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Community unites in eye of the storm

NICOLA MILTZ

In an extraordinary display of unity and co-operation, leaders of all Jewish communal and civic structures came together this week to find ways to prevent further deaths in our community as the pandemic substantially worsens.

“Together, we implore the community to self-regulate and take responsibility,” said Wendy Kahn, the national director of the South

African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD). “The alarming rate of infections in our community is a warning that it’s up to us to do everything in our individual power to prevent further deaths in our community.

“Individuals, families, and communities need to take control and stop irresponsible social gatherings and socialising.”

Zev Kregel, the national chairperson of the SAJBD told the *SA Jewish Report*, “We were in training during the past few months, the real war is about to start, and the next four to five weeks will be make or break for our

community and South Africa.”

Weeks of stringent preventative measures coupled with lockdown fatigue, complacency, and differences about how to deal with the restrictions, have precipitated the call for a more united front. It has come amidst a mounting medical emergency in the form of rapid expansion of the virus.

The urgent gathering took place on Sunday via Zoom, and was attended by the entire communal leadership,

including Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, all communal structures, community organisations, and experts in the field of infectious diseases.

Those present said it was an unmatched display of solidarity and camaraderie during this unprecedented time of crisis. Reports from leaders of various sectors of the community including schools, shuls, and welfare allowed for productive dialogue and exchange of ideas.

The last time a gathering like this took place was in March around a boardroom table at the Johannesburg offices of Beyachad, where communal leaders discussed the unfolding coronavirus pandemic, then still in its infancy in South Africa.

The words of Kregel and Kahn echoed the stark messages delivered by medical experts Professor Barry Schoub, the founding director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, and Dr Richard Friedland, the chief executive of Netcare.

Dr Friedland highlighted the severity of the situation. “We are entering the most dangerous phase of the pandemic. The next four to six weeks are critical. The number of positive cases in Gauteng is doubling weekly. The numbers of infections as a percentage of

tests conducted is rising rapidly,” he warned.

“We understand the devastating socioeconomic forces which drove the government to relax lockdown restrictions, but paradoxically, this isn’t the time to lessen our guard. We need to remain hyper vigilant. The textbook on coronavirus hasn’t come out yet. Every day we know more, but we are still at the beginning of the learning curve. Now isn’t the time to relax. There is solid scientific evidence that wearing a mask is singularly the most important precaution, together with washing hands. We didn’t know this in March – that’s how quickly this is evolving.

At the time of publication, the total number of COVID-19 cases in South Africa had spiked to 106 108 cases. The nationwide death toll now stands at 2 102.

Professor Schoub said the meeting was held in a “spirit of total unity of purpose” as the various sectors confronted the COVID-19 pandemic each within their own sphere of interest. “It was particularly gratifying to see leaders from all sections of community life coming together with a single agenda of addressing the pandemic which has affected the community in so many different and often severe ways. For me, it was particularly heart-warming to be part of such a dedicated, committed, and knowledgeable team, unified and working together to combat this unique plague.”

Schoub said the metrics of the epidemic were being closely and

continuously monitored by a team of epidemiologist and actuaries, supporting virological and medical expertise. “Decisions affecting the community structures are and will continue to be assessed based on this robust scientific knowledge.”

Lance Abramson, the chairperson of Hatzolah, said the virus was “very much in our community, alive and well. It’s not something out there somewhere. Our numbers are only going up from here. We aren’t expecting to see a reduction in the numbers.”

He hailed the organisation’s 60 frontline responders and dispatchers, the majority of whom are volunteers, and urged the community to make use of Hatzolah’s home wellness monitoring programme and the emotional wellness helpline, both of which he said had been hugely comforting for those who had tested positive and were in quarantine.

“At present, there are 110 active positive cases that we are looking after. It’s important to note that this is only a sample of people in the community because not everyone is on the programme,” he said.

Abramson said Hatzolah faced numerous challenges. “The complexity of responding to emergencies in this environment is much higher than in a non-COVID-19 setting.”

Chevrah Kadisha Chief Executive Saul Tomson detailed the multiple challenges facing the organisation at this time. **Continued on page 3>>**

Telling a thousand words



Photo: Joshua Rubin

See story on page 10



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Lifting of restrictions makes vigilance personal

TALI FEINBERG

As the government slowly lifts lockdown, health experts have warned that we need to be extra-vigilant in preventing the virus spreading in the community and beyond.

Going for a haircut or seeing a beautician, playing non-contact sport, visiting a restaurant, cinema, casino or theatre, work conference, or hospitality accommodation may now be allowed under strict conditions, but that doesn't mean we should be doing them.

"The announcement by President Cyril Ramaphosa on 17 June that even further lockdown restrictions would be lifted contrasted starkly with the simultaneous stern warning from Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize that 'South Africa is approaching a heavy storm in the fight against COVID-19,'" says Professor Barry Schoub, the former executive director and founder of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, and professor emeritus of virology at the University of the Witwatersrand.

"Unfortunately, South Africa is now at the very worst phase of the epidemic. The peak hasn't

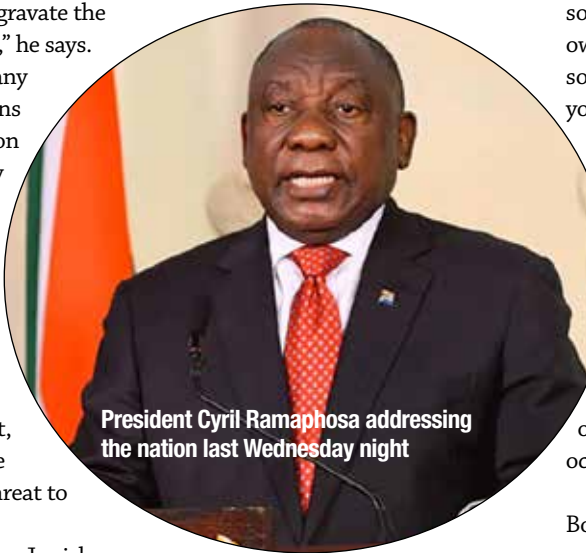
yet been reached, new cases are rapidly increasing in hospitals, and healthcare facilities are fast being stretched to capacity. The winter season may well aggravate the threat even further," he says.

"The lifting of many legislated restrictions leaves the population and the community now largely reliant on behavioural demands to prevent infection. Unfortunately, changing people's behaviour is notoriously difficult, compounded by the invisibility of the threat to health.

"The South African Jewish public has, up to now, been spared the horror of this formidable disease – loved ones carted off to hospitals, isolated, and perhaps even suffering a lonely stay in intensive care and even worse, a lonely death. New York and London experienced it. More than ever, what we do now could, to a large extent, forestall this.

"We simply have to devote ourselves to the precautions of avoiding social gatherings of any sort, practising social distancing, wearing masks conscientiously in

public places, and washing hands thoroughly when coming from outside the home. Now is the hour for those simple practices and



President Cyril Ramaphosa addressing the nation last Wednesday night

social responsibility."

Professor Heather Zar, the chairperson of the department of paediatrics and child health at Red Cross War Memorial Children's Hospital, who specialises in the care of children with respiratory diseases, says, "Everyone needs to consider the risk-benefit of what they do. Every time you go to a shop, visit a hotel, go to a casino, and so on, you are placing yourself and others at increased risk for getting the virus.

"Those who are at high risk

should not be doing these activities. For example, elderly people should not be going to the shops, hairdresser, theatre, and so on. It's safest to remain in your own home. Also, if you live with someone who is at high risk, then you should not do these activities.

"People should definitely keep away from crowded places. If you must go to the shops, then do so while protecting yourself as best as possible. Group gatherings, including religious gatherings, should be avoided. There have been several reports of a lot of transmission and disease occurring in these settings."

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) is working to heighten awareness about ignoring restrictions as the pandemic nears its peak.

