews know what happened 90 years ago, and who was actually responsible for World War II and the Holocaust. And I know they don't want us to talk about it."

Shain, who is emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town, said, "Kriel denies the Holocaust, and consciously turns the victims of Hitler into the perpetrators. Hitler is, indeed,

vindicated." He believes that she has been "digging deeply into the dark web and beyond". Indeed, her Facebook page was awash with conspiracy theories about COVID-19 as well as other anti-Semitic comments. Her page has since been removed from Facebook.

Shain said Kriel "picks up on twin conspiratorial canards: Jews as 'Bolsheviks', responsible for great carnage; and Jews as 'rapacious capitalists'. Rothschild is the 'villain'." These ideas have a long history in South Africa. "Hoggenheimer, a vulgar Semitic financier, dominated South African iconography for the first

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## Students reaching out with kindness



The South African Union of Jewish Students this week delivered 165 packs of food and sanitary products to students at the University of the Witwatersrand who have stayed on campus for various reasons during lockdown.

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17:31	18:25	Cape Town
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17:02	17:56	Port Elizabeth
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# Homemade Torah

OPINION

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



This Shavuot, instead of being in shul with our communities, learning from our rabbis, we’re at home, learning with our families.

It’s probably not what we would have chosen. But there’s an opportunity here. An opportunity to fulfil, perhaps like no generation before us, the great directive in Pirkei Avot: “Let your home be a meeting place for the sages.”

The literal interpretation is that our home should be a place where great Torah sages gather to teach Torah and discuss the affairs of the day so that we may “drink thirstily from the words” of those who embody the values they learn and teach, absorbing their ideals, ethics, and character.

However, Rav Chaim Volozhiner, in his commentary on Pirkei Avot, has a different interpretation. He says that this *mishna* isn’t just referring to sages of flesh and blood, but also to the Torah books and commentaries authored by the sages.

He explains that when we learn Torah at home, we invite the sages throughout the thousands of years of Jewish history into our home. Delve into a page of Mishna, and Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Meir walk through the door. Open up a Rashi, and suddenly there’s the great French medieval commentator on the couch beside us taking us through the simple meaning of the verse. Read in the Chumash about Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and they become personalities tangibly involved in our lives.

This is the thinking behind our first ever South African Tikkun Leil companion: to make our home a meeting place for the sages in precisely this way.

After the warm and enthusiastic feedback we received from the Hagaddah companion, which brought inspiration to our seders at a challenging time and exemplified the unity and togetherness of our community, I invited our community’s amazing rabbis and rebbetzins to write a counterpart for Shavuot.

The result is a book, collectively authored, filled with inspirational Torah ideas to learn and share on the night to uplift and enrich our experience of the *chag*.

We can’t be in shul, we can’t attend their shiurim, but with this compendium of beautiful Torah insights, we’re bringing our rabbis and rebbetzins into our homes.

This year’s Tikkun Leil offers an opportunity to transform our home into a house of learning – a bona fide *beit midrash* (Jewish study hall) bustling with energy, inspiration, and active engagement.



A “meeting place” is typically a site of robust discussion and debate, of lively conversation. When we learn Torah, we aren’t passively receiving a one-way monologue, but are instead active participants in a dynamic exchange. When the whole family gets involved, our children become active partners in our awesome divine legacy. Learning its teachings can be transformational in a way that permeates our homes, and inspires and guides us to become better people.

That’s why this Tikkun Leil book isn’t just a learning companion. It’s a symbol, a clarion call, that our Torah learning shouldn’t be confined to our shuls and *batei midrash*, but be brought into our homes to transform our families. It is a potent reminder that the home, itself, can be the most powerful *beit midrash* of all.

I wish you all a Chag Sameach. May our homes be filled with the light and warmth of Torah. And may G-d bring health and healing to our community, our country, and our world.

• The Tikkun Leil book can be downloaded and printed from [chiefrabbi.co.za](http://chiefrabbi.co.za)

## Torah Thought

Rabbi Sam Thurgood,  
Beit Midrash Morasha



### Torah - the true north of our moral compass

One of my teachers, Rabbi David Aaron, tells the story of a student whose father had recently passed away. “My father,” the young man said, “was an atheist, and a fantastic human being. It’s true that he didn’t have the Torah in his life, but frankly I don’t think he could have been more moral even if he had the Torah. So why do we need the Torah?”

It’s a pertinent question as we approach Shavuot, and likely one that you have asked before. We have all had the joy of meeting decent, admirable – even awe-inspiring – people whose faith is significantly different to our own, or (apparently) non-existent. And we’ve all had the misfortune of knowing someone whom we saw as representative of our faith betray the moral principles that we hold dear. So what’s the moral role that Torah is supposed to play in our lives?

Daniel Kahneman writes in *Thinking Fast and Slow* that human beings are naturally good grammarians (a child of four effortlessly conforms to the rules of grammar as she speaks), but poor

statisticians, regularly misjudging the size of a data set we would need to draw conclusions.

Rabbi Dr Nahum Rabinovitch answers our question with a similar approach. First, a word about this Torah giant, who passed away only this month. Rabinovitch was one of the most brilliant and creative minds of our generation; the world’s greatest expert on the works of the Rambam (Maimonides), a leading halachic authority, a master educator (you are undoubtedly familiar with his student, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks), and a PhD in mathematics.

Rabinovitch points out that people naturally have a moral compass that gives them a strong sense of values, but we are quite poor at consistently putting those values into practice in a way that has clear boundaries. For example, we all feel a moral responsibility to ease another’s suffering, but how far should we go in this regard? We want to honour and help others, but that raw desire doesn’t guide us in how to do so whilst also

being responsible to ourselves. The Torah systemises these moral drives, giving us parameters as to when, to whom, and how far our responsibility extends. My analogy is that the human moral drive is the engine, the Torah is the steering wheel.

The corollary of this approach is that Torah guidance without moral drive is also insufficient. All of the moral parameters and guidance in the world won’t help one who is not, himself, committed to the endeavour of being a good and moral person.

We have all been blessed by Hashem with a sense of right and wrong, a need to help others and to leave the world better than we found it, but without divine guidance, those very impulses can become terribly destructive instead, as history bears witness. Through Hashem’s gift of the Torah, may we merit to harness and direct our altruism to achieve incredible things.

Chag Sameach!

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# Call for alumni to block BDS ‘hostile takeover’ bid at UCT

NICOLA MILTZ

There has been an urgent call for University of Cape Town (UCT) alumni to support a campaign to vote out delegates aligned with the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement in this week’s convocation elections.

A secret group, calling itself the Concerned Citizens for Academic Freedom at UCT, has petitioned alumni – at the eleventh hour – to vote out BDS-friendly candidates in today’s (Thursday’s) convocation elections. The group, however, has the full support of the South African Zionist Federation and South African Friends of Israel. By Wednesday afternoon, 65 000 alumni had signed the petition.

The group believes that these BDS-friendly candidates plan to impose a UCT boycott against Israel, something that has been tried a number of times and failed. In fact, there has been a long-running effort by anti-Israel pressure groups for UCT to impose the boycott.

In March last year, the UCT senate passed a resolution to boycott Israeli universities. The UCT council

determined that a more consultative process along with an assessment of the impact of the resolution on the institution’s sustainability was needed, and referred the matter back to the senate. The senate reconsidered, then rejected it, and effectively rescinded the resolution.

However, there is now fear among Jewish and other alumni that the Israel boycott bid might come back if certain delegates get selected to the council, the university’s highest decision-making body. “We urgently



The University of Cape Town

need your UCT vote to keep the newly elected council balanced and fair,” read the change.org petition.

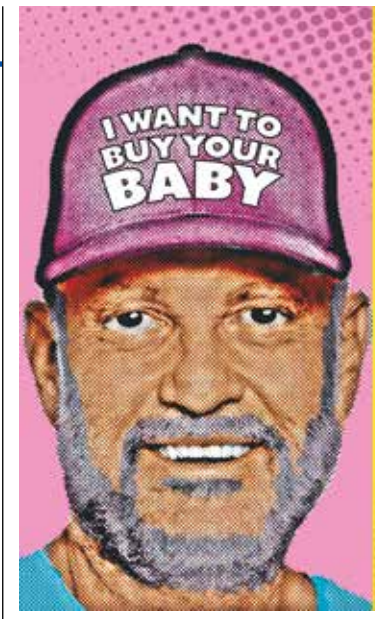
“BDS has put together a slate of candidates to run with the aim of overturning the work that has been achieved. This is a hostile takeover of UCT, and we need your help to stop it.”

This week’s election is to select the four convocation seats that will go forward to join the new 30-member council that governs the university. The convocation is the only place alumni can make a difference. Eight delegates were selected for the four available convocation seats on the council, and an electronic ballot is being held. The election closes today at 16:00.

“The council is composed of people elected by students on the Student Representative Council, people elected by the staff of the university, people appointed by various levels of government, (the minister of higher education, the mayor of Cape Town, the premier of the Western Cape), and other people who are part of council ex officio,” says Jordan Seligmann, the former chairperson of the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS) in the Western Cape.

“[Members of the public] can’t control the election of most of these seats as this is done by government officials or stakeholders closer to the university, but as alumni of the university, we are part of the convocation who elect the four people to sit on the council.”

The council, which will serve for a term of four years from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2024, has a wide range of



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powers over university policy. “Once council has decided on something, short of changing delegates’ minds, the only [route of ] appeal is a court of law,” Seligmann says.

Progress SA, a student organisation which says it’s fighting for a free future, posted on Twitter, “We have reason to believe that pro-Israel boycott candidates are trying to get elected to the UCT council in an attempt to drive an anti-academic-freedom agenda. The boycott lobby will try again to force through a motion to enforce a boycott instead of leaving the decision about who to associate with up to individual academics.”

According to insiders, among the list of candidates, at least two are BDS-aligned. One of them, Dr Shuaib Manjra, is described as a “kingpin” in the attempt to get UCT to boycott Israeli institutions.

Manjra, a sports and occupational medicine physician and consultant, has served on the executive committee of Open Shuhada Street, an anti-Israel, BDS-aligned, pro-Palestine advocacy group. He posts prolifically on anti-Zionist and pro-Palestinian affairs on social media, and advises UCT’s Palestine Solidarity Forum.

According to Sara Gon of the Institute of Race Relations, Manjra has sat on the council for years. “He was the faculty advisor for the Palestine Students Council which pushed for the previous boycott call at UCT in 2019. He is a dedicated anti-Israel spokesperson, and was a prime mover in recent years to get UCT to boycott Israeli academia.”

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, told the SA Jewish Report, “BDS is attempting a renewed assault on academic

Continued on page 6>>

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# Cost of continued lockdown ‘far too high’

TALI FEINBERG

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein has called for the lockdown to ease based on the fact that the virus will spread no matter when it ends, but the economic impact will only worsen the longer it goes on. He made this point in an online panel discussion with Judge Dennis Davis and Mike Abel (co-founder and chief executive of M&C Saatchi Abel).

“We cannot put a price tag on the value of even one human life. However, saying that the lockdown is about ‘lives versus livelihoods’ is a false framing of the moral question our government is facing,” said Goldstein as the three discussed the legality, morality, and logic of the lockdown in the webinar hosted by Marais Road Shul in Cape Town.

“The lockdown was put in place to slow the rate of infection, not to eradicate the virus,” argued the chief rabbi. “Only a vaccine can do that.” At the outset of the crisis, he said that President Cyril Ramaphosa’s decisive action took much courage and prioritised the sanctity of human life.

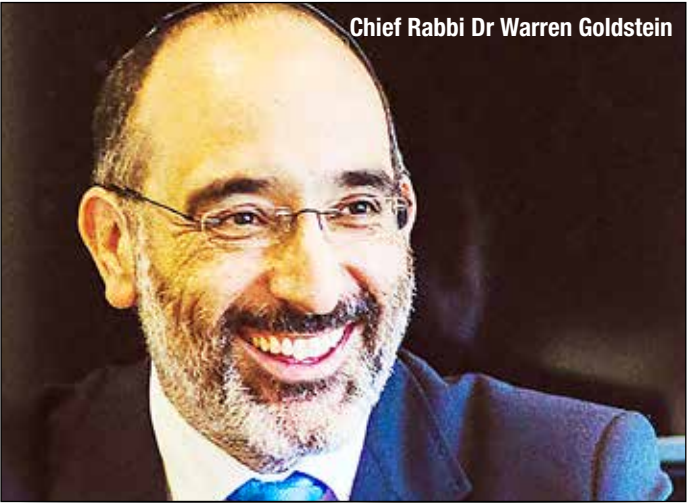
When meeting the president at the time, the chief rabbi conveyed the Jewish community’s respect for the lockdown, knowing it’s a *mitzvah* to defend human life. Indeed, “the commandment of *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life) sets aside almost all our other commandments”, he told the audience.