"The president's speech on 17 June signified a new phase of government's response to the pandemic. He has acknowledged the economic suffering of our citizens, and has removed the draconian measures previously employed to protect us against COVID-19. In so doing, he has shifted the responsibility of protecting ourselves against this deadly virus to individuals,

Continued on page 4>>

Torah Thought

Visiting the sick good for our spiritual health

There is a fundamental *mitzvah* that is alluded to in this week's *parsha*. When Moshe addresses the Jewish people in the stand-off against the rebel faction led by Korach, he says the following, "If these die like the death of all men, and the visiting of all men is visited upon them, then it is not Hashem Who has sent me." (Numbers 16:29)

The Talmud in Nedarim 39B discusses these mysterious words. What is Moshe referring to when he says, "the visiting of all men is visited upon them"?

The Talmud explains that this alludes to the *mitzvah* of *bikkur cholim* – visiting the sick.

What exactly does this *mitzvah* entail, and what are some of the benefits we reap from it?

Torah authorities tell us that there are two main components of this *mitzvah*. First, we must take care of the needs of the ill person. This entails making sure that their health is looked after, and that they have adequate food and clothing. The Talmud recounts a story of the great Rabbi Akiva, who visited a sick student and took care to clean the room of its dust. This helped the student to recover. Furthermore, often the extra effort can make

a difference to a person's recovery.

Second, we must daven for the ill person. When we plead with Hashem, he recognises that the fate of the ill person is in divine hands, and thereby invokes divine compassion. Our rabbis teach us that as Hashem, so-to-speak, visits the sick, the divine presence is more concentrated above the bed of the ill person, and therefore it's particularly powerful to daven in their room.

Those who perform this *mitzvah* acquire four main benefits.

In Parshas Vayeira, our rabbis teach that Hashem visited Abraham after his *bris*. This means that one who practices *bikkur cholim* is in fact acting like Hashem, who is the epitome of kindness and love. This is a fulfilment of the *mitzvah* of walking in Hashem's way.

Performance of this *mitzvah* on a regular basis also helps you to become a kinder and more considerate person as the classic work, the Sefer ha-Chinuch, explains it – a person is influenced by the activities he involves himself in.

The commentator, Kli Yakar, adds that visiting the sick reminds us of our mortality, which serves as a stimulus to improve our ways.

Rav Avigdor Miller says that when we see others with an illness absent in ourselves, we acquire an appreciation for the myriad kindnesses that Hashem performs daily with our bodies.

Hashem should bless us with health especially in these difficult times, and let us try, albeit from a distance, to fulfil this vital *mitzvah*.

Rabbi Yonatan Landau, Ohr Somayach Savoy



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Pretoria’s Jaffa old age home hit by coronavirus

TALI FEINBERG

Residents and staff at the Jaffa Home for the Jewish Aged in Pretoria are “anxious and fearful” following a coronavirus outbreak at the home over the past week. Twenty-six of its 79 residents have tested positive, and six among 88 staff members.



Este Coetzee and Dikeledi Madisha delivering goodies to residents

“We are pulling together, getting on with things, and hoping to contain it,” says Jaffa Director Mark Isaacs.

The majority of those who tested positive are asymptomatic, and their condition is being monitored regularly for any change. Two residents had mild respiratory symptoms at the time of diagnosis.

Four residents are in now in hospital. One was admitted after a regular screening found that his condition had worsened. Subsequently, three more were admitted as an extra precaution due to their comorbidities.

On 15 March, Jaffa went into early lockdown in conjunction with the guidelines set up by the Chevrah Kadisha and other Jewish homes around the country. And, just like the Glendale Home for the Intellectually Disabled and Highlands House for

the Jewish Aged in Cape Town, it’s unclear how COVID-19 managed to fight its way inside.

Under this strict lockdown, Isaacs says, “We reduced staff trips in and out by rearranging shifts and having more stay on the premises for a full seven-day shift, and then changing shift the following week. All staff was monitored on a daily basis when entering and leaving the home.”

However, the coronavirus problem at Jaffa was picked up by accident. “A resident required admission to a local private health facility on 16 June for an unrelated medical ailment, underwent routine pre-admission testing for coronavirus infection, and was found to be positive,” says Isaacs. “No clinical suspicion of coronavirus infection was present



Nurse Hilda Moselakgomo dispensing medication

prior to admission. She has subsequently been discharged back to Jaffa in a stable condition.”

On 17 June, the home was notified of the positive result. “The management committee, all staff, and residents were subsequently informed of the situation. The home went into ‘full lockdown’, where residents confine themselves to their rooms, and relevant government departments and communal groups were notified.

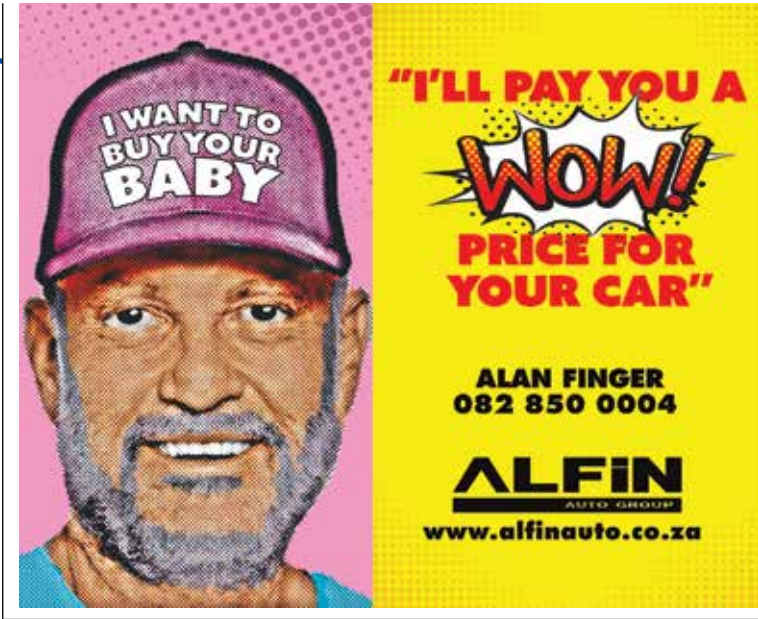
“Testing was arranged on the premises for all staff and residents using a private laboratory, and all costs of non-medical-aid testing was carried by the facility. The testing process was assisted by an infectious disease nursing specialist made available to the home, and expedited by the pathologist working at the private laboratory concerned. Testing began on 17 June, and was concluded on 18 June. At the time of testing, there was no clinical suspicion of COVID-infection in any of the staff or residents,” he says.

Each resident’s own doctor was informed of their result, and management of each specific resident was individualised accordingly. Twice daily screening of all staff and residents for symptoms was initiated. A nursing matron is recording all vital statistics, including oxygen saturation measurements, regularly throughout the day to screen for deterioration or new symptoms and to make sure any symptoms or anomalies are reported to a doctor.

All residents and staff are required to wear masks at all times, and deep cleaning and sanitising is taking place continuously

All visits to the gate are now prohibited, shopping outside has stopped, and goods brought into the home are made available only after cleaning and quarantine. Members of the management committee are assisting with the procurement of items residents need.

All non-essential staff have been encouraged to stay at home until they have tested negative. Staff who tested



positive were sent home to self-isolate for 14 days. They will return to work only after this time and if they test negative.

Residents, families, and staff were informed of their results as soon as they became available. While in their rooms, all the residents’ needs have been met, including meals provided in disposable containers.

“Staff use full PPE [personal protective equipment] during interactions with positive residents, including masks, visors, gloves, aprons, and ponchos. There is one resident per room, and couples with different results have been isolated separately,” says Isaacs.

“An online meeting was held with facilities around South Africa confronted by the same concerns. Information was shared, and our practices differ minimally from those elsewhere.”

The home has also procured additional PPE, oxygen concentrators, and other equipment. Its occupational therapy department has helped with exercises and activities for residents.

To support the residents through this period, Isaacs says messages of support can be sent to jaffa.org.za, where one can also donate. “Above all, please pray for our well-being.”

Meanwhile, all the residents of Glendale in Cape Town have come through the 14-day quarantine period unscathed, and are doing well. “Of the 21 residents who tested positive for the virus, 20 showed symptoms, and at any stage of the two weeks, up to four residents required oxygen. As of Monday, 22 June, which was day 14, they are all off oxygen, and many are no longer showing symptoms,” says the home’s chairperson, Judith Cohen.