While lives have been saved, the chief rabbi said that extending the lockdown wouldn’t slow the inevitable spread of the virus. “No one ever claimed that the lockdown was to eradicate the virus. It has always been about slowing the rate of infection so that our hospitals wouldn’t become overwhelmed. This in turn would save lives. Seven weeks later, surely our infrastructure is prepared?”

He said that when the lockdown came to an end, the virus would start to spread again. “If the economy is opened up sooner, it doesn’t mean more or less lives will be lost. But what is certain is that without

an easing of restrictions, more jobs will be lost, more poverty will be inflicted, and there will be more human suffering. I don’t think we can overstate the level of economic devastation ravaging the country.”

In the previous week, he had spoken to three separate business owners of medium to large companies that have had to lay off between 400 to 600 workers. “At the end of



Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein

this month, how will those workers and their families eat?” Goldstein asked. Furthermore, children are suffering as they don’t get their one nutritious meal of the day at school. “On so many different levels, and for every job lost, another family is suffering. Every single day, businesses are closing.”

He suggested that the country proceed with great caution, which is the responsibility of every citizen, and allow the economy to open, “so this country can survive”.



Mike Abel

Davis said, “Any government would struggle with these decisions. The difficulty South Africa has is that we can’t extrapolate

entirely from developed countries. We have a different social framework, and when you have a developing society, the lockdown becomes problematic.”

He said that while our lockdown was initially justified, once the virus reached the townships, it was never going to be suppressed even with a lockdown in place. Therefore, it’s “not a viable strategy” for South Africa to continue under lockdown.

“Now that it’s clear that the lockdown isn’t going to suppress the growth of the virus, we need to think differently,” Davis said. Looking to the *parsha* (Torah reading) of the week, which explores inequality and using every seventh year to correct this, he suggested that this was a chance to “imaginatively re-develop our economy, bringing social justice to millions”.

Davis believes that the great tragedy is that South Africa went into the lockdown in an already weak position. Therefore, he thinks we shouldn’t just be debating the lockdown, but asking ourselves what we want our economy and society to look like afterwards. “It must be about an expanding, rather than contracting economy, and reconstructing society,” he said.

Davis said we shouldn’t see the situation as a dichotomy. Even after lockdown, there must be testing, tracing, and sensible measures. “It’s an acute balancing act.”

Addressing some of the questionable regulations like the ban on alcohol and cigarettes and instructions about what clothing can be sold, he said some regulations were “devoid of justification” and weren’t part of the government’s

mandate to prevent or limit disaster under the Disaster Management Act.

“They have suppressed the economy and jobs more than they should have, and there has been far too much control and command,” Davis said. “These highly questionable regulations have depressed confidence, and could erode the basis of a constitutional democracy.”

Abel argued that as a Jewish community, we

have as much right as other citizens to raise our voices and debate these issues. Having previously expressed concern about the

lockdown on social media, he believes that stage-four lockdown includes “draconian measures” and an “overreach”.

He said that the next step must be to open the economy along with protecting the elderly and immuno-compromised. “It’s likely that many people will get the virus. The question is if we will get it and have a job and be able to earn, or get it and be in abject poverty.

“If we don’t go back to work soon, we will turn a health crisis into an unrecoverable economic crisis,” he said. “We can’t afford the steps wealthy countries can – they have stimulus packages that we can only dream of. If we don’t end the lockdown, this will be a cataclysm from which we won’t recover.”

## Hundreds apply to Gesher Fund

TALI FEINBERG

It’s been just short of two weeks since the launch of the Gesher Fund, envisioned by Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein and led by community leaders, which provides interest-free loans to small-to-medium-sized Jewish businesses battling under the coronavirus lockdown in South Africa.

In these two weeks, the fund has received hundreds of expressions of interest through its website, says chairperson Martin Sacks. “We have received initial donor funds, and are hoping to start paying away late this week or early next week,” he says.

Sacks says expressions of interest are a “high-level indication of the nature of the applicant’s business and the proposed size of loan requested. At this stage, a brief application form needs to be completed, which is phase 1. If the applicant is eligible in terms of the key qualifying criteria of the fund, certain additional information is requested, which is phase 2.

“A relatively small percentage of the expressions of interest have completed phase-1 applications, and a percentage of those have completed phase-2 applications,” says Sacks. “Phase-2 applications are being reviewed by our evaluation teams comprising more than 40 volunteer businesspeople and bankers nationwide. Our evaluation teams are, in most instances, also advising and assisting the applicants with many of the challenges they are facing, and helping them to evaluate appropriate funding options.”

In the past two weeks, the fund has “set up the necessary entities from a regulatory perspective, and put in place the governance, dedicated resources, and systems to manage the organisation and processing of applications responsibly and cost effectively”.

Sacks says a number of applicants haven’t qualified for Gesher loans, for example, if the requests are more personal than business in nature. These applicants have been directed elsewhere for assistance.

“We are working to understand the gaps between expressions of interest and completed applications in review, and today, [19 May], we are sending out a brief survey to all those who expressed initial interest.”

There are some challenges. “One of the issues is that the banks’ COVID-19 loan scheme was launched only a week ago, and they are ironing out their own issues around credit and processing,” says Sacks. “A number of initial applicants are still in negotiations with landlords and creditors and getting a better assessment of their operating and working capital needs arising from COVID-19-related dislocation.

He concludes: “The Chevrah Kadisha has provided incredible operational and administrative assistance during the set-up phase, notwithstanding the fact that it’s increasingly stretched itself, financially and otherwise, during this time.”

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# Possible COVID-19 vaccine in the offing

JORDAN MOSHE

Local medical experts are cautiously optimistic about the news of an American biotech company’s promising early results of a candidate COVID-19 vaccine.

Dr Evan Shoul, a specialist in infectious diseases, said the announcement had big implications, offering a kernel of hope.

“The results they released were from an early phase of development,” he said. “Vaccines have a whole gestation period, and each stage is a big step towards it being registered. However, each stage also has potential for the vaccine to fail and fall out of the running.”

Professor Gert van Zyl, a virological pathologist at Stellenbosch University, agreed that the announcement brought excitement and uncertainty.

The two were speaking about American biotech company Moderna, which this week announced promising early results of its candidate vaccine.

On Monday, the Massachusetts-based company reportedly revealed that the first human testing phase of its vaccine, mRNA-1273, had shown positive results amongst its test group. The vaccine reportedly produced an immune response in the eight people who received it in low doses, which is similar to that observed in people recovering from the virus.

Another 17 participants reportedly had immune responses at a level similar or greater than recovered patients.

Moderna’s Israeli chief medical officer, Dr Tal Zaks, confirmed the promising results to *Times of Israel*. “We got the first results today [...] and we are showing that it actually works. We are able to stimulate the immune system,” Zaks said.

He also reportedly confirmed that the next phase of testing on thousands of people would go ahead in July.

“By about the end of the year, the start of next year, there’s a reasonable likelihood that we’ll see this vaccine on the market, at least on the American market,” he said in an interview from Moderna’s headquarters.

Zaks said that the vaccine produced a similar response to the one naturally produced by patients who had recovered from the virus. Beyond that, higher doses created more antibodies than those created naturally. The company also reportedly said that the vaccine “was generally safe and well tolerated”, and that patients suffered no more than redness or soreness from the shots.

While most of the media has hailed the announcement as a major breakthrough, some are more conservative about the results. Experts reportedly told medical publication *Stat News* that they were waiting for more statistical evidence to back the success.

Shoul also expressed his reservations, and put the news into perspective, telling the *SA Jewish Report*, “Each step is enormous. The fact that there is a vaccine that has made it to this stage is a triumph, but the phase they’re in really only shows the safety of the vaccine in healthy people and whether antibodies are generated from it. We don’t really know more than that.”

He said that the vaccine had to pass multiple tests. “We know it’s safe for healthy, younger people, but we don’t know if it’s safe for older people, those who are immune-compromised, or children. The people who have been tested have no other conditions and received small doses. They showed no major side-effects. That’s all.”

Shoul stressed that this is a vaccine aimed at preventing healthy people from contracting the virus, making it almost impossible to compare the breakthrough with other strategies being developed.

“It’s a preventive strategy,” he said. “It prevents people from getting infected, unlike convalescent plasma or antiviral treatment

which are therapeutic strategies. They’re very different paths in the bigger story.”

Shoul pointed out that this is simply one of many vaccines being developed concurrently, meaning that other major companies may also soon embark on testing phases like Moderna.

“Because the stakes are high and complications so huge, we don’t always have access to all the research that’s happening,” he said. “But we know there are other teams worldwide working on the same thing.

“This is one biotech that has issued a statement regarding early results, but it’s by no means the only one working on it.

“It mustn’t change our strategy and how we think about infection,” he said. “We can’t suddenly all go back to work or school, stop wearing masks, and believe it’s over. This isn’t a saviour yet. We must maintain common sense and follow advice regarding prevention.”

Said Van Zyl, “It’s uncertain as a messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine has never been licensed to prevent a human infection. Nevertheless, scientists are excited about the potential of this novel strategy as it’s very clean. Once inside cells of the body, it produces only the specific antigen or protein to which the body should launch an immune response, and it may therefore be safer than other vaccines.”

“It may in future offer another approach to vaccination against other diseases even if it doesn’t prove that useful against COVID-19.”

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It’s too early to tell “which horse may win the race, but unlike influenza, the virus evolves really slowly, which makes vaccine development somewhat easier”, Van Zyl said.

“Overall, I’m positive about the prospects of a vaccine, but the timeline is difficult to predict.”

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## The dark underbelly of anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism never ceases to horrify me. I find any racism abhorrent because it’s senseless, hateful, and based on pure ignorance, nothing more.

However, anti-Semitism is aimed at you and me. And we know how far this revolting hatred has been taken over the centuries. While anti-Semitic verbal tirades may seem to some to be just words, they seldom are. Words are often just the beginning.

So, when anti-Semitism rears its ugly head, it’s never acceptable.

In some cases, however, it’s more horrifying than others.

This week, when *Joburg Jewish Mommies* administrator Phillipa Bergman brought to our attention the revolting anti-Semitic ravings of a young Pretoria woman, I initially assumed her social media identity must have been hacked.

This woman was the brand ambassador for a fitness company, a bodybuilder, and an athlete. She’s pretty well known, but not for being anti-Semitic.

I couldn’t believe that any sane, thinking person could spew the nauseating things she said. She wrote, “It was the Jews that bombed, raped, sodomised, and burned all people in Germany alive. Hitler was innocent. Our history has been twisted to favour the Jews without question.”

She went on and on, saying there “was a special place in hell” for Jews, and that our “religion is just as corrupt as the souls” we embody.

She made it quite clear that she hadn’t been hacked, and brazenly and proudly accepted responsibility for what she wrote and believed. “They [her beliefs] are mine. I’m entitled to them, and no one will bully me into believing that their religion is superior to mine.”

What’s crazy is that she felt no shame at being called out for racism. To the contrary, she didn’t flinch. She didn’t even try to make an excuse. She made out that it was acceptable to denigrate us and deny the Holocaust, to deny the death of six million Jews, calling Hitler innocent. As if it was okay to throw such ugly abuse at us.

Imagine Adam Catzavelos being caught out, and standing by his racism. Imagine Penny Sparrow doing that. It’s outrageous!

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies gave her an opportunity to apologise, and she flat out refused.

It will be interesting to see what will happen now. Will she be hauled through the courts and fined like Sparrow and Catzavelos?

Or will she avoid censure? Will she get away with it?

Is it acceptable in this country for her to say that about Jews? Is racism seen for what it is no matter who is involved?

We shall see.

I believe those involved must be called to account and either genuinely apologise or face the full might of the law.

I’m aware that top legal minds are mulling over what is or isn’t acceptable when it comes to hate speech. The key question appears to be: does it incite violence?

And if it doesn’t necessarily incite violence when you hear it, surely the more you hear it the bigger the impact? What about those who discover that it may be legally acceptable to vomit this kind of hatefulness, what then? Do they stop doing it if nobody makes a big deal about it? Or do they get worse?

Another aspect of this young woman’s saga I found deeply concerning is that in her explanation to Tali Feinberg, our journalist, she refers to her beliefs as “informed” by documentaries she didn’t go looking for. She claimed they “popped up on Facebook” and “out of curiosity” she had a look.

How on earth do such “documentaries” pop up on Facebook? How does that happen, and why?

Professor Milton Shain, who is a global expert on anti-Semitism, said that he believed she had been digging in the dark web. This is an ugly part of the internet that isn’t readily available and requires a browser that keeps you anonymous to access it. The point is, somehow these documentaries and false and hateful information are out there for people to access. I’m not sure there is anything that the world can do to stop it.

So, how do we help people filter out the noise of racism?

What makes a young woman – or anyone for that matter – hear these ugly falsehoods and buy into them?

I guess I will keep wondering, but hope that sanity and sense prevails, and most people recognise what’s real and what isn’t. I can only hope.

The truth is, anti-Semitism or any racism is never okay. Hating someone because of their race, colour, religion, gender, or sexual preference isn’t acceptable. As Jews, I’m sure you will agree that we need to make sure we set an example as it’s very difficult to point fingers at others if we don’t practise what we preach.

**Shabbat Shalom!**  
**Peta Krost Maunder**  
**Editor**

*Note: This is our official Shavuot edition. We will be publishing next week on erev Shavuot, but it won’t be a printed edition. It will be our first 100% online edition. Like all our newspapers, it will be jam-packed with fascinating, newsy stories for you. Please make sure to go to **sajr.co.za** and download your edition.*



## Finally ... Israel forms a government

After the longest political deadlock in Israeli history – more than 500 days – the country finally has a new government. With 36 ministers and 16 deputy ministers, it’s the most bloated government to date.

Coming at a time of crushing unemployment (an estimated 25% of Israelis are jobless in the wake of coronavirus) critics complain that several portfolios were especially created to satisfy coalition promises made by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. His party and that of Blue and White – headed by his rival-turned-partner, Benny Gantz – are on an almost equal footing. Their blocs have a similar number of ministers and virtual veto power over the other’s major decisions. Gantz and his allies received major ministries as a solace to those Blue and White supporters who were dismayed that the two had formed a unity coalition.

The good news is that the coalition is stable. Nearly the majority of Knesset (parliament) members are ministers, deputies, or senior officials. In this way, it has a built-in vote of confidence.

But there is deep distrust between the opposing camps which has given rise to doubts about how they can govern together.

They’ve agreed that for the first 18 months, Netanyahu will be prime minister; after that it’ll be Gantz’s turn. But most Israelis don’t believe that Netanyahu will vacate his office and hand it over to Gantz in spite of what the 14-page agreement between the two leaders stipulates. As it is, even after the rotation, Netanyahu will retain the position of “alternate” prime minister and be allowed to remain in the prime minister’s residence in Balfour Street in Jerusalem.

Three-quarters of the government is made up of right-wing parties who feel no real allegiance to Gantz.

This ensures Netanyahu that he is likely to remain the most powerful and influential figure even when Gantz is heading the government.

Among the challenges facing the new government is dealing with the economic crisis wrought by COVID-19. Israel fared better than Western Europe and the United States, but hasn’t been able to escape the financial downtrend. On the defence front, the Israeli army will need to balance its budgetary demands with the economic crunch. The foreign ministry also has its hands full. It needs to rehabilitate its status after not having a full-time minister for years and suffering from a lack of prestige and budget. The ministry also needs to “sell” Israel’s plan to unilaterally annex the Jordan Valley and all settlements across the West Bank to the international community that is against it.

Late on Tuesday night, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas came out vehemently against the proposal, announcing that Ramallah would no longer be bound by agreements it has signed with Israel and the United States.

As part of American president Donald Trump’s Mideast plan, the proposal envisions handing 30% of the West Bank to permanent Israeli control. Netanyahu

**DATELINE:  
MIDDLE EAST**

*Paula Slier*



said in a speech late last month that he was “confident” he could annex occupied territory with the support of Washington from 1 July. Last week’s visit to Jerusalem by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo sent a message that Netanyahu was free to do as he saw fit.

Pompeo said, “The Israeli government will decide on the matter, on exactly when and how to do it. I hope the Palestinians understand that peace is good for them.”

But the Palestinians are enraged. Jordan’s King Abdullah has warned that if Israel annexes the area, it will lead to a massive conflict with Amman. The international community is opposed, including the US public at large and the American Jewish community.

Some observers suggest that Netanyahu used the promise of annexation as an election pitch, but he knows that if he follows through on it, he will also need to agree to the rest of Trump’s deal – founding a Palestinian state on the remaining two-thirds of the West Bank. This raises questions as to whether he really intends to annex, as his nationalist base will never support such a Palestinian state. Nonetheless, they are pushing for annexation before the US election in November as concern grows that Trump could be replaced by Joe Biden, the presumed Democratic candidate, who has stated he opposes unilateral annexation.

Gantz, who was army chief during the 2014 war in the Gaza Strip, isn’t expected to emerge as a dove in the security cabinet. There is broad consensus amid Israeli leaders that their key fights are countering Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, and Iran and its



**Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the halls of the Knesset after the swearing-in of the new government on 17 May 2020**

proxies in Syria.

But there are issues on which Gantz and his team might generate a moderating influence. The newcomers might be willing to take a more diplomatic approach in the efforts to contain Iran’s nuclear ambitions, especially if Biden replaces Trump. Biden is likely to push for the nuclear deal.

One last thing to watch. This coming Sunday, Netanyahu’s trial begins. He faces accusations of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust, all of which he denies. As an indicted prime minister, he has to step down only when he’s convicted, and only after that conviction is upheld through the appeals process. The legal process might last as long as two years. Three elections later, and Netanyahu remains in the driving seat, just like he’s been for four previous governments.

## Call for alumni to block BDS ‘hostile takeover’ bid at UCT

>>Continued from page 3

freedom at UCT.”

He says the BDS-aligned candidates are running for positions on the UCT council with the sole purpose of pushing through another bid to boycott Israel.

Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, says events at UCT over the past couple of years have shown how critical it is to have responsible university leadership who hold dear the values of academic freedom.

“We have seen a hardline anti-Israel faction repeatedly trying to hijack critical university decision-making structures, at senate and council level, in order to pressurise UCT into imposing an academic boycott. These attempts violate the basic tenets of academic freedom, polarise the university community, and cause it to deviate from other issues of critical importance to

its functioning and strategic imperatives.”

Alumnus David Kaplan, who was active in 2019 in mobilising the global opposition of alumni to the proposed boycott of Israeli academic institutions, is involved once again.

“Alumni around the world still strongly feel the connection, and only want the best for their alma mater. This is in stark contrast to those sectarian, agenda-driven BDS supporters whose sole aim is to advocate a boycott instead of trying to maintain openness and diversity of discourse,” he says.

“BDS agitators at UCT aren’t advocating boycotts of the worst human-rights violators in the world, only against the state of Israel. This vote is critically important as it could have a decisive impact on future UCT policy and its international academic stature.”



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# Charting uncharted waters for the sake of sanity



OPINION

JUDITH ANCER

Don't you miss "precedented times" and "charted" territory? I do. I really do. I miss the illusion we had of control, predictability, and fairness before these "unprecedented times". Now, we stumble through, unsure of our leaders and confused by our experts, uncharted territory our present and future.

Even before COVID-19, we were warned of an increase in diagnoses of depression and anxiety, and there was much talk of an epidemic of psychological distress among teenagers. It's no surprise that the media is now full of headlines about the second global pandemic, the mental-health crisis, as we feel the impact of coronavirus and accompanying lockdowns, and economic and social disruption.

Last week, the secretary general of the United Nations, António Guterres, spoke at the launch of a policy brief on mental health and the pandemic. He said, "The COVID-19 virus isn't only attacking our physical health, it's increasing psychological suffering: grief at the loss of loved ones, shock at the loss of jobs, isolation and restriction of movement, difficult family dynamics, uncertainty and fear for the future." It's also apparent that many people are experiencing a great deal of frustration, boredom, and anger in addition to the omnipresent underlying hum of dread.

So how do we cope in the midst of a global outbreak of a highly infectious and unpredictable illness? How do we keep it all together? We still have to earn a living, manage our kids' schooling online, and find ways to deal with living on our own or with other people in close quarters.

How do we "keep our heads" when all about us, on WhatsApp groups and Facebook, others appear to be losing theirs because they've run out of cigarettes and whiskey, or just "refuse" to

exercise wearing a mask. How do we wade through the excesses of wildly contradictory information, or make do with the paucity of verifiable fact? Maybe up seems down, and our minds want to unravel.

Extended anxiety, frustration, and uncertainty lead to raised levels of stress hormones and consequent disturbances in sleep. There are increases in body aches and pains, nervousness and irritability, and decreases in energy, focus, and motivation, as well as reduced capacity to think rationally and make good decisions.

However, there are simple strategies that can assist many of us to manage our most difficult emotions. The first is to accept that these difficult feelings are a normal and appropriate response to the situation.

What is most helpful psychologically is to identify what you are feeling. Once you have named this for yourself, accept that the feeling is part of you and practise self-compassion in relation to having the feeling. Whether it's anger or fear, take a slow, deep breath, exhale slowly, and tell yourself that the feeling will pass through you.

Research shows that we can train our minds to be calm and turn away from total negativity. We can learn to tolerate uncertainty, and accept that we have limited power to change our immediate physical circumstances.

Even if the limitations of our power make some of us feel enormously frustrated or panicky, there are strategies that help us gain a sense of calm, even if for short periods of time. These include "mindfulness" activities like meditation, prayer, making and fixing things, as well as being in the moment. Listening to music that is meaningful, reminding ourselves to notice a beautiful tree through the window, the sound of birdsong, savouring a delicious meal, and practising self-

compassion is also very helpful. It's obvious – but worth repeating – that self-care isn't an indulgence, but essential. Exercise, movement, dance, singing aloud, gardening, cooking, journaling, watching movies or series, eating in a balanced way, laughing, watching videos of animals on YouTube. These all enhance our physical, psychological, and social well-being.

Research shows that we can train our minds to be calm and turn away from total negativity. We can learn to tolerate uncertainty, and accept that we have limited power to change our immediate physical circumstances.

Fear, anger, and resentment are contagious, so avoid excesses of social media, and don't baste yourself in information, COVID-19 monitors, and opinions about what's happening.

If the future seems overwhelming, another important strategy is to shift your focus from the long or even medium term to what needs to be done now, what the next right thing to do is. We can't do everything, but we can do something. And what we do makes a difference – that may be to message a friend who lives alone, make a cup of tea, or call a counselling service for assistance.

I have been moved by the work of the brilliant psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor, Viktor Frankl, who knew first-hand the nature of loss, helplessness, and suffering. His core idea of the importance of finding meaning in our lives helps

me to make sense of how best to cope in challenging times. Frankl explains that all people are driven by a will to meaning as a primary life force, and this meaning is present in all our lives in three ways:

1. There is meaning in what we create, what we do and make, and in our contributions to the world – what we give to others.
2. There is meaning in what we experience and take from life, especially uplifting experiences, things like pleasure, memories, relationships, and love, experiences that involve empathy and an openness to needing others and taking from others with grace.
3. Finally, there is meaning in our attitude to suffering that is unavoidable and out of our control. Of course, we must avoid unnecessary suffering and change what can be changed. But we need to have the wisdom and courage to accept what can't be changed. If a situation can't be changed and suffering can't be avoided, what is retained is the individual's freedom to chose their attitude to their suffering.

Frankl never says this is easy or simple. It's a life project to change ourselves and find meaning in what has brought us suffering. But it can be done. He writes, "The moment suffering becomes meaningful it loses its unbearable quality and becomes another one of life's tasks which offers a special and great challenge and reward."

It's my hope that out of the catastrophe that is this pandemic, we are all able to find some ways of coping and making meaning that allow us to bear the unbearable with grace and courage.

Judith Ancer is a Johannesburg-based clinical psychologist.

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# Kosher eateries tighten belts and innovate

JORDAN MOSHE

The much-loved Feigels deli of Glenhazel, Johannesburg, officially closed its doors this week, bringing a 28-year journey to an end. While other Feigels branches continue to operate, this landmark closure highlights the dramatic change our new reality has wrought on the food industry and the pressing need for innovative solutions.

COVID-19 has changed the way food outlets operate and will continue to do so for some time. Empty tables and reduced menus have become the new reality, but some eateries in Jewish Johannesburg are making changes that they hope will help them ride out the storm.

“The nature of business has changed,” says Feigels business development manager Tamar Dakes. “The virus resulted in a drop in trade and functions stopped. We had to look to where there is business, adjust our focus, and tighten up wherever we could. It has given us the chance to consolidate and work according to our strengths.”

Until recently, Feigels operated out of independent stores at Kingswood Centre in Glenhazel and BluBird Shopping Centre, a deli space in KosherWorld, and a production site in Lyndhurst which included a front shop and supplied the other branches.

From the outset of the nationwide lockdown, Feigels found ways to adjust to the new reality. It wasn’t easy, not least because Pesach was approaching.

“The time just before Pesach is usually extremely busy for food stores, but many simply didn’t take Pesach orders this year,” says Dakes. “We wanted to keep our staff safe, so we decided to close the shop front at Lyndhurst and use it solely as a manufacturing plant.”

Although the Glenhazel branch continued to operate initially prior to Pesach, the decision was taken to close it owing to security concerns. Dakes says that only Connie Mashiane, a long-serving staff member and the beloved face of the Glenhazel branch, was managing the store, and she was concerned about her safety.

“It didn’t make sense to keep her there,” says Dakes. “She was the only person in the entire centre. It was eerie, quiet, almost ghostly. We felt that by running at BluBird and KosherWorld and supplying supermarkets with products, our customers could buy elsewhere.”