“We have been told that once we have passed day 12 to 14, we should be out of the ‘danger zone.’ We are still carefully monitoring residents and are starting to consider whether we can move from ‘room lockdown’ to ‘unit lockdown’,” she says. “COVID-19 is fickle, and there is a possibility of it entering the home again. However, for now, all our residents are clinically stable. It is a miracle.”

Community unites in eye of the storm

>>Continued from page 1

“The Chev is unique in being one of the only Jewish organisations dealing with residential-care facilities and financial-assistance services. The Chev is 70% private-donor funded, with the state being an almost non-existent funder. We are dealing with a black-swan event that has an impact on our organisation in every way,” Tomson said.

Present at the meeting were representatives of the SAJBD from Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Cape Town, and Pretoria; Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein; the South African Zionist Federation; the Chevrah Kadisha; the South African Board of Jewish Education; Yeshiva College; the South African Rabbinical Association; the Union of Orthodox Synagogues; the Union for Progressive Judaism;

Hatzolah; the Community Security Organisation; and the South African Union of Jewish Students.

“What has been so heartwarming throughout this challenging period is our communal unity,” the chief rabbi said. “All the different parts of our community – welfare and security organisations, schools, and shuls – have worked together for the common good. It’s this spirit of partnership, this unity of purpose, that gives us the strength and motivation to confront any challenge. Our unity is the heart of who we are as South African Jewry, and I’m so proud of all our communal leaders and organisations. Truly, what a blessing and privilege it is for all of us to be part of this precious South African Jewish community.”

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Anger at sudden plans to close Herzlia’s Constantia campus

TALI FEINBERG

The Cape Town Jewish community is reeling after an eleventh-hour email on the afternoon of Friday, 19 June, announcing the closure of United Herzlia Schools’ [UHS] Constantia pre-primary and primary school in December 2020.

The email had the subject line, “UHS End of Term Message”, giving no hint of its subject matter. In it, the school’s executive director, Andries van Renssen, wrote, “We are making a very difficult decision to close our campus in Constantia as well as the Kerem Pre-Primary School at the end of December 2020. We are embarking on a broad-based Section 189A consultation process geared at addressing capacity requirements across all our schools.”

This was the first time that parents and staff had any idea that such a decision was in the works. Van Renssen attributed the move to “continuously declining student numbers, a reduction in the overall size of the Jewish population due to emigration, and ever lower birth numbers [which has an impact on the potential number of students into the future].

“In addition to this, a very poor economic environment has had an equally significant impact,” he wrote. “While not directly linked, this has been exacerbated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are deeply aware of the impact on our community, students, and teachers, and while this isn’t easy, it’s very necessary.”

Van Renssen, who joined the school’s management in October 2019 in the newly-created position of executive director, told the SA Jewish Report, “United Herzlia Schools has a R20-million budget deficit. This number is forecast for 2021, and many different factors can influence it, such as inflation, fee increases, and enrolments.

“It remains unsustainable, and requires prudent, if not very hard, decisions to address it. Declining student numbers are a significant driver of this, along with declining levels of fundraising from the broader community. The decision to close at the end of 2020 provides six months for parents and the community to manage the changes that are needed. It’s important to bear in mind that all students will have places at other Herzlia campuses.”

The parents don’t see it so simply. “We have been completely blindsided,” said Professor Amanda Weltman, who has children at the school. She believes that its closure will herald the end of the Cape Town Jewish community. “They are cutting off the streams to preserve the river. But without streams, a river dries up. If you cut off the primary schools, there is no long-term community,” she said.

Another parent, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, “We are devastated, as we specifically bought a house in walking distance of the school, and now our dreams of raising our kids in the suburbs and giving them a Jewish education



are shattered.” Her sentiments are echoed by many other parents who moved to the area because of proximity to the school. Founded in 1973, the school has about 244 children in total (not all of them Jewish) and also houses the Constantia Hebrew Congregation, a centre-point of the Southern Suburbs community. It’s unclear what will happen to the shul.

Explaining why the announcement was made so suddenly and over email, Van Renssen said, “There is never a ‘right time’ or ‘right way’ to provide news of this nature. The school will continue to be open, transparent, and direct in its communication.”

In a video message to parents on Monday, 22 June, he elaborated that the leadership felt a Friday afternoon at the end of term was best in order to inform staff before the holidays.

The announcement comes after another Herzlia pre-primary school in Milnerton, north of the city, was closed at the end of 2019. United Herzlia Schools marks its 80th anniversary this year.

In response to consternation about the lack of consultation with staff and parents, Van Renssen said, “The school has commenced

with this consultation process. It’s important to understand that the legal requirements of a S189 process require the school to adopt a very defined approach. Consultation will continue with all stakeholders over the next 60 days.”

He said consultation with staff has commenced, and options are being discussed regarding the future of the school grounds. Parents are wondering why this most spacious of all Herzlia primary campuses is being sacrificed, especially with the current need for social distancing.

A group of deeply concerned parents have drawn up a petition, asking the UHS for transparency in how it came to this decision and why they were never alerted to the situation or included in the decision-making process. “This announcement came like a bolt out of the blue, at the end of a difficult term and in the midst of a pandemic,” they say.

“This, after the financials at the last annual general meeting (AGM) held on 20 May 2020 as signed off by the chairperson and treasurer

stated, ‘The board members have reviewed the school’s cashflow forecast for the year to 31 December 2020 and, in the light of this review and the current financial position, they are satisfied that the school has or has access to adequate resources to continue operations for the foreseeable future.’ This was one month before they announced closure of the Constantia campus.”

Said Van Renssen, “This is a technical accounting discussion. However, it doesn’t in any way address the R20-million budget deficit. Further clarity will be given during consultation meetings.”

The petition against the closure is specific: “We want a clear explanation as to how a dire financial collapse occurred within a matter of four weeks, why there was no consultation with the stakeholders, how this could have been announced when admissions to public schools for 2021 are already closed, and how all of this fits into the UHS constitution,” which calls for stakeholder engagement and ethical leadership.

The petitioners ask that “the decision to close the schools be rescinded until such a time as adequate stakeholder engagement has occurred, answers as to the financial situation are made clear, and that the school remain open until at least 31 December 2021 to allow those parents who choose not to travel to other UHS campuses to find appropriate alternative placements for their children.”

As a parent, Weltman said, “If you are looking to protect something, you need to look two generations forward. You can’t cut back the branches of the tree and then expect to get new seeds. We are a substantial school and have a highly intelligent parent body that could have at least tried to find a creative solution for the school’s sustainability.”

She predicts that with no primary school in the area, this community will either assimilate or emigrate. Crowding more children into Herzlia’s other schools will lead to larger classes – during a pandemic – and these families will also look for greener pastures. “We feel that we have been thrown overboard to save others, and this will have long-lasting ramifications. It affects us all.”



Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein and Rabbi Sean Cannon (Head of Jewish Life at Herzlia Schools) at school with the Herzlia Constantia pupils (2019)

Lifting of restrictions makes vigilance personal

>>Continued from page 2

families, and communities,” says SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn.

“It’s painfully ironic that at a time of escalating infections, restrictions have been eased and even removed. Thus far, our community has, to a large extent, been spared the horrifying death tolls experienced by our fellow Jewish communities in countries such as France, the United Kingdom, and in New York. However, to avoid an increase in numbers and to ensure the safety of our community, it’s up to us to be vigilant,” she says.

“We need to take responsibility and ensure that we practise physical distancing, wear masks, and stay home as much as possible. Now is the time to implement these essential safety measures. Let’s not have regrets, like so many Jewish communities in Europe and the United States. Let’s not have losses that will haunt us forever.

“As the SAJBD is concerned that our community is suffering from COVID-19 fatigue, and in light of the fact that the economy is returning to normal, the SAJBD has embarked on a campaign for us to take responsibility for ourselves and each other. The campaign will go under the hashtag #InOurHands, and we call on our community to join us in spreading this important message at this time of

the pandemic.” Her comments come as South Africa reached more than 100 000 cases of coronavirus infection, accumulating more than 4 000 cases each day. Hatzolah Chairperson Lance Abramson urged the community to stay home whenever possible. “Hatzolah is witnessing an ongoing escalation in infections in the community based on the COVID-19-positive patients we are monitoring at home and those we have transported to hospital,” he says. “The number of patients being monitored at home increased from 45 last week Thursday, to 70 yesterday [Sunday, 21 June], and 80 today. With the surge of COVID-19 cases in our community, now more than ever we need to stay safe at home wherever possible.” The director of the Community Security Organisation (CSO) in Cape Town, Loren Raize, says the organisation is using Hatzolah’s programme to monitor COVID-19-positive Cape Town Jewish community members. “June shows the largest number of reported cases within the Cape community, currently at 69 [including cases at Jewish facilities and care homes], and that’s only the cases reported to us. Of these, more than half were placed on the CSO Wellness Program, with the majority being on-

boarded in the past two weeks,” she says. “The relaxation in restrictions is having an effect on our community. We can see this in the case numbers. We urge those who can continue to stay at home to do so, and to act responsibly in public and in your homes by following the guidelines.” Mike Abel, a Cape Town community member and the chief executive of M&C Saatchi Abel, has spoken out against the lockdown, and now feels that, as responsible adults “we need to take full ownership and accountability for our decisions. At the same time, we need to unemotionally understand the real threats versus the perceived ones. This is a marathon, not a sprint. We need to survive economically while no medical option is available. “I won’t preach to others how they should live their lives, but I would suggest erring on the side of caution when choosing wants versus needs socially. For example, if you want to eat out, and the restaurant provides adequate social distancing, then you must make that call. We are all in this together, so that should guide our behaviour. But don’t lose sight of the overwhelming survival rate, as that may help in making the right decisions to protect your health and protect your income. It’s not an either/or situation, it’s both.”

Continued shul closure a sign of rising infection rate

JORDAN MOSHE

“The fact that we are keeping our shuls closed should be the clearest statement about the dangers of the current increased infection rates,” said Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein this week.

Goldstein was commenting in the wake of his decision that shuls in South Africa will reopen only when there is a decline in the rate of new infections in the country.

“We would love nothing more than to open our shuls, which are so important to us spiritually, emotionally, and communally,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*. “We aren’t doing so, and that should be a clear sign to us all how careful we should be in all areas to protect lives and the health of the people around us.”

For the foreseeable future, experts will keep a close eye on daily infection rates, and will advise the community when it’s safe to open shul doors.

The chief rabbi’s announcement came after weeks of agonising over whether to reopen shuls. This latest decision was taken after extensive consultation with Dr Richard Friedland, the chief executive of Netcare, and Professor Barry Schoub, the founding director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, who outlined the criterion for reopening shuls.

“We now have a solid, transparent medical criterion for the reopening of shuls, which has been drafted by two of the country’s top medical experts in the field,” Goldstein told the *SA Jewish*

Report.

Goldstein said that the model reflected international standards, creating a key marker for the point at which the health risks of returning to shul started to diminish. At present, the infection rate is increasing daily. It’s only when experts agree that the rate is in significant decline that the green light will be given to shuls.

“With the guidance of Dr Friedland, Prof Schoub, and a team of epidemiologists and actuaries, we will watch the trajectory of the disease closely and monitor the numbers so that we will know when things change,” Goldstein says. “This gives our community an objective and transparent criterion formulated by medical experts for return to shul. The community can track developments. There is no dependence on individual discretion. It’s all about the numbers.”

In the lead-up to Sunday’s announcement, Goldstein spent hours in consultation

over Zoom with community rabbis, shul chairpersons, and shul committee members from across the country to discuss the implications of the decision. More than 80 rabbis and 90 others were in attendance, collectively expressing widespread support

for the move.

“There was consensus that this is the best way forward. The unity, agreement, and team spirit has been amazing,” he said.

The strategy also makes provision for how

shuls will reopen when it is deemed safe for them to do so.

“Addressing the how as well as the when is equally important,” said Goldstein. “Even when we do return to shul, it will have to be under



proper health protocols. It will be essential for shuls to implement them.”

Professor Efraim Kramer, an expert in emergency medicine, has been appointed to draft and implement the relevant protocols and procedures which will apply to shuls. With a specialty in mass gatherings, Kramer is one of FIFA’s top medical officers, and recently oversaw all of the medical operations for the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia.

Under Kramer’s management, a committee comprising key representatives of the Beth Din, Union of Orthodox Synagogues, Hatzolah, and the Community Security Organisation will oversee the process.

“Each shul will have a COVID marshal, a responsible team leader who will be appointed to ensure the shul’s compliance with all protocols,” said Goldstein. “Prof Kramer has agreed to train them, and will make sure that they monitor our shuls on an ongoing basis.

“He will personally undertake onsite

inspections of our shuls to help set up the infrastructure and processes and ascertain each shul’s readiness. Every shul that wants to open when the situation improves will have to meet him.”

Kramer has agreed to travel to each shul individually, including those in Durban and Cape Town. Onsite inspection will involve an evaluation of the shul’s size, spacing, community size, and will include proper training in sanitisation procedures.

This approach is one of the best under the circumstances, Schoub said.

“The model has been developed by a team of experts, and is very stable,” he says. “It reflects a position which is most appropriate under the circumstances.”

Models aren’t infallible, he cautioned. “They do have a certain degree of latitude, but are essential for planning. We have a scientific background available for decision making, and our basic idea is to wait until we’re over the peak before we decide it’s safe to go back to shul.”

Schoub stressed that the decision was based on hard scientific data, and would rely on the collection of more data as time passes, including hospital admissions, tests results, and the like.

“Things can and do change, but the optimistic scenario is that Johannesburg will peak in July, with Cape Town peaking sooner,” Schoub said. “It may well be that shuls in Cape Town will open sooner, but we will have to monitor the situation closely. We need to address this nationally, regionally, even by suburb if need be.”

Goldstein expressed his confidence in the expertise of Schoub, Friedland, and Kramer.

“Not only are they of high calibre professionally, all three of them are regular shul-goers,” he said. “They understand what’s at stake here, and truly appreciate the value of shul.”



Photos: Ilan Ossendryver

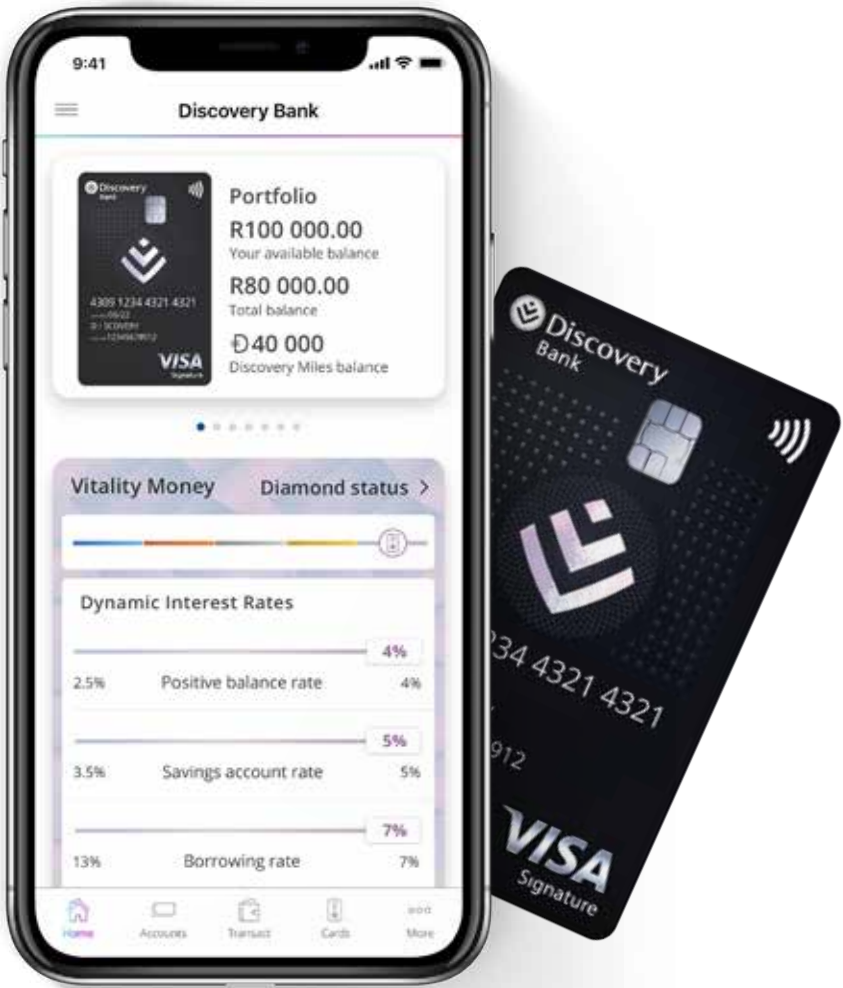


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In the eye of the storm

Suddenly, the number of people we know who have tested positive for COVID-19 is increasing daily. We have spoken ad nauseum about the upcoming spike in coronavirus cases, but now it’s real and very distressing.