Even subsequent to the country’s move to level-four lockdown, it made sense to keep the Glenhazel store closed. The front shop at Lyndhurst was also closed.

“I consulted Kevin Hedderwick, a mentor and the former chief executive of Famous Brands,” Dakes says. “His advice was to focus on consolidation under COVID-19, reduce costs, avoid incurring debt, and keep it simple. We

realised that Feigels had to reduce its overheads without retrenching staff.

“Now it’s all about being innovative and conservative, which isn’t an easy balance. We’ve reviewed our menu, tightening up what we offer, and spent time re-establishing our core objectives and vision. We’ve created a new frame of reference against which to check ourselves continuously as we move forward in a new reality.”

Though Dakes relishes the opportunity to pilot innovation, she admits it has been somewhat difficult for her family to accept the change. This includes her mother, Patsy Dakes, as well as her uncle, Joss Zaslansky, both integral personalities within the business and known across the community.

“It’s been thrust on us very suddenly, and the older generation finds it more difficult to accept the changes,” says Dakes. “They weren’t given much of a choice. Joss has always looked after the Glenhazel branch like a child, often spending the whole day there and interacting with customers with warmth and passion.

“I don’t think this would have been as welcome had it not been for the new reality. We opened in Glenhazel in 1993, and I worked there with my cousin, Nadine, for more than a year. We passed it on to Millie, Joss’s sister-in-law, who ran it for 17 years. It’s been part of the family.

“Still, the change made sense. This new reality gave us a safe space in which to make the change. We could allow logic to override emotion. It’s very sad to close, but it’s part of a natural order of things.”

In spite of the challenges involved, other kosher establishments have also taken up the opportunity to implement innovative change. Closing entirely when lockdown began, Frangelicas lost three out of its four sales channels (functions, catering, and sit-down) and changed to a food emporium, separating production from the shop entirely.

“We limited our operating hours, the number of products we make, and most importantly, the number of staff on the premises at any one time,” says owner Simon Godley. “The virus has introduced a host of challenges, and we have changed the business model to address them.”

There is now more time to reflect, consolidate, and plan positively for the future,” Godley says. “It has also been a good lesson in dealing with a rapidly changing environment. We’ll be more reliant on our new business model, and will continually innovate in that direction.”

Similarly, Michelo’s Pizzeria has used the opportunity to drive its online order and delivery service, maximising its ability to operate without in-store customers by partnering with a courier service.

“We’re keeping things as easy and simple as possible,” says store manager Justin Baskin. “We initially offered frozen items only, but as things have eased, we’ve been able to operate online and offer the community a menu featuring most of our items coupled with fast delivery.”

Baskin says as many as 80 deliveries can be made on a Sunday, stressing that none of these would have been possible before the delivery innovation.

“Without the new system, we could never had facilitated all the orders. We are affected by the lack of sit-downs, and I don’t know if we’ll have increased sales, but we’ve perhaps emerged a little stronger and with an effective system moving forward. We’ve been very fortunate.”

Says Dakes, “My life has taught me that in every challenge, there’s light on the other side. We need to innovate if we’re going to make it. It’s our job to transform the darkness into something positive.”

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# Israelis relieved finally to get a government

STEVEN GRUZD

After three inconclusive elections and an acting government for 18 months, most Israelis are relieved that the country has finally inaugurated its 35th government. It has been portrayed as an emergency government to combat COVID-19, and averted an unthinkable fourth election.

So said political commentator and former member of Knesset, Rabbi Dov Lipman, in a Zoom webinar hosted by the South African Zionist Federation’s Cape Council on 13 May 2020.



Throughout the election campaigns, Gantz vowed not to serve with or under Netanyahu, who has been indicted for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust.

“No one expected this when we went to the polls in December 2018,” Lipman said. Then, the new Kachol Lavan (Blue and White) Party headed by career military figures Benny Gantz, Yair Lapid, and Moshe Ya’alon banded together in an attempt to finally unseat Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Throughout the election campaigns, Gantz vowed not to serve with or under Netanyahu, who has been indicted for bribery, fraud, and breach of trust.

After the third election, Gantz was given

the mandate by President Reuven Rivlin to form a government, but he failed to do so. Eventually, he performed a 180 degree turn to hammer out an emergency broad coalition government with Netanyahu, “to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and prevent a fourth election [on 4 August]”, said Lipman.

Lipman said Gantz’s decision was portrayed by some as courageous. For others, it was shocking and reflected poorly on Gantz’s integrity. Blue and White fell apart in the Knesset on live television as Lapid and Ya’alon chose to leave the coalition and form part of the opposition instead. Gantz kept the Blue and White name, but with other defections, he was left with just 15 Knesset seats to Likud’s 36 in the 120-member Knesset.

Lipman explained the details of the coalition pact. Netanyahu would be prime minister for the first 18 months, with Gantz in a new post which essentially amounts to deputy prime minister. At the latest on 17 November 2021, they will switch roles, and Israel will have a new prime minister for the first time since 2009. The Knesset would not seek to pass any major legislation in its first six months.

“This was democracy in action,” said Lipman. “The laws, rules, and procedures were followed. I wear this as a badge of pride as an Israeli.”

The battle then shifted to parcelling out ministries. The agreement guarantees 18 ministries each for the two major blocs, plus 18 deputies, making it Israel’s largest cabinet ever. In a time of economic hardship, “this has been broadly criticised”, said Lipman.

Parties may need to apply the so-called “Norwegian Law” which allows members of the Knesset to resign on becoming a minister, with the next person on the party list taking up the Knesset seat. Lipman explained that this is complicated for Gantz, as his coalition partners have quit his alliance. It may allow more opposition voices rather than Blue and White loyalists into the Knesset.

As usual, there was much haggling over ministerial posts. Long-time Speaker Yuli Edelstein became health minister, and religious parties in Netanyahu’s bloc received ministries like religious affairs and the interior. Gantz will serve as defence minister, with Blue and White’s Gabi Ashkenazi becoming foreign minister. Crucially, Blue and White will also have the justice and communications ministries to attempt to prevent any political manipulation around Netanyahu’s trial.

In terms of COVID-19, Lipman said that Israel’s medical system had handled the

virus well so far, and was gearing up for a spike in infections as the economy opens up. He discussed how coronavirus has spread rapidly in Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) communities, citing an initial failure in rabbinic leadership as people didn’t practice social distancing, especially during Purim.

“Groups of extremists defied regulations and held public bonfires on Lag B’Omer,” Lipman said, “but 99% obeyed the rules and stayed home”.

From 1 July, Israel’s government can explore the annexation of settlement blocs in the West Bank in accordance with the Trump Peace Plan. Lipman said support for at least limited annexation has gained ground as Israel has shifted to the right after the 1993 Oslo Accords, suicide bombings, and the withdrawal from Gaza that handed the territory to Hamas.

With the American elections in November, some believe the annexation should take place while Trump is still in office. “There will be consequences for diaspora communities. It risks more anti-Israel

activism, and some Jewish communities will be divided. There will be some noise around the world about this”, Lipman said, “but many predicted doomsday after the US embassy moved to Jerusalem, and there was no horrific result for Israel. It seems Israel is willing to risk it.”



Rabbi Dov Lipman

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# Closure of magazine group – end of an era, not just a family business

TALI FEINBERG

When Associated Media Publishing (AMP), formerly Associated Magazines, announced its closure three weeks ago, it sent shockwaves around the country and the globe. The home of iconic magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *House & Leisure*, the publishing house was a South African success story with innovation and entrepreneurship at its core. Its sudden end demonstrated that nothing is immune to the devastating shockwaves of COVID-19.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, the company’s chief executive, Julia Raphaely, says that the moment of making the announcement was “traumatic ... we feel anguish for the staff and the huge audience we have had to cut loose. This is like the death of an era, not just a company, and many people have expressed nostalgia for the medium of print and compassion about this tough decision.”

It was her mother, Jane Raphaely, who founded the company with the launch of *Cosmopolitan* in 1984, followed by numerous ground-breaking titles over the next 36 years. “She did it with gumption and chutzpah, through feisty determination, and often with a baby on her hip,” wrote journalist Mandy Wiener at the launch of the elder Raphaely’s book, *Unedited*, in 2012.

“I remember looking at the first issue of *Cosmo*, with Anneline Kriel on the cover, and thinking how it set a whole new benchmark for the industry on South Africa,” remembers South African media expert and journalist, Gus Silber. Pnina Fenster, the former editor in

chief of *Marie Claire* and *Glamour*, agrees. “*Cosmopolitan* shattered ceilings in male-dominated media and inspired many dreams, my own included. Always my admired colleagues and sometimes my formidable competitors, the powerhouse of AMP changed women’s lives in incalculable ways.”

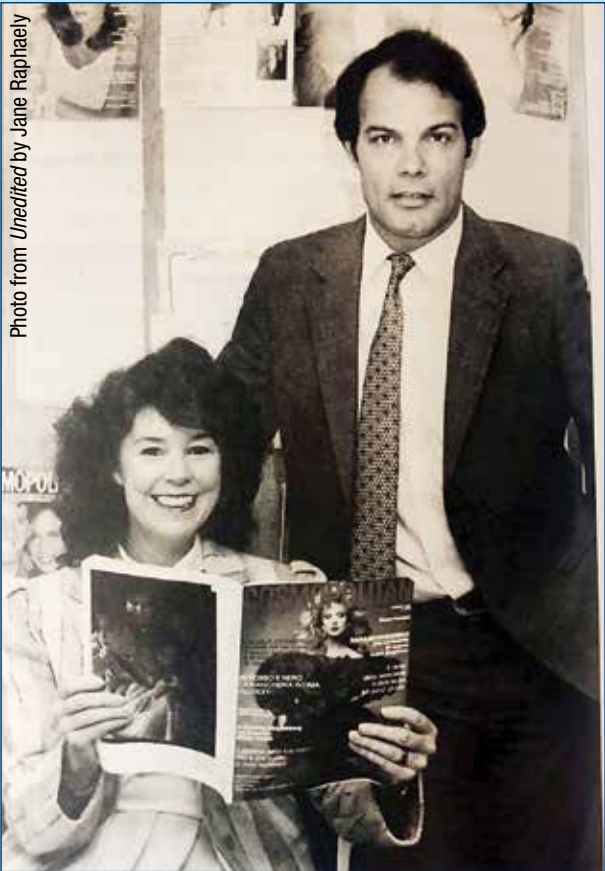
*Cosmopolitan* continued to innovate and push boundaries. In 1994, then 14-year-old Claire Mawisa became the first black model to grace the cover. “Jane Raphaely empathetically declared that a 14-year-old black girl would be the new face of beauty in South Africa, forever changing that child’s life,” she tweeted at the news of AMP’s closure.

Another defining moment was AMP being chosen by Oprah Winfrey to publish *O*, the *Oprah Magazine*, making South Africa the only country to publish her brand outside of the United States.

Jacqui Biess of Charly’s Bakery remembers, “One morning, I got a call from Jane to meet me in her car outside the bakery for a confidential meeting. She asked me if I could I provide a high tea for 120 people that same afternoon at 15:00 as Oprah was coming to their office. She had only just heard this news. We closed the bakery for the day, jumped into action, and by 15:00, we set up in their boardroom.

“When introducing Oprah, Jane said she just wanted to thank one special person, and she called me up. I was introduced to Oprah in my dirty apron! I’ll never get over Jane being so gracious and thanking me when there were so many other important people in that room.”

Nicola Miltz recalls a similar moment when she was the Johannesburg bureau



Along with long-time business partner Volker Kuhnel, Jane Raphaely launched *Cosmopolitan* as the first title for Associated Magazines

chief for *Femina* magazine in 1999. “I remember attending a meeting where we invited Charlize Theron to guest-edit an upcoming edition. I watched awestruck as Jane allowed Charlize to take centre stage.”

In the industry, Raphaely is renowned for nurturing talent. In *Unedited*, she writes, “Editing is not about power. It’s about possibility. It’s the art of the possible, provided you put the right pieces in the right place at the right time. Matchmaking, giving a good idea or a good person a good shove in the right direction, shining the light of truth in some very dark places, and always trying to stay one step ahead of the expectations of your readers is heady stuff for the headstrong, and I was certainly that and proud of it.”

This is exactly how journalist Nadine Rubin Nathan came to work for AMP. “I was interviewed by Jane Raphaely when I was 22. I was told by her secretary that she wanted to meet me for breakfast at

the Sandton Sun. I had sold one freelance story to *Cosmopolitan*, but had no idea why she wanted to meet,” she recalls.

“The breakfast was lovely, but I was too timid to ask what I was doing there. Three months later, I was offered the job of junior features writer at *Cosmopolitan*. I was still in the middle of my degree. Jane looked beyond a curriculum vitae to find the best people to work on her magazines. I think I was hired based on sheer passion. I learned to write and edit on the job.” She would go on to edit *Elle* magazine.

“It wasn’t a business, it was a relationship, and this was one of the reasons that Jane [now in her 80s] was still working,” says her daughter. “She is passionate about people, and therefore was an incredible mentor to people inside our business as well as a valuable ambassador outside of the business. She is an ‘ideas and solutions’ person, and has always loved giving people what they

want before they even knew they wanted it.”

To the younger Raphaely, AMP represents a uniquely South African story. “A family-run, independent business whose actions and beliefs were always driven by the fact that our name was on the door. Integrity was critical for us, but ultimately the people who worked inside and outside the business always knew what we stood for.”

Silber agrees that this is what makes the Raphaely family’s story and publishing house so important to so many South Africans. “It was a company that always seemed to have the warmth of family at its heart. The Raphaelys built a media institution on chutzpah, drive, vision, and a keen intuition for the needs and wants of their multiple audiences,” he says. “They can look back with pride on the publishing legacy they leave behind. The shelves will feel a lot emptier without them.”

## SA woman’s anti-Semitic outburst shocks SA Jewry

>>>Continued from page 1

half of the twentieth century, and Jewish Bolsheviks go back to the 1922 Rand Rebellion.”

When her contract with PSN Lifestyle was cancelled, Kriel chose not to apologise. Instead, she dug her heels in. “No one will bully me into believing that their religion is more superior to mine ... I’m Christian, and I will defend and speak up for what happened in the past, contrary to today’s beliefs,” she wrote amongst other points.

PSN Lifestyle wrote on Facebook that it had asked Kriel to remove her ties to the company on social media with immediate effect. When contacted by the *SA Jewish Report*, it chose not to comment.

Shain believes that Kriel’s posts are “unabashed hate speech”, but Constitutional Law expert, advocate Mark Oppenheimer, warned that this case might not be seen that way by a court of law because the question of what constitutes hate speech is currently before our Constitutional Court. Hate speech may soon only be categorised as such if it constitutes “incitement to cause harm”.

“This is clearly anti-Semitic speech that advocates hatred, but there is no clear incitement to cause harm,” Oppenheimer said.



However, the Community Security Organisation’s (CSO’s) Jevon Greenblatt said, “The CSO is working with the SAJBD to investigate this case. It’s concerning in light of rising global levels of anti-Semitism, which have been exacerbated by the coronavirus crisis.

“What’s different about this case is that this isn’t a fringe extremist but an ordinary South African with a substantial online following. Although her world view is dangerous and unacceptable, we are particularly concerned about how her words and views, expressed in a public forum, could motivate others to go out and commit acts of violence. Just one such act is one too many. History shows that words eventually turn into actions. We are monitoring this closely.”

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# Limmud bounces back from tech challenges

OPINION

JOCELYN ROME



When South Africa went into lockdown on 27 March, like many South Africans, the Limmud leadership from around the country met on Zoom to discuss how to contribute. We decided to do what we do best by bringing Jewish connection, community, and culture to as many people as possible.

We planned an ambitious online eLimmud with a distinctly South African flavour. A stellar line-up of some of our most successful local and international past presenters, together with exciting new ones, was assembled and disseminated, all by volunteers, in record time.

Participants registered from our usual bases in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, but also from East London, Harare, Maputo, Knysna, De Rust, and throughout the world, all hungry for connection and Jewish learning. One Cape Town participant's message, sent from COVID-19-related isolation in a retirement home, said that the anticipation of eLimmud had kept her going, making all the volunteer hours worthwhile.

On Sunday morning, I prepared to replicate aspects of a traditional Limmud by stocking up on goodies from Gary Friedman Caterers in anticipation of a great afternoon of learning. I looked forward to sharing the experience with my parents, who had battled through the Zoom set-up process, with my sisters and their families in Israel and Canada, and cousins and friends from Cape Town, Johannesburg, Ra'anana, and Dublin.

Then, an hour before going live, the first inklings of trouble emerged. Messages of Zoom collapsing around the world lit up WhatsApp groups, with users experiencing audio and video problems.

As we approached the start time, we could see some of the virtual rooms were full, while we couldn't get into others. Our risk-management plans made provision for people needing help with Zoom, presenters needing assistance, managing Zoom chats, Zoombombing, even dealing with inappropriate behaviour on camera by participants.

We had purchased the ideal Zoom package to support the expected numbers. We had experienced successful simultaneous sessions with our Limmud partners in North America, the United Kingdom, China, and Mallorca, and engaged with the people who ran them. Apart from this unanticipated collapse of the Zoom platform in the United States itself, everything had been covered.

We held our collective breaths as reports came from inside some of our session rooms that things were working beautifully, with Marc Michael Epstein and Jonathan Ancer enthralled participants with presentations on topics as diverse as using art to understand Jews of bygone times and the secret lives of apartheid spies. In other rooms, Adina Roth, while starting late, gave a beautiful exposition of the story of Ruth and Naomi in explaining the complexities of social intimacy in our times, just in time for Shavuot.

All the while, our WhatsApp chats were

erupting with calls for assistance from participants who couldn't get into rooms or couldn't hear or see.

Everything was stacked against us, yet we held on for as long as we could. With improvisation from our technology and registration teams, and our outstanding hosts calmly and graciously sharing our difficulties, we rebooted the system for the second session. Some rooms worked, some didn't.

At 15:43, our chats fell silent as the team made the difficult decision to postpone the event. We wouldn't be true to our Limmud values if we allowed some sessions to continue but denied participation to those who couldn't connect.

After communicating with everyone inside the rooms and out, we stared at our screens and exhaled. Then came the outpouring of support. Presenters have all re-committed to a new time, participants who managed to get a small taste of Limmud are clamouring for more, others



A scene from Limmud 2019

(including new sign-ups) are excited about the new date.

Limmud South Africa didn't fail on Sunday afternoon. We may not be able to tick the box that we delivered a flawless conference with a full 28 sessions of Jewish learning and culture, but we succeeded in so many other ways.

Participants and presenters, Zoom-sceptic traditional Limmud supporters and Limmud-sceptic traditionalists, from major city centres and remote towns in South Africa and all over the world (as far as Panama City, Taipei, and Locorotondo in Italy) all became Limmudniks, connecting to Jewish learning, Jewish community and life, and each other. We discovered the positivity and resilience we so need in uncertain times.

In my professional life working with adults and entrepreneurial learning, we know that adaptive learning is essential to enable people to survive the shifting sands of modern life and work. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted that in the most stark way.

Transformative learning empowers us to thrive. Limmud creates that transformative space in which individuals come out a little different to the way they were before. We will be back on 31 May, and we will be better.

• Jocelyn Rome is co-chair of Limmud Johannesburg.



While The Angel Network has always received incredible help from the Jewish community, since the start of the COVID-19 crisis, the support has been overwhelming. Our heartfelt thanks is extended to everyone involved. We are immensely grateful to those who have assisted with our causes through donations, collections and/or by being part of a CAN (community action network).

Special thanks to Wendy Kahn and the SAJBD, Howard Sackstein and the Jewish Report for encouraging people to get involved in the CAN project, and to CAP and Selpal for always being available to help with distribution.

For more information on The Angel Network and/or the CAN initiative, visit our website on [www.theangelnetwork.co.za](http://www.theangelnetwork.co.za)

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# A miracle as Raphi goes home

TALI FEINBERG

On 8 May, three-year-old Raphi Blatt was allowed to go home after undergoing neurosurgery for skull and brain injuries after a freak accident on 19 April.

“The speed and extent of his recovery has been an absolute miracle,” says his father, Eddy Blatt.

His son underwent surgery, a stay in intensive care, and rehabilitation, all in the midst of the restrictions of the coronavirus outbreak. Hundreds of people around the globe prayed for his well-being.

“It was such a relief. There were no regrets about taking him home, and in hindsight, he should probably have come home sooner, but the situation didn’t allow for it,” says Eddy.

“We are all overjoyed to have him home. He is in his element finally to be with his family, in his space, with his own things.”

It’s not always easy. Like most other toddlers, “Raphi is a handful, and gives us a hard time looking after him. He is a typical boy, and doesn’t accept any limitations!” says Eddy. “But this is a blessing in itself, and our hearts are full to have our little boy home.”

With Raphi’s accident occurring during the coronavirus lockdown, the family had to face unthinkable choices on top of an already terrifying situation. “At the time that Raphi was transferred from high care to the normal ward, he couldn’t walk yet, and we didn’t

know the extent of the rehabilitation that he would require. We wanted him to get the best rehab available, so we had him transferred to a rehabilitation centre where he would be assessed and treated intensively in an inpatient-treatment programme,” says Eddy.

“However, the rehabilitation centre decreased visitation rights because of coronavirus, which limited the amount of

his family any longer as an in-patient. His recovery at home has been excellent. There is no replacement for the love, support, and compassion you get from your own family.”

For Raphi’s mother, Leeat, bringing Raphi home was extremely emotional. Being pregnant and under strict visitation rules during lockdown, she had hardly seen her son since he went into hospital.



Raphi Blattt

time we had to see and be with Raphi. As his parents, we had to weigh up the benefit of keeping him there as an in-patient without the love of his family, versus the benefit of taking him home where he could be with his family and be treated on an outpatient basis.

“In hindsight, it was the best decision we could have made [to take him home]. Although Raphi will need ongoing therapy, his recovery has been astounding, and there was no good reason to keep him away from

some reason, which he was obviously still trying to work out for himself. But once we took him home, he adjusted quickly, and was back to his affectionate self,” she says.

“If you didn’t know Raphi, and didn’t see the plaster or scar on his head, you probably wouldn’t know that anything was wrong.

“We have only recently started his outpatient rehabilitation programme, and it’s still too soon to tell how much treatment he will need and for how long,” he says. “While

we have come a long way, the journey isn’t over. We still have to deal with a number of challenges on an ongoing basis, such as making sure he doesn’t hurt his head where the injury occurred.

“As with any traumatic brain injury, Raphi will always be at a higher risk of certain conditions than someone who hasn’t suffered this [trauma]. Going forward, it will be important for us to make sure that he reaches all his developmental milestones, and has the best foundation and building blocks for each stage of his development.”

From the moment Raphi’s accident occurred, the community rallied behind him and his family, and this support has continued. “The community has been amazing. Within a short amount of time, there were *tehillim* groups praying for Raphi around the world, and donations for meal plans were set in motion,” says Eddy.

“We were told that the numbers of people praying for Raphi had reached the hundreds of thousands. The community baked challah, held “Amen” parties and shiurim, and performed many other *mitzvot* in Raphi’s honour. We still receive gifts for Raphi at our door. We believe that all our prayers around the world were answered, and Hashem granted us this miracle.

“As a family, we couldn’t be happier to have Raphi home. He is such a special little soul, and such a little joker,” Eddy says. “With Raphi at home, our hearts are full. Due to the severity of the injury and the ongoing risks that could, G-d forbid, arise at any time, we ask you to keep him in your prayers. May Raphael Meir ben Leeat be blessed with a speedy *refuah shelema* (full recovery) that will keep him safe till 120! Amen.”

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# A wedding to remember

OPINION

RABBI YOSSI CHAIKIN



We have all seen recent pictures of brides and grooms marking their special day around the world, but there is something eerily absent in these celebrations: the crowd.

Seeing photos of these ceremonies with barely a handful of invited guests fills us with sadness. But then we look at the joy that fills the faces of the *chatan* and *kallah* (bridegroom and bride). For sure, this isn’t the wedding of their dreams, the one they may have planned for months or even years, with perfect attention to every detail, from colour schemes, menus, décor down to the exact list of invitees. No doubt there is disappointment that the day they were both so looking forward to has turned out to be an altogether different simcha. The happiness we see in the couple is the celebration of their marriage, of the absolute dedication they are pledging to their relationship, and of their vows of mutual respect, love, and care.

A few days ago, the editor of the *SA Jewish Report* contacted me to ask me to write a Shavuot column for this edition. The brief sounded similar to the one I received just a year ago, before Shavuot in 2019. I went back to her original email, which asked me to compose an article about the custom of *tikkun leil* Shavuot, when communities get together for a late or all-night vigil to study Torah. This year’s request was almost identical, except it was how we would observe the important customs of the *chag* at a time when religious gatherings are banned by law.

I re-read last year’s writing, and my eyes welled up as I recalled the remarkable programmes that our amazing team of rabbonim have been putting together for this

holiday over the years. All involved gatherings which are currently dangerous and prohibited by law. South Africa’s rabbis have been incredibly creative in keeping their respective congregations together and active at this time particularly through the use of technology. On Shavuot, of course, the use of Zoom or other real-time electronic tools is halachically prohibited. How will we have a proper *chag* this year?

Our circumstances have forced us all to look at the core – the core of who we are, what we do, how we act, and why we do things. The same will be true of the forthcoming holiday. What is Shavuot really all about? It’s the celebration of the marriage of the Jewish nation, the bride, with her groom, the almighty G-d. The Torah, much like a Ketubah document composed prior to nuptials, is the document outlining the terms and the conditions of this union.