I guess this is because until now, the community was mostly vigilant and careful, and we didn’t think we would really be harmed by it. But many of us got tired of the stress of lockdown, and began getting lax and taking chances that were unnecessary. And many of us didn’t take those chances, and just so happened to be related to someone who may have contracted the virus unwittingly and passed it on.

Let me say at the outset, there is no blame here. I don’t believe that there is one single person in our community or in the greater society who wants to get sick or make someone else sick. It’s that simple. Nobody, even if they did decide to go to their best friends for a Shabbos lunch last week, did so with bad intentions. They were understandably sick and tired of lockdown. We all are.

Others decided that after all this time in isolation, what harm could one poker night do? Well, it clearly can and did do harm.

The Linksfield Clinic has now had to open a fourth COVID-19 ward, and our doctors are snowed under with people testing positive and needing help. The numbers that are coming back positive within and without our community are simply overwhelming. While many are asymptomatic and others a little sick, some are extremely ill.

Hatzolah, which has now started a special service to help COVID-19 patients who are at home, is experiencing a doubling in numbers every day. And it’s not even getting close to all those in need.

Is it too late to start taking extra precautions? As long as you are still healthy, then it absolutely isn’t too late. Right now is the time to stop taking any more risks.

And, if you have coronavirus, there is nothing to be ashamed of. Tell everyone, so that if there is any chance that you may have infected someone, they can be tested and act on it. There is no shame in getting flu, so why is there shame in getting this coronavirus? There is no shame in getting sick. Anyone who is going to shame you should be ashamed of themselves. The only way to stop the spread of this virus is to stop taking chances and to speak out if you have the virus.

This week, a certain school outside of the community sent an entire grade home for two weeks because one of the children in that grade tested positive for the virus. The child concerned wasn’t identified because, as the principal said in the late-night message, she didn’t want the child or his family to be stigmatised. It sounded noble. However, every one of those healthy children who were sent home to continue online learning has a family, including perhaps brothers and sisters at other schools.

So, where does that leave the family and the children at other schools? Do all the children have to stay home because the child at this school was infected? What of parents who go out to work? Could they be at risk of contracting or transmitting the virus? Who can tell, because without knowing who has the virus, there is no way of knowing if the other 30 to 60 children spent any time with him or her. If we knew who the child was, we could offer support to that family, and clarify which other children are at risk.

I don’t believe there is anything noble about keeping COVID-19 a secret, and there is nothing to be ashamed of in getting it. Surely, with so many of our community and people we know contracting the virus, this is blatantly clear.

I always believe that you should be ashamed of something you do with bad intentions. If you purposely harm someone or damage something, you should be ashamed. But getting sick from a virus that is invisible and undiscerning is nothing to be ashamed of. Nobody should be stigmatised because of getting sick.

Meanwhile, as the numbers of infected are stacking up, there is so much to be proud of in our community.

First, I know we have been quite tough on the proposals for opening shuls, but clearly the chief rabbi has found the best solution. Through deep consultation with some of the country’s top experts – who happen to be shul-going members of the community – he has decided not to rush opening shuls until it’s actually safe to do so.

He has also put in place a team of people to manage the return when it happens.

The action of our community since the pandemic hit South Africa has been incredible. The leadership ensured that our schools closed and then our shuls, long before other communities and the government acted.

Our communal leadership has been on top of safeguarding our community from economic, medical, and social damage. And this week, once again, they gathered to find ways to ensure that we stop taking risks, and maintain our own safety and security.

It makes me feel confident to know that we are so united as a community in trying to survive this pandemic, no matter what it throws at us.

Let’s discard any stigmas, protect each other, and follow the guidance of those in the know to ensure that we make it safely to the other side.

Stay safe, and Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor



Challenging sexist culture in our boys

OPINION

ROZANNE SACK AND WENDY HENDLER

On a chilly Saturday night, we logged in to a Zoom panel discussion with 40 boys and 40 girls from two very well-known private schools in Johannesburg. The discussion was on gender-based violence, and they were in the middle of a fascinating exercise.

Each of the boys and girls were asked to raise 10 fingers in response to 10 statements. They were asked to lower a finger if any of the statements applied to them. Transfixed, we watched as the statements were read out, including: “You think twice about what you are wearing before going to the shops to avoid getting catcalled”; “You always have to go to the bathroom with at least one friend”; “Your bad mood or moodiness has been blamed on your hormones or gender”; “You know someone that shares your gender who has been sexually assaulted”. One by one, the girls’ fingers went down, while the majority of boys still held up 10 fingers at the end of the exercise.

We were asked to sit on this panel to offer support to these amazing Grade 11s and 12s should anyone become triggered or need help after the discussion. As the discussion unfolded, we became aware of existing in an almost parallel universe, getting a very privileged glimpse into the world of our youth who are determined to make changes.

Words such as “patriarchy”, “toxic masculinity”, “rape culture”, “misogyny”, and “#menaretrash” bounded around this forum like a ping pong ball, and as we scrambled to keep up, it became clear that these issues have been around for decades, albeit under different guises and movements.

The term “gender-based violence”, has become the banner under which an age-old societal scourge exists. These amazing young men and women are now tackling it head on. As I listened, I felt a deep sadness for this generation. Their world is complex and dangerous, made even more difficult by having to live their lives on social media, vulnerable and exposed.

Patriarchy is a system in which men hold the power and subjugate women. It’s rooted in the belief that men are superior to women, and that they need to dominate them. The younger generation has identified this as the underlying cause of gender-based violence, and they are trying to change the narrative by encouraging men to start questioning the unspoken rules that have existed in their families for generations.

It seems that by starting to undo these preconceived ideas about women and their place in the world, a number of other issues start to unravel. The primary issue is toxic masculinity, which is spotlighted as a major contributor to violence against women and girls. Toxic masculinity refers to the traditional stereotype of men as strong, dominant, fearless, unemotional, and sexually aggressive. Patriarchal society socialises boys to act in strong, “masculine”, and aggressive ways. This behaviour is then normalised and excused as “boys just being boys”.

How many times have you heard a boy being told, “man up”, “don’t be a sissy”, “don’t throw like a girl”, “don’t wear pink”, “boys don’t cry”, “score the girls”, “don’t be a snitch”, “don’t show weakness”, and “play rugby”?

Listening to the panel discussion with the students, it became evident how damaging this “man box” is to the boys of this generation. Many of them either take part in or would like to take part in cultural extra murals, but are scared of being labelled by their peers as “a girl”. There do, however, appear to be an increasing number of boys who are willing to challenge these notions, who are tolerant of diversity and more comfortable



with expressing their emotions. It’s these boys who are trying to eradicate the ingrained culture of patriarchy and resultant toxic masculinity.

Toxic masculinity is a violation of the dignity of manhood. It has a damaging effect on how the average male lives his life by influencing his expectation of behavioural norms. While we cannot excuse the horrendous rate of femicide and gender-based violence in our country, we need to understand the factors that underlie this epidemic if we are to make any meaningful strides towards change.