Each Shavuot, on the anniversary of the initial covenant on Mount Sinai 3 332 years ago, we celebrate this marriage once again. We are accustomed to having large wedding gatherings for the occasion. But this year, there won’t be any guests, just the bride and groom. And, nothing can take away from the joy of this amazing union.

Over the years, I have counselled countless brides and grooms to concentrate more on the forthcoming marriage and less on the wedding. A wedding lasts only a few hours, but the marriage is for a lifetime. Does the same not apply to these Shavuot nuptials? Let us make this *yom tov* as happy as we can, just Hashem and us, in wedded bliss. Never mind who is or isn’t there. We have our groom. We will rejoice with Him and pore over the minutiae of the Torah, our wedding contract,

as we marvel on our absolute good fortune.

Our rabbis will do everything they can to prepare us in advance of the festival to make the day as special as it can be. But come Shavuot, it will be just the purity of this union, just Hashem and His people, together, alone.

It will be a wedding to remember. But it’s about Hashem, not the wedding of our

dreams. Remember that, and this year, let’s celebrate hopefully the way weddings should be celebrated.

Chag Sameach!

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

## The gift of Ruth: cleaving to social intimacy

OPINION

ADINA ROTH



It feels strange to be approaching Shavuot having had very little meaningful contact with people outside my immediate family since before Pesach.

There were so many good efforts at the beginning, cloaked in things like homemade pizza, the best of banana bread, and three-hour Monopoly games. But now it feels as if things are fraying at the edges.

We are giving our very best to home schooling, but my 10-year-old misses her friends terribly, and I find myself also wondering about having a good long conversation with a friend over coffee.

When I do scroll through social media, I get very upset at anyone who uses terms like “new normal”. How can this level of social distancing ever be “normal”.

The book of Ruth, which we read on Shavuot has some of the greatest lessons to teach us about intimacy and friendship. The text opens up in Israelite country, in the barren wasteland in Bethlehem. A famine devastates the land, and one of the most well-to-do men takes his family and leaves for Moav, lest, we are told by the Midrash, the poor come begging at his door.

In Moav, this man and his two sons die, and his wife, Naomi, is left with two Moabite daughters-in-law. Bereft, Naomi starts to make her way back to Bethlehem with Orpah and Ruth following after her.

On the way, Naomi turns to them and entreats them to return to Moav. In her rationale, Naomi explains that she has nothing to give these women in terms of prospective husbands.

She urges them, “Don’t come with me, for what do I have to offer you?”

Here we pick up on Naomi’s psychological state. Without sons to give these women, she doesn’t believe herself to be of any value. She doesn’t feel worthy of them following her.

The one daughter-in-law, Orpah, hears Naomi’s reasons and decides to return to Moav. However, we are told that Ruth “cleaved” to Naomi, refusing to leave her. The Hebrew word “cleave”, “*davkah*”, is a significant verb in the Torah.

Very early in the Bible in Genesis, after man and woman are created, we are told, “therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife”. What’s more, in Deuteronomy, we are told, “Those that cleave to G-d are alive today.” A mystical Jewish practice called *deveikut* introduces the concept of a union or merging between the human being and G-d.

When we are in the realm of cleaving, be it between husband and wife, G-d and human, or in the case of Ruth, cleaving between two friends, we are in a realm of profound feeling and soulful potential.

Therefore, the word “*davkah*” signals to us that Ruth’s devotion to Naomi is profound. She hears Naomi saying to her, “I have nothing to give you, you have no future with me”, and yet, she attaches herself to Naomi.

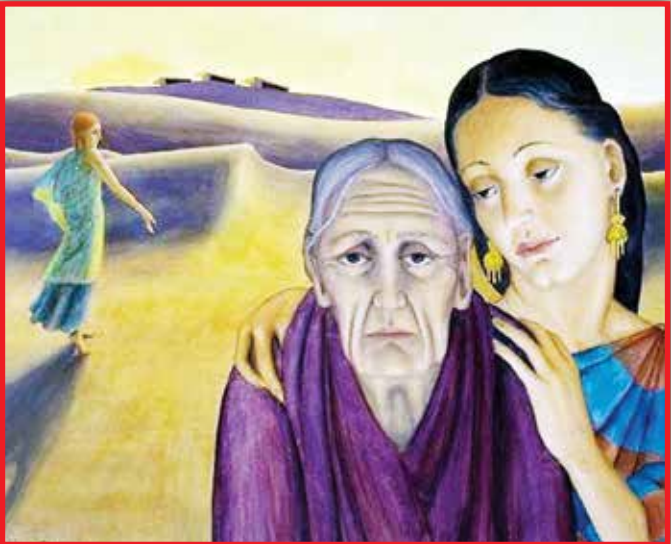
It seems to me that this is the first moment of genuine friendship in the Tanach, a connection that isn’t bound by exchange, rivalry, or competition.

In some ways, it’s a friendship that steps outside the confines of the patriarchal system in which they are born. The image for their friendship – that of “cleaving” – implies a physical kind of mapping of one onto the other’s body in a protective holding.

It seems that Ruth recognises Naomi’s devastation, and her response is unconditional love. Linguistically, the word “*davkah*” elevates this type of deep friendship to the union of husband and wife (*davak*) or even to one’s connection to G-d (*deveikut*). And who of us have not felt close to G-d when we had a really amazing conversation with a friend over coffee?

Although Naomi doesn’t experience an immediate healing, Ruth’s choosing of Naomi marks the beginning of her tentative healing from her grief. At the end of the story, the women in Bethlehem exclaim to Naomi how fortunate she is to have a daughter-in-law whom she loves, who is more precious to her than seven sons.

The rabbinic tradition posits Ruth as the archetypal convert, and many say that this is why we read the book of Ruth on Shavuot. However, if friendship is at the heart of this book, we might want to consider social intimacy as a value that needs to be cultivated at the heart of Jewish life.



Indeed, our concept of shul, of comforting mourners, of dancing at a wedding, of sharing a Shabbat dinner, and of visiting the sick, all imply that Judaism is built on this concept of “*davkah*”, cultivating practices that forge deep bonds with people.

For us as Jews, social distancing is a necessary evil, but it can never be the new normal. Rather, social intimacy is a spiritual, even G-dly aspiration.

At this time on Shavuot, as we consider the receiving of the Torah and the *mitzvot*, let us remember this important Jewish value and hold it dear, even as we must – temporarily – be cautious for the sake of *pikuach nefesh* (the preservation of human life).

Indeed, Ruth’s message to us is surely that social intimacy is a practice upon which the integrity of our religious life – and perhaps even our world – depends.

• *Adina Roth is a clinical psychologist in private practice, and a teacher of Jewish Studies. She runs an independent Barmitzvah and Batmitzvah programme in Johannesburg, and teaches Tanach to adults. She is also a teacher at Melton in Johannesburg. Adina will present at eLimmud South Africa on 31 May.*

## G-d is one – and so are we

OPINION

RABBI ARI KIEVMAN



Unlike most other holidays, Shavuot doesn’t have many ceremonial rituals. Paramount to the traditional celebration in better times was convening in shul to hear the ten commandments, often followed by a deluxe dairy feast.

In Temple times, the primary *mitzvah* was that of *bikkurim*: the biblical tenet to bring one’s first-ripened fruits to the *beit hamikdash* in Jerusalem as a gift to the priests, declaring thanks to G-d.

What’s interesting is that when Moses instructed the Jewish people about this *mitzvah*, they were still wandering in the desert, not yet settled in Israel, not yet landowners, not yet harvesting any fields or vineyards from which to bring their *bikkurim* gift. Only once they finally conquered and settled in the Holy Land, a process that took 14 years, did this *mitzvah* become applicable.

Why? We aren’t meant to take our blessings for granted. So, if the purpose of *bikkurim* was to express our gratitude, then why wait 14 years? Perhaps the commandment should have been implemented on a personal basis – as each family settled on their designated land, they could begin practicing *bikkurim* at their first available opportunity. Then, by the end of the 14-year settling process, the entire Jewish people would be involved in the *mitzvah*.

Our sages explain that indeed, the *bikkurim* commandment wouldn’t take effect until everyone inhabited their inheritance of land. Even if I was ensconced in my property but others weren’t yet on theirs, I couldn’t rejoice until everyone was settled.

Why wait for others? Shouldn’t I be grateful as soon as my crop has grown?

In Tractate Shavuot (39a), the Talmud explains, “All of Israel are guarantors for each other.” As long as a fellow Jew was still unsettled, it was impossible for anyone else

to truly celebrate. If my fellow is lacking, if my neighbour isn’t yet settled, I myself can’t feel fully content and settled.

The atmosphere at Mount Sinai was similar. We were worthy to receive the Torah only when we were all in the same situation. “One person, with one heart,” (Rashi) in genuine unity.

As a Jewish community, we have always been keenly aware of our unity as a nation. The past few months have reminded us of this universal lesson for all humanity.

Because all of humanity is created in the divine image, it follows by extension that we are all connected. If “G-d is one,” then essentially we are all one. As postulated in the so-called “butterfly effect” (a small change that can make much bigger change happen), the slightest change in initial conditions can have an exponential effect on the outcome. Nothing can be regarded in isolation.

Our community’s swift response to COVID-19 and our extended protocols to prevent any transmission of the disease has emphasised this lesson. In the interest of protecting a single potentially susceptible person, we all engaged in severe restriction. Saving that life is saving the world.

We are all in this together. For me to win, I need you to win. With the almighty’s help, may our dramatic changes at the beginning of our country’s experience with this pandemic result in dramatic positive outcomes.

This year, as we accept the Torah with renewed joy and commitment, though we are each in our own homes, we are united in our determination to win it together.

• *Rabbi Ari Kievman is the rabbi of Sandton Central Shul – Chabad Goodness & Kindness Centre.*



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# Why a crisis needs a woman in charge

OPINION

I recently read an article in the *Guardian* asking, “Are female leaders more successful at managing the coronavirus crisis?” (25 April 2020). The writer looked at the results of countries like New Zealand, Germany, Finland, and Denmark, all governed by female leaders, up against the less exemplary record of some of their male peers – no names named, but I know who you are probably thinking of. Not just in their COVID-19 statistics, but in the way that the messaging has been broadcast – strong and clear, but compassionate, empathetic, and inspirational at the same time, creating a sense of trust in the leadership.

What struck me is that the upcoming festival of Shavuot not only has strong women in the starring role – Naomi and Ruth – but that their story opens, like ours, at a time of crisis. Famine, food shortages, and lack of strong government lead to migrants desperate for work and food. Sound familiar? Only this is more than 3 000 years ago.

Israel was experiencing weak leadership, civil war, and unrest, and food shortages precipitated disaster. Even the name of Naomi’s hometown, Bethlehem, is an ironic play on the literal translation “house of bread” – only there is no bread. Responding to the famine, Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons moved to Moav, a move of sheer desperation given the long hatred between Israel and Moav, where they thought the prospects of getting food and productive work were greater. The text doesn’t tell us how they are received, but we know from today’s world what

life was like as a refugee at a time of crisis.

Whatever their reception, within ten years, they experienced social and economic tragedy: the death of all the men, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law without husbands. These three women had to support themselves without the legal and economic rights accorded to men in their society. In short, they had no husbands, no clear title to land, and no resources with which to make a living.

Naomi doesn’t give up, and Ruth courageously makes the famous decision to stand with her – “Thy people shall be my people, and thy G-d, my G-d.” As they negotiate the crisis together, not only do they end up saving their family, but in the long term, the Jewish people as well with Ruth giving birth to Oved, the grandfather of David, who will one day be the king that unites the entire Jewish people.

Now that we mention it, this isn’t the first festival to centre on the story of women who save the Jewish people! Seven weeks ago, we marked Pesach. You might think that was all about Moses, right? Wrong! First, Moses isn’t even mentioned in the Haggadah, while the Exodus wouldn’t have happened without four key women in the story. In fact, Moses wouldn’t exist at all without these women. Let’s start with Pharaoh’s harsh decree to drown every male child. Who resists? The Torah tells us about Shifra and Puah, two midwives, who refuse Pharaoh’s order of genocide and when challenged, don’t hesitate to give a cover story about how the Jewish women give birth too fast for them to get there in time.



RABBI GREG ALEXANDER



Once Moses is born, it’s up to his mother and sister to keep him alive, and they manage the whole thing smoothly from the moment he is laid in the basket in the bulrushes. Miriam watches him float safely downstream to be noticed by Pharaoh’s daughter, who adopts him and raises him under the care and wet nursing of Moses’ mother herself. A plan hatched and enacted by Miriam.

These powerful women set up the entire Exodus story to come. Without them, we would still be slaves in Egypt.