The panel discussion touched on the movement #menaretrash, and it was fascinating to hear some boys challenge other boys who wanted to disassociate from this hashtag. They were asked whether they actively challenged patriarchy and toxic masculinity in their own and their friend’s behaviour. For example, would they call out a friend in public who is objectifying girls by rating them on a scale of 1 to 10, or who is making sexist remarks and jokes that degrade girls? It was heartwarming for us to hear some of the ideas being put forward to begin changing the narrative.



Ideas such as encouraging boys to challenge the traditional images of manhood that keep them from taking a stand; or asking how they could help if they suspected a case of abuse or assault by not buying into excuses that sexual violence is due to stress or intoxication or drug use.

Boys were encouraged by girls on the panel to look in the mirror, and question all their attitudes and actions that help support the objectification and de-valuing of women. They were challenged to be a role model for their peers by teaching with words and actions that being a man actually means respecting women, learning from them and standing up for them, and speaking out in support of their rights. It was proposed that healthy masculinity means being honest with yourself about your own feelings, needs, and desires. It also means treating all others with the kindness and respect that you deserve and not using your size, strength, or power to get what you want from others.

It’s our greatest hope that these discussions start to take place in our community and our schools, with the youth taking the initiative to set up the discussion groups. It’s through this type of introspection and dialogue that real change can start to take root. We challenge you all to start these discussions in your homes or workplace, shul, or school. Societal change can happen only when each person takes responsibility for their own attitude and behaviour. By changing ourselves, we change our world.

- Rozanne Sack and Wendy Hendler are the co-founders and directors of Koleinu, the helpline for victims of abuse in the South African Jewish community.
- The helpline number is 011 264 0341, operating on Monday and Wednesday from 09:00 to 24:00, and Tuesday and Thursday from 07:00 to 22:00.



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- 2015 STOCK MARKET SELL OFF
- 2020 COVID-19 PANDEMIC

US peace plan secures sovereignty for Israelis and Palestinians



DAN DIKER

International audiences have been fed a heavy diet of misleading, factually false, and even propagandistic news and commentary on the United States administration’s Mid-East peace plan.

Facts and context are needed. In the framework of the US plan, Israel has declared its intention, starting on 1 July 2020, to replace military law with civilian law in about 30% of the territories that lie east of the 1949 armistice lines, including the strategic Jordan Rift Valley. In these territories where Israeli civilian law may be applied, 500 000 Jews and 25 000 Palestinians live. Jewish and Arab residents of those areas will benefit from the application of Israeli civilian law.

There is a historical precedent. Israel applied Israeli law to the existentially critical Golan Heights in 1981, and to the strategically vital eastern part of Jerusalem in 1967. Today’s Arab Israeli citizens and residents in those areas will attest to their quality of life under Israeli law versus the status quo under previous Syrian and Jordanian law respectively.

This US plan grants Palestinians and Israelis rights and responsibilities, and provides a blueprint to solve the conflict.

First, a key correction of definition is necessary. Israel isn’t annexing anything. States that illegally conquer other states’ sovereign territory, for example Russia’s annexation of Crimea, or Turkey’s annexation of Northern Cyprus, are examples of unilateral annexation. Israel is applying civilian law to non-sovereign territories, particularly the existentially critical Jordan Rift Valley that it has controlled by international agreement since 1995.



Photo: Avshalom Sassoni

The US plan is the first viable blueprint for peace that gives the Palestinians the prospect of becoming the first Arab Middle East “start-up nation” without threatening the security of Israel, its Jewish majority “start-up nation” next door.

The Palestinian Authority’s (PA’s) record hasn’t inspired confidence in its peaceful intentions. The PA assigned \$350 million (R6 trillion) of its 2019 budget to a terror-incentive programme financing pensions for incarcerated terrorists or those killed while carrying out terror assaults and their families. The Palestinian leadership and affiliated NGOs in Ramallah have actively co-lead the international economic and political warfare campaign against Israel known as the global Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement.

South Africans may remember that the Palestinian-driven global BDS crusade was launched and led by Yasser Arafat and the PA leadership at the United Nations-sanctioned Durban World Conference Against Racism in 2001. Durban called for a “policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state ... and the full cessation of all links between all states and Israel ... and its perpetration of its racist crimes against humanity including ethnic cleansing and acts of genocide”.

Today, the PA leadership, Palestinian school books, and official media have continued to demonise Israel and Jews including accusing the Jewish State of blood libels. Most recently, in March 2020, PA Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh accused Israeli soldiers of purposely infecting Palestinians with coronavirus. This behaviour has reminded Israelis to secure themselves first, and make concessions second.

The current US plan has also pre-empted the PA’s past strategy of vetoing far-reaching Israeli territorial offers for yet a better one. The PA rejected the past six US mediated offers to end the conflict. Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered 92% of the West Bank at Camp David in 2000, with additional land swaps, and Ehud Olmert offered to concede 94% at Annapolis in 2008, with swaps. The PA vetoed each one, including Israel’s vital security requirements, waiting for a better deal. Israelis have become wary of the intentions of the Palestinian leadership.

The US plan reverses this failed peace paradigm. It begins by recognising Israel’s wall to wall security consensus, and Jewish legal and diplomatic rights.

In the framework of the US plan, Israel has said it may apply Israeli civilian law in the 50% of Area C, which Israel has controlled by agreement under the Oslo Accords that the Palestine Liberation Organization and the State of Israel first signed in 1993.

Under that power sharing agreement, Israel has already conceded to the PA either full or functional control of 40% (Areas A and B of the West Bank where more than 98% of Palestinians live), and 100% of Gaza. What remains to be shared under the US plan is 60% of the West Bank, referred to as historic Judea and Samaria for Israelis, of which Israel has agreed in principle to concede an additional 50% plus Gaza and land swaps from the Western Negev.

This latest territorial package paves the way for a viable and potentially prosperous \$50 billion (\$866 billion) start-up Palestinian nation. This is a high-risk venture for Israel. Neighbouring failed states such as Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and the

Hamas dominated Gaza Strip have effectively been kidnapped and controlled by the Iranian regime.

So, how does Israel secure itself while being called upon to make room for a 23rd Arab state that risks becoming another Iranian-controlled terror state?

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s call to apply Israeli law to the Jordan Valley as the first step. The Netanyahu-Gantz unity government has merely operationalised the Oslo Accords “security-first” peace vision laid out by former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin based on the non-negotiable territorial demand of every Israeli Prime Minister since 1967 of retaining or applying sovereignty to the Jordan Valley. Observers will remember that Rabin declared to the full Knesset assembly on the eve of the signing of the Oslo interim accords in October 1995 that, “Israel’s security border will be located in the Jordan Valley in the broadest sense of that term”.

Rabin’s former commander, General Yigal Allon, who would become Rabin’s foreign minister, had called for Israeli sovereignty to be applied to the entire Jordan Rift Valley following the 1967 war, after Israel barely short-circuited an Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian planned invasion. Readers may remember that scores of Jordanian tanks crossed the West Bank westward in a fierce tank battle opposite Israeli forces with the intention of annihilating the territorially indefensible Jewish State.

Therefore, Netanyahu’s intention in the US peace framework to apply Israeli law from the outset to the Jordan Rift Valley and its 4 500 foot (1 371m) high ridge that dominates Israel’s coastal cities and protects Ben Gurion Airport reflects Israel’s need to survive in an unstable and dangerous Middle East. The Palestinian leadership didn’t honour these iron-clad security needs in previous peace blueprints.

The US plan also formally recognises Israel’s legal rights to live and build east of the 1967 lines. This is an affirmation of what the 51 principal powers of the League of Nations, the legal predecessor to the United Nations, formally recognised and affirmed a century ago – the right of the Jewish people to reconstitute their national home in the geographical area of Palestine. It affirms Israel’s modern legal rights to what has been historically Jewish territory for the past 2 000 years. The US state department’s international jurists have refuted the former Carter-era administration’s position on Jewish housing in Judea and Samaria, thus reaffirming what every Israeli government since 1948 has understood to be Israel’s legal and diplomatic rights.

In sum, the US security-first peace plan paves the way for a secure, viable Palestinian state without threatening Israel in about 70% of the West Bank, with a \$50 billion (\$866 billion) state-development budget promised by the Arab states and the West. The PA started out on the wrong foot by boycotting the US administration, Israel, and the Arab states participating in the US Peace to Prosperity’s Bahrain economic workshop in May 2019.

It’s still not too late for Mahmoud Abbas and the PA leadership to learn from past mistakes, and pave the way for a secure, peaceful, and prosperous Palestinian future living next to an Israeli neighbour willing to help them achieve it.

• Dan Diker is a foreign policy research fellow at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs.

Celebrating 120 years of saving lives

As South Africa and the world struggles with the COVID-19 pandemic, Magen David Adom South Africa is celebrating more than 120 years as an autonomous humanitarian organisation. The organisation is holding a special online members meeting on 28 June in terms of clause 11 of its constitution. The name “Magen David Adom” (the Red Shield of David) was first used 121 years ago, during the Anglo Boer War in South Africa (1899-1902), as the name of the ambulance corps founded by Ben Zion Aaron in Johannesburg to assist the Boer forces.

Permission was given by President Paul Kruger of the South African Republic for the Red Star of David to be used as its insignia rather than the conventional Red Cross long before the establishment in 1930 of what today has become Magen David Adom in Israel.

Magen David Adom continued its humanitarian work in South Africa after the Boer War, providing life-saving support to the South African Jewish community and the community at large from 1902 until 1948. Its associated organisation, named the “Palestinian Soldiers Comforts Fund”, funded and provided aid for those in Israel prior to the country’s declaration of independence in 1948.

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SAVING
MORE
LIVES

Magen David Adom was founded in Tel Aviv in June 1930 in response to the riots of 1929, which made people realise that they needed first-aid services in emergencies.

Set up by seven public-spirited men, its first home was a shop on the corner of Rothschild and Nahalat Benyamin Streets, its only resource a small van converted into an ambulance and a few dozen volunteers.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, it was recognised by the mandate authorities as the Red Cross society of the country, and became the medical service of the Haganah, with Magen David Adom members serving as first-aiders alongside Haganah fighters.

With the foundation of the State of Israel in 1948, leading members of Magen David Adom were involved in setting up the medical corps of the Israeli Defense Forces

Get the full story in the SA Jewish Report next week.

NOTICE OF MEETING: MDA South Africa - conference of members in terms of clause 5 and clause 11 of the constitution of Magen David Adom in South Africa. This meeting is open only to members in good standing as at 28 June 2020, 14:00, who will have the right to vote. The results of the meeting will be published in the press.



ZOOM MEETING:
<https://zoom.us/j/9286056528?pwd=Wjd5T2huOURXS0R3cnFSckM3YjM2QT09> • Password: 928595

Antisemites salute Simone Kriel on social media

TALI FEINBERG

Amid general outrage over the antisemitic comments of Pretoria fitness enthusiast Simone Kriel on social media, a number of South Africans have expressed support for the hate-filled words she wrote.

On the *SA Jewish Report* Facebook page, Nomlanga Zuma wrote, “Simone Kriel, I salute you woman. Let’s expose the real truth. Dankie. Nkosi.”

John Slimmert wrote, “Everyone is being taken down for revealing the truth about Hitler. Hail him.” When community members criticised him, he wrote, “Do proper research and you’ll find out. History is told by the ...” (unclear), “Wicked you are,” and “Oh Jew, what have you done, you know what you’ve done,” with a devil emoji. These comments have since been deleted by the *SA Jewish Report*.

They were responding to Kriel’s social-media posts on 16 May, in which, in among a torrent of classic antisemitic accusations, she wrote, “The f***n Jews are greedy as f**k and they will wage war against countries and races based on lies and deception to get what they want. There is a special place in hell for them, and not even that is good enough for what they are doing to this world! 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.”

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has laid criminal charges against her.

Asked if Kriel’s supporters represented the views of a substantial number of South Africans, local antisemitism expert Professor Milton Shain said, “It seems to me this is a fringe group living in the world of social media. To what extent these voices reflect wider sentiment is difficult to know. What it does show is that the insidious world of the dark net is influencing a new generation in ways inconceivable only 10 years ago. It should also not be forgotten that Holocaust denial has a long history in South Africa on the far white right, as well among sections of the Muslim community.” Shain is also emeritus professor of History at the University of Cape Town.

“We can take it that only a small minority [support Kriel],” said SAJBD Associate Director David Saks. “Most of those who have commented or responded have been genuinely appalled. Nevertheless, there does appear to be a greater readiness by certain people to come out baldly and unapologetically with views they might have kept to themselves, say 10 years ago. It may be part of the general breakdown of civility in terms of how people in South Africa engage with one another, especially online.

“Then there is the current dire state of the economy and troubled state of the country in general,

which is engendering increased fear, frustration, and often paranoia, and with it a related need to find someone to blame,” he says.

“People with a far-right white-supremacist orientation in particular may be reaching the point where they feel they have nothing to lose, and hence are becoming progressively more reckless and in-your-face in the way they express themselves.”

Tali Nates, the director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, said, “I believe it’s a minority. However, the worry these days is the rise in racism, gender-based violence, antisemitism, xenophobia, homophobia, and ‘othering’ in many countries, including ours. This makes Holocaust and genocide education even more important now, as this history can help one to make connections to ethical situations today such as the issue of refugees, persecution, and mass atrocities.

“The South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation, through its three centres, is fully committed to confronting hate through education and the promotion of respect for human dignity. It’s important to learn lessons from the Holocaust and genocide, and to encourage all of us to become upstanders in our communities.”

It’s in this context that 98-year-old Holocaust survivor Ella Blumenthal wrote an open letter to Kriel, which has since gone viral. In the letter, she shares how, “I was about your age in

1945 when I was liberated from that pit of hell they called Bergen Belsen,” and that her whole family perished in the Holocaust.

“I would love to meet you when circumstances permit. Maybe I will tell you my story, and you will tell me yours. I know we will learn that far more unites us than divides us. And maybe together, Simone, we will find a way to shine light into our fractured world,” she wrote, among other things.