Go back another month, and we get to Purim, another Megillah, and another heroine who saves the Jewish people. Esther, the queen, who must defy convention and approach the king with her request to save the Jews, and in so doing, avoids the genocide planned by the vicious advisor, Haman. But the story is no “happily ever after” tale. It leaves us with a feeling of unease that this king can have so much power and so little accountability. Monday it was going to be the Jews, Tuesday it was Haman and his family. What’s to stop Wednesday being the Jews again? It’s a cautionary tale about Jews living under governments that aren’t democratic, stable, or just, and how precarious a citizen of any race or religion is in such states.

So, we have Ruth and Naomi doing their best to survive in a time of famine, starvation, and migration, where the rules are made by the men around them, even as they die and fall out of the story. We have Shifra and Puah, Miriam and Yocheved, negotiating the brutal oppression of a tyrant set on destroying the slaves that work for him. Even Pharaoh’s daughter

can’t oppose her father, raising the child secretly within his court. With no resort to a constitution or impartial legal system, they all find the best way to manipulate the situation to save lives and bring hope to the oppressed. And, Esther works “within the palace of the king” to bring salvation to her people outside, all the time knowing that she hasn’t changed the status quo, only managed to buy some time and relief.

None of these women has any formal power. None of them can really change the political or economic realities of the countries they live in at first. They are themselves vulnerable, and yet rise to be heroines who save their families and ultimately the Jewish people.

As we reel from this pandemic and the impact it’s having on our welfare and economic systems, do our sacred texts suggest to us that women need to be part of the solution? If our biblical matriarchs could do so much without any real power, imagine what they could have done as appointed leaders? Imagine, furthermore, if all our leaders, regardless of gender, displayed those values. What is clear to me from the *Guardian* article is that the style of leadership that has most benefitted those countries is one that is strong, decisive, and capable of displaying feeling. These are qualities that we see in our biblical heroines, and ones we would want to look for in our leaders to guide us through our current crisis.

• *Rabbi Greg Alexander is a leader of the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation.*

## Omer – a dual counting

OPINION

ILANA STEIN



All our Jewish holidays enumerated in the Torah have a dual foundation: a historical foundation and an agricultural one. This should not surprise us. We often forget in our very urban times that from the people’s entry into the land of Israel (in about 1400 BCE) until the exile after the destruction of the Second Temple, we were an agricultural people, living off the land.

Thus the Torah speaks to the people in both those senses.

So, Pesach commemorates the exodus from Egypt, but it’s also known as *chag ha’aviv* (the festival of spring), indicating the time during the solar year that this festival must take place.

Spring marks the birth of abundance as the grain crops are coming to fruition, just as Pesach marks the birth of a nation.

What about the counting of the Omer? In Vayikra 23 we read: “9. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 10. Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: when you come to the land which I am giving you, and you reap its harvest, you shall bring to the kohen an omer of the beginning of your reaping. 11. And he shall wave the omer before the Lord so that it will be acceptable for you; the kohen shall wave it on the day after the rest day . . .”

The Omer therefore is a measurement of some sort of grain – “the beginning of your reaping” – in other words, of the first crop that could be harvested at the time of Pesach.

We know from archaeological records in the Middle East and what happens today that this is barley. Thus, just before Pesach, one would harvest the first part of the barley crop and bring it to the Temple to be given to the priest on the day after Pesach (being one day in Israel of course), in other words, on the second day of Pesach.

The next major crop to be harvested was wheat, which ripened between Pesach and Shavuot. The text continues: “15. And you shall count for yourselves, from the morrow of the rest day from the day you bring the omer as a wave offering seven weeks; they shall be complete. 16. You shall count until the day after the seventh week, [namely,] the fiftieth day, [on which] you shall bring a new meal offering to the Lord. 17. From your dwelling places, you shall bring bread, set aside, two [loaves] [made from] two tenths [of an ephah]; they shall be of fine flour, [and] they shall be baked leavened, the first offering to the Lord.”

Here, the farmer brought the first fruits of the wheat harvest to the Temple on Shavuot, which makes sense, as the wheat ripens about six weeks later than the barley. But what is the need for counting between the two? There is no reason given in the Torah, and while there are reasons in the Talmud and elsewhere that are bound up with the historical event of the nation marching from the Red Sea to Sinai to receive the Torah, there is an agricultural reason too.

If we were farmers, it would be obvious to us. The time of the ripening of the wheat is in fact a time of trepidation for the farmer. No rain must fall during this time, as that amount of moisture would be injurious to the “fruit”, and destroy the crop.

Considering that wheat formed much of the economic foundation of an agrarian-based society, one can imagine the anxiety. The farmer at this point could do no more – the ploughing and planting was done. Now all there was to do was wait. And pray and count.

The human being had to take a step back and hand over to G-d, counting off rain-free days, one by one, until the harvest was ready. Each day, he would look to the heavens and ask G-d for dew not rain, and as night would fall, he would give thanks to G-d for clear skies.

When finally, at the end of 49 days, the wheat grower could successfully harvest the waving wheat in the fields, it would be with a huge sense of gratitude that he would bring the first of that harvest in the form of two loaves of bread to the Temple.

Thus, the agricultural element of living in – and off – the land of Israel is bound up with understanding that the bounty of the land is a co-creation of the human and the divine.

Society must never forget that it owes its existence to a higher power. It should never consider that “the strength and the power of my hand did this”.

We know too well what happens when we think that we control the natural world. This, then, is the lesson that the Torah gives in asking the farmer to count.

• *Ilana Stein is head of education of the Academy of Jewish Thought and Learning, where she also lectures on Tanach and Jewish environmental ethics.*



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The Power to Surprise



# Pizza pizzaz with delectable dulce de leche cheesecake

With Shavuot just around the corner, these two specially-created **Sharon Glass** recipes are sure to be winners with your family. Indulge in a little bit of decadence with the dulce de leche cheesecake (it’s just sublime)! It’s dairy time, so while the pizza dough will take you just minutes to make, you can use any topping and vamp the pizzas up a bit. Change the shape, and see how interesting you can make them. Have fun!

## Long pizzas with assorted toppings

These unusually shaped long pizzas are crispy, thin, and decorated with a variety of toppings. These can be just as adventurous as you want them to be.

Preparation time: 25 minutes

Cooking time: 20 minutes

### Dough

- 500ml (2 cups) flour
- 10ml (2 tsp) sugar
- 10g (0.35 oz) instant yeast
- 10ml (2 tsp) coarse salt
- 30ml (2 Tbs) olive oil
- 250ml (1 cup) warm water

Mix dry ingredients together. Stir the olive oil and warm water together. Then fold the wet ingredients into the dry mixture and knead well to make a dough. Place in an oiled bowl, and cover with plastic wrap. Leave to rise for about an hour in a warm place.

### Toppings

- olive tapenade or sun-dried tomato paste
- mushrooms, sliced and fried
- zucchini, sliced in ribbons
- roasted eggplant
- soft mozzarella balls, sliced
- fresh rosemary, thyme, or basil
- coarse salt
- black pepper



Long pizzas

### Method

- Preheat oven to 180°C.
- Divide dough in half. Roll out very thinly into two long rectangles. Spread with either the tapenade or tomato paste. Then top with a selection of vegetables. Scatter with mozzarella slices. Sprinkle with fresh herbs. Season well with salt and pepper.
- Bake on the oven’s middle rack for about 15 minutes or until bubbling and golden. Slide off the baking tray and place directly on the oven rack for about five minutes. *Chef’s tip:* I love topping these pizzas with whatever takes my fancy that day. I sometimes add some caramelised onions and a few drops of pesto for a delicious change.

Serves 4-6

## Dulche de leche cheesecake

The caramel sauce marbled into this ultra-creamy cheesecake leaves a delectable taste on your tongue. Forget about the diet when eating this.

Preparation time: 25 minutes

Cooking time: 90 minutes

### Ingredients

- 150g (5.29 oz) Amaretti biscuits, crushed
- 45g (1.5 oz) unsalted butter, melted

### Method

- Preheat oven to 180°C.
- Mix crushed biscuits with the unsalted butter and press onto the bottom and a little up the sides of a 24cm (9 inch) springform tin. Bake crust until just browned. Set aside to cool.

### Filling

- 250ml (1 cup) mascarpone
- 250ml (1 cup) Philadelphia cream cheese
- 500ml (2 cups) cream cheese
- 4 eggs
- 250ml (235g) castor sugar
- 60ml (38g) flour
- 5ml (1 tsp) vanilla essence

### Method

- Place all ingredients in a food processor, and pulse until just mixed through, smooth and creamy.
- Pour into pre-baked crust shell. Lower oven temperature to 140°C. Bake for about 45-50 minutes or until just set. Turn oven off and cool in oven for about 30-40 minutes before removing from oven. Refrigerate when cool. Remove from

fridge about two to three hours before serving.

### Dulce de leche sauce

- 80ml (⅓ cup) treacle brown sugar
- 60ml (¼ cup) cream
- 60ml (¼ cup) condensed milk
- Bring sugar and cream to a boil, and simmer until sugar has dissolved. Remove from the heat and stir in the condensed milk. Cool. Drizzle over the top of the cheesecake just before serving. Top with sugared pecans.

Dulche de leche cheesecake



### Sugared pecans

- 100g (3 oz) pecans
- 60ml (¼ cup) water
- 80ml (⅓ cup) icing sugar
- Dip nuts into water. When they are wet, roll them in icing sugar. Place on a baking tray and bake in a preheated 140°C oven for about 15 minutes or until toasted. Keep in a Tupperware until ready to use. *Chef’s tip:* refrigerate cheesecake, and then remove before serving to bring to room temperature for a few hours.

Serves 8-10

## Cheese blintzes with orange confit (or without it’s just as delicious)

### LAUREN BOOLKIN

#### For the blinis

- 3 eggs
- 2½ cups cold water
- 1½ cups flour, sifted
- ¼ tsp salt
- ½ tsp baking powder
- Oil/butter for frying

#### For the filling

- 250g cream cheese
- 1 tbs cream
- 2 tsp flour
- 1 egg
- ¼ cup castor sugar
- ¼ tsp cinnamon

#### Method

- Beat eggs and water. Sift flour, baking powder, and salt. Add to the eggs, and whisk till blended. Pour into a jug through a sieve.
- Refrigerate the batter for an hour or up to 24 hours.
- Beat the egg and castor sugar together. Add the cream, cream cheese, flour, and cinnamon.
- Beat until smooth.

#### To fry

Heat a small, non-stick frying pan over medium heat. Add a teaspoon of oil, and swirl to coat the base. When it begins to sizzle, pour in a little batter. Cover the base of the pan in batter, and pour the rest back into the jug. Cook over a medium heat until you can lift the edge of the blini and see a light brown base. Flip onto a plate. Bear in mind that the first one or two flop. Don’t give up!

#### To assemble

Lay one crepe on a plate cooked side down. Put two thirds of a teaspoon of the filling in the centre of the uncooked side and roll up by first tucking in the sides. Fry immediately or refrigerate for up to two days. Unfried blintzes can also be frozen.

#### Orange confit

Segment the oranges over a bowl. Four oranges would be good for this quantity of blintzes. Squeeze the remaining juice out with your hands into the same bowl. The pith is bitter, so be sure not to include it.

Drain the oranges, and reserve the juice in a jug. Add double the amount of castor sugar to the juice. (If you have a quarter of a cup of juice, you will add half a cup castor sugar, and so on.) Bring the mixture to the boil, and then turn the stove down to very low. Keep stirring until you have a jammy mixture. Add this to your orange segments, and refrigerate without stealing any. *Serve the hot blintze with a spoonful of confit on top.*

Cheese blintzes





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# The most difficult commandment?

OPINION

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN



Revelations bring revolutions. And the greatest revelation in history brought about what is arguably the most far-reaching of all social revolutions. The revelation at Sinai – witnessed not by one lone prophet or a prophet and his close disciples, but by the entire nation of Israel, millions of men, women, and children – changed the world forever. That day was Shavuot, when we heard the voice of G-d thundering down the ten commandments, G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish people, and we became His ambassadors to the world at large. Virtually every civilisation defers to the ten commandments as the basic universal principles of morality and ethics.

Which would you say is the most difficult of the “big ten” to keep? Would it be the first, the commandment to believe in G-d? Faith doesn’t come as easy to our generation as it did in the days of our grandparents. But children with aged parents suffering ill health who require much attention might argue that the fifth commandment, “Honour your father and mother”, is the most difficult to fulfil properly. Others would say that the fourth commandment, to keep Shabbat, cramps their style more than any other.

While each has a valid point, I would cast my vote for the last one on the list – commandment number 10, “Thou shalt not covet.”

“You shall not covet your friend’s house; you shall not covet your friend’s wife, or his field, servant, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your friend.” Or in simple English: don’t desire his beautiful home, stunning wife, dream business, nifty sports car, or anything else that is his.

Now, it’s one thing not to steal stuff, but not to even be able to desire it? That’s got to be the hardest of all. Really, now, isn’t G-d being somewhat unreasonable with this one? Is He really being realistic? Surely, He doesn’t think we’re angels, I mean, He created us!

So, allow me to do what all good Jews do and try to answer a question with ... another question. Why does the text of this commandment first list a variety of specifics: house, wife, field, servant, etc, and then still find it necessary to add the generalisation, “and all that belongs to your friend”?

One beautiful explanation offered by the rabbis is that it teaches us a particularly important life lesson, a lesson which actually makes this difficult commandment much easier to observe. What the Torah is saying is that if, perchance, you should cast your envious eye over your neighbour’s wall, don’t look at the specifics alone. Remember also to look at the overall picture.

Most of us tend to assume that the grass is greener on the other side. But we don’t always consider the full picture, the whole package. So, he’s got a great business and a very healthy balance sheet. But is he healthy? Is his family healthy? His wife looks great at his side when they’re out together, but is she such a pleasure to live with at home? And if he should have health and wealth, does he gain *nachas* (pride) from his children? Is there, in fact, anybody who has it all?

As the Yiddish proverb goes, everybody has his own *pekkol*. We each carry a backpack through life, a parcel of problems, our own little bundle of *tzorris* (trouble). When we are young, we think that difficulties are for “other people”. When we get older, we realise no one is immune. Nobody has it all.

So, if you find yourself coveting your fellow’s whatever, stop for a minute to consider whether you really want “all that is your fellow’s”. When we actually see with our own eyes what the other fellow’s life is all about behind closed doors, what’s really inside his backpack, we will feel grateful for our own lot in life and happily choose our very own *pekkol*, with all its inherent problems.


There is a famous folk story about a group of villagers who formed a circle, and each one opened his sack, revealing his most precious possessions for all to see. They walked around



the circle of open sacks, and everyone had the opportunity to choose whichever one he wanted. Ironically, in the end, each one chose his own.

The almighty is giving us good advice. Be wise enough to realise that you’ve got to look at the whole picture. When we do, this difficult commandment becomes more easily observable. In fact, not only is it sinful to envy what other people have, it’s foolish. Because life is a package deal.

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



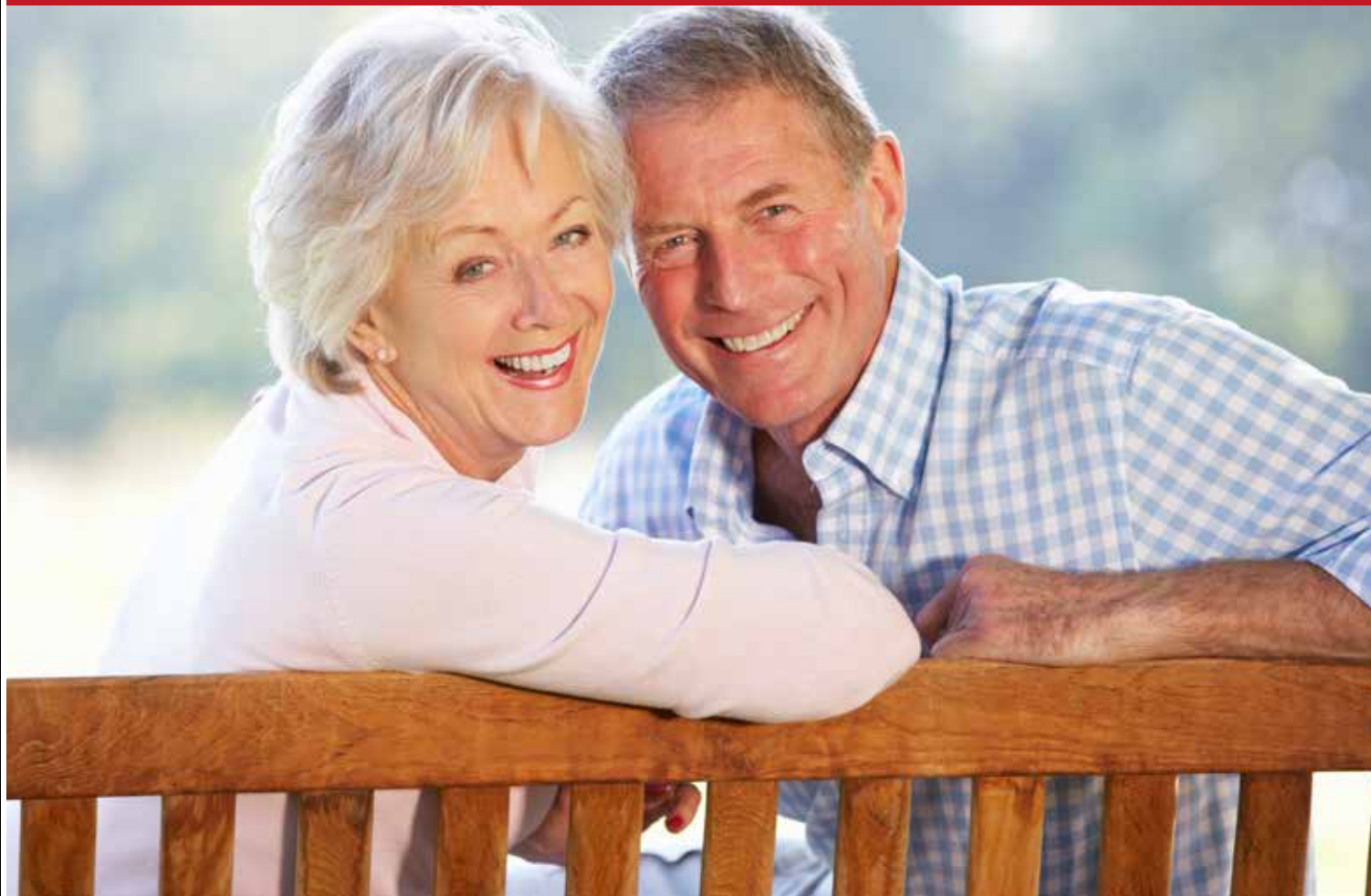
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# Zooming in on the real heroes

I have always liked the naughty kids. It might be that I was never one of the good or conventional ones, but they somehow seem more interesting to me. It helps that I’m not a teacher, and don’t have to deal with the consequences of their behaviour. Or that I don’t need to find a way to discipline them on a Zoom call.

I laughed when an eight-year-old kid told me he had been kicked off his Zoom class because he entered his name as “Hacker”, and this scared the other children. I found it hilarious when my daughter told me of an entire class who changed their name to “Reconnecting...” so that the teacher thought that everyone’s internet had gone down, and found it disturbingly funny when she showed me a music video (moves and all) that they had filmed in a maths class. Forgetting for a moment that it’s a pretty important subject.

I felt real sympathy for one of my child’s teachers who accidentally managed to merge herself into her virtual background and gave the entire class looking like she had become one with a drum – the musical instrument – not the thing that stores oil.

Needless to say, no one mentioned the musical convergence to her, and I can only imagine what she thought when she watched the recording of the lesson sometime later.

The muting and unmuting, the videos on and off, have to be unbelievably challenging for teachers, many of whom are new to this online world. If ever there was a situation where they are disadvantaged by their students, it’s in

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



this space, which makes their approach, tenacity, and sheer resilience nothing short of remarkable.

No less awe-inspiring are the parents, particularly those of young children. I have stopped calling the helpline every time I hear, “Please hold on while I go and murder some children!” while on a business call. I also appreciate the government’s genius plan to limit alcohol. I, for one, wouldn’t make it past 10:00 without a stiff drink if I had to supervise a maths tutorial.

Whereas no school is perfect, I believe that for the most part, schools have risen to the challenge in a remarkable and magnificent way. They were handed a situation not of their choosing, many without much time for preparation, and have done a remarkable job. From play schools through to high schools, what I have seen (anecdotally) is a system of care, support, love, and education that we should take a moment to feel proud of.

In essence, this is a shout out to the teachers, rabbis, head teachers, administrators, and social workers. This is a shout out to parents who haven’t beaten their children or resorted to alcohol. Equally so, this is a shout out to our children, who in spite of being told over and over that they are a weak and mollycoddled generation, have shown the strength and character that makes them, in my eyes, the real heroes of the COVID-19 world.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

## Proud to meet the challenge

The core mandate of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) is to safeguard the rights and promote the welfare of South African Jewry, but there are times where, as the community’s representative body, we involve ourselves in matters of wider national concern.

In the past, this has included assisting victims of xenophobic violence, flood, and in fire relief initiatives, and helping to ensure the continuation of essential services during public-sector strikes.

Today, the overriding challenge facing the country is to provide sufficient food to those unable to generate any kind of income due to lockdown conditions to sustain themselves and their dependents until the crisis has passed. The Board has been devoting much of its time and resources to making a difference in this area either through its own projects or by working with and supporting other Jewish-led upliftment initiatives.

As our National Director Wendy Kahn stresses, in addition to seeing to the welfare of our own community, we need to be concerned about the real crisis of hunger in the greater society.

That’s why we have taken the outreach we are already involved in and elevated it to another level. Last week, thanks to an extremely generous contribution from an anonymous donor and further contributions from other community members, the SAJBD launched its R9 million fund to provide food to communities in need during the lockdown.

The Board has partnered with the Angel Network, a non-government organisation founded by a group of Jewish women that even before lockdown was accomplishing



## ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev

marvellous things in terms of helping severely disadvantaged communities. We have been working with it on numerous CAN (Community Action Network) initiatives, and with the substantial additional funds, are now in the process of rolling out an assortment of projects in both rural and urban areas of Gauteng, the Eastern Cape, Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, and North West Province.

For more details, I recommend listening to the messages from Wendy Kahn and the Angel Network’s Glynne Wolman, which can be found on our Facebook site and website (<http://sajbd.org/>), along with information on some of the other inspiring work that is being done.

The day will come when we, and future generations, will look back on this very difficult period in our country’s history and evaluate the extent to which our community responded to the complex moral and logistical challenges of the day. We can be justifiably proud of what has been and is being done in that regard. In Gauteng alone, nearly two-thirds of CAN projects are being run by Jewish community members.

However, right now our focus has to be on continuing this essential – indeed life-saving – humanitarian work. Every contribution helps, no matter how small, and I urge all members of our community who are in a position to do so to come on board in whatever way they can.

• 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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## When times are bad, friends are even more important

At 23:47 on a Thursday night I logged onto Zoom. My best friend of 15 years, who I had just hung up with on a FaceTime call, did the same. In 30 seconds, we were allowed entry into an 18th birthday countdown call for a friend of ours from another school.

As my screen loaded up, I found myself desperately searching for more familiar faces. I counted at least five people I knew personally, and another 15 I had met briefly at parties, on camp, or at inter-school events.

Nevertheless, the anxiety I felt on entering that Zoom call was so similar to the feeling I experience when walking into a party, except without the usual pumping music and sickly sweet scent. The difference is that my anxiety quickly dissolved.

I soon had private messages coming through on my phone from fellow Zoom attendees along the lines of, “fancy seeing you here” or “I’ve missed you”. Those short messages led to catch-up conversations, some of which are still continuing. When I logged off that call at 00:15, it was with a smile and a realisation.

Seeing the happiness on my friend’s face as the clock struck 12 and we all erupted into a slightly delayed rendition of “Happy Birthday” filled me with warmth. Seeing the faces of friends I had failed to make plans with pre-lockdown, who I missed more than I imagined, made me grin until my cheeks hurt.

Amidst the pressure and stress of COVID-19, a birthday celebration created a brief moment of solace that was extended in WhatsApp messages and voice notes. That Zoom call made me appreciate the power of friendship, especially in difficult times like these. You don’t realise how much you need



## SCHOOL SAVVY

Dani Sack

that catch-up chat or just seeing the other person’s face on your screen.

I didn’t know how much relief I’d feel from simply sharing stories about online classes or discussing the anticlimactic ending to a new series we had both happened to watch.

Friendship is important at the best of times, and its significance is highlighted at the worst of times, when you desperately need a friend or a (figurative) shoulder to cry on. It’s an amazing feeling knowing that somebody is there if you want to talk or just be distracted from the confusion. I’m so lucky to have so many people I can simply message or call if I want to.

One of my closest friends, who lives in Israel, is allowed to see people face to face again. I can hear simply in the way she writes a message or sounds in a voice note how much it has relieved the boredom and stress we’ve all become accustomed to.

Seeing my family friends on an early morning Shabbos walk, people I’d grown used to seeing weekly but now haven’t seen in months, energised me more than the exercise did.

Simply remembering that you’re not alone, that there are people who love, miss, and care for you, is enough to brighten anyone’s day.

I urge you to catch up with your friends, or just message someone you haven’t spoken to in a while. It does a world of good in a world gone mad.

• Dani Sack is a Grade 12 pupil at Yeshiva College



# Baby City and Toyzone

MANAGEMENT AND STAFF WISH YOU

Chag  
*Shavuot*  
Sameach