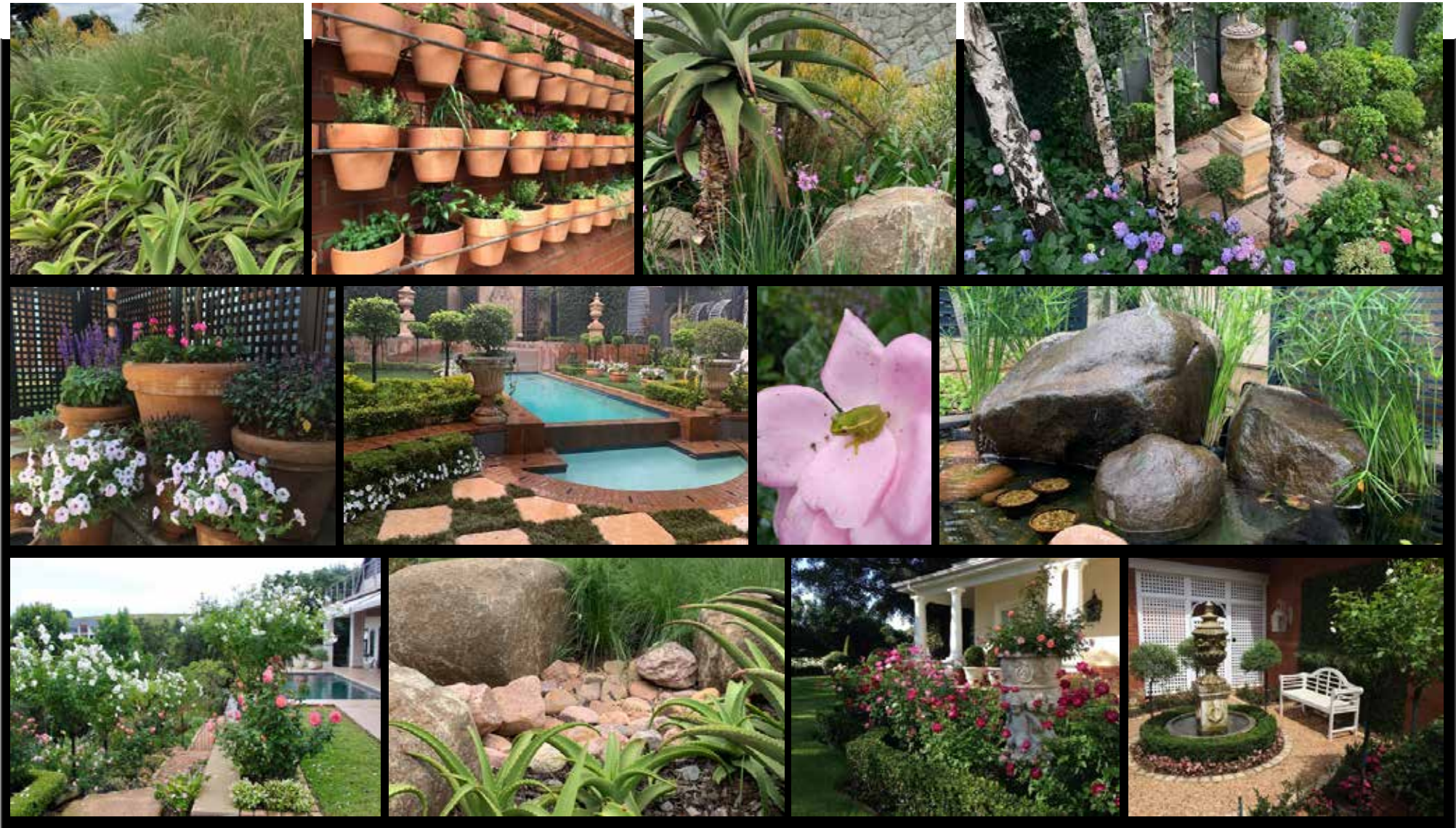
Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Blumenthal said, “At first, I was shocked to read her comments. Then I felt sad to think just how misguided she is. It occurred to me that it must be so awful to carry this hatred in her heart, that hate breeds hate, and that she is trapped in a web of deceitful lies. My first reaction was that I would like to meet her when it becomes possible to do so. After spending time with me, I’m hoping she will realise how poisoned she is and how deeply disturbing her comments are, not only to me, but to everyone of every race and religion.”

She agrees with the SAJBD’s approach of laying criminal charges. “The law has to take its course.

My approach is to communicate openly with her to try and make her understand how wrong she is, but the two approaches aren’t mutually exclusive.”

While some may question Blumenthal’s forgiving approach, she said, “I realised early in my life that you can’t heal hatred with hatred. I came to this country after getting married – not speaking the language, with no family, and deeply traumatised. When I started my own family, I knew that I had to live for them, and that I now had an extension of the family that I lost. I had no hatred in my heart at all, and that enabled me to live the rest of my life filled with love, positivity, and *joie de vivre*. So I wanted to show her compassion. In that way, she could learn from me that hatred will imprison her for the rest of her life.”

Blumenthal is happy that her message has been widely circulated, “because it’s a message that cannot be repeated enough. In the twilight of my days, I would like to spread a feeling of goodwill in order to try and combat racism, prejudice, and hate. If I can contribute to this in some small way, then I would have achieved something meaningful in my life.”



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From social backlash to upliftment: the picture that told a thousand words

NICOLA MILTZ

A powerful photograph taken during the nationwide lockdown shows a shirtless, scantily clothed homeless man dragging his tattered blanket down a desolate stretch of Long Street in Cape Town. As he walks, a huge billboard screams, “Stay Home”. The man is tauntingly greeted by a row of South African flags on his left as he nears the intersection of Orphan Lane on his right.

Local documentary photographer and filmmaker, Joshua Rubin, 23, was moved by the twisted irony of the visuals before him, and asked the man’s permission to take his picture.

A click later, and he believed he had captured a powerful image of a city ground to a halt that simultaneously encapsulated a stark reminder of poverty in one of the world’s most unequal countries.

Rubin went home, collected some clothes and food, and went back to find him.

“I asked him whether I could take him to a shelter, but he didn’t want that,” said Rubin.

“While I was editing, I asked my dad whether this image was too much.” He then asked his friend and fellow cinematographer, Chad Nathan, aka @GingerWithaGoPro, if it was too hectic. Both agreed the image was powerful, so Rubin decided to post it on his Instagram page @JoshWideAwake.

Little did he know that the photograph would cause outrage on social media.

“Within an hour of posting the photograph, I received thousands of angry messages and threats from people on social media accusing me of being insensitive and exploiting the man in the photograph,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

A local disc jockey sparked the furore, and within hours, Rubin was lambasted by his attackers for depicting the man in a degrading, dehumanising, and humiliating way.

One message read, “Contrary to popular belief, it’s possible to raise awareness without dehumanising or exploiting the people you claim to be helping.”

An anti-racist advocacy group has accused him of “white saviourism” – a term that refers to a white person who provides help to non-white people in a self-serving manner.

“What we are seeing here is peak white saviourism,” the organisation said. “The photographer’s justification is that he gave this man some money, and that his friends are raising money for ‘people like him’. Your kindness can quickly turn into blackmail when it’s mentioned so many times and when it’s used as justification for your exploitation. Most people, if given then [sp] chance to give

informed consent for this photograph, would have at the very least, pulled up their pants.

“I was pretty scared. I was pale for a few days,” said Rubin, who has had a passion for photography since the age of 10.

“My intention was never to offend or upset anyone. I don’t regret taking the photograph, but at the same time, I respect people’s opinion and I don’t want to hurt people,” he said.

The criticism took its toll on Rubin, who took the photograph down. He posted an apology to his Instagram story which read, “Over the past few days, there has been a large amount of reaction to the photograph I took on Long Street. What’s missing from this reaction is the context. I have been documenting the realities of lockdown and the huge divide this has amplified in our society. I believed

this was a powerful representation of this, and asked permission to take this picture. Having taken it, I returned home to fetch clothes and food and returned with them. This image can be seen as offensive, which was absolutely never the intention. I have taken it down out of respect for this, and apologise unreservedly for any harm it may have caused.”

Avid art collector, Mike Abel, the co-founder and chief executive partner of M&C Saatchi Abel, stepped in to help Rubin navigate his way through the furore. He got wind of the backlash through Jarette Petzer, the founder of the movement #ImStaying, of which Abel is a patron.

“I think Joshua is an extremely talented young man with an extraordinarily observant eye. He has a rare talent for capturing a moment,” said Abel.

“What happened to him is an example of the toxicity and danger of some “woke” hyper-far-left voices intent on shutting down important voices,” he said.

As the issue of poverty and homelessness is close to his heart, Abel wanted to turn this into a positive story. He reached out to nine art collectors

who, like himself, purchased a copy of the photograph for R10 000 each. Half the money raised was then matched by the Angel Network, and given to The Kolisi Foundation, a non-profit organisation founded by South African rugby captain Siya Kolisi and his wife Rachel.

“The money raised fed 50 families for three months. Eventually, Joshua’s photograph created enormous good, and I have sent it to curators in the United Kingdom. What’s the benefit of hiding the plight of the suffering, and shutting down an important conversation on homelessness and the dispossessed? The photographer’s intention was never to humiliate, it was to raise awareness and create a conversation, which sadly was shut down before anyone got to appreciate it.”

The *SA Jewish Report* became aware of the photograph during this year’s eLimmud series of lectures in which Rubin was invited to present a talk about his work during lockdown.

Although the image has been removed, he still receives messages on social media.

“Some praise my photograph, but there are others that are critical and sadly, that’s where your mind goes,” said Rubin whose latest work includes photographing rival gangs in Manenberg on the Cape Flats, a project aimed at conflict resolution.

“I’ve been told I need to develop a tough skin, but I know that if I’m doing things for the right reason, I won’t have to worry. You can’t please everyone. People will find fault anywhere,” he said.



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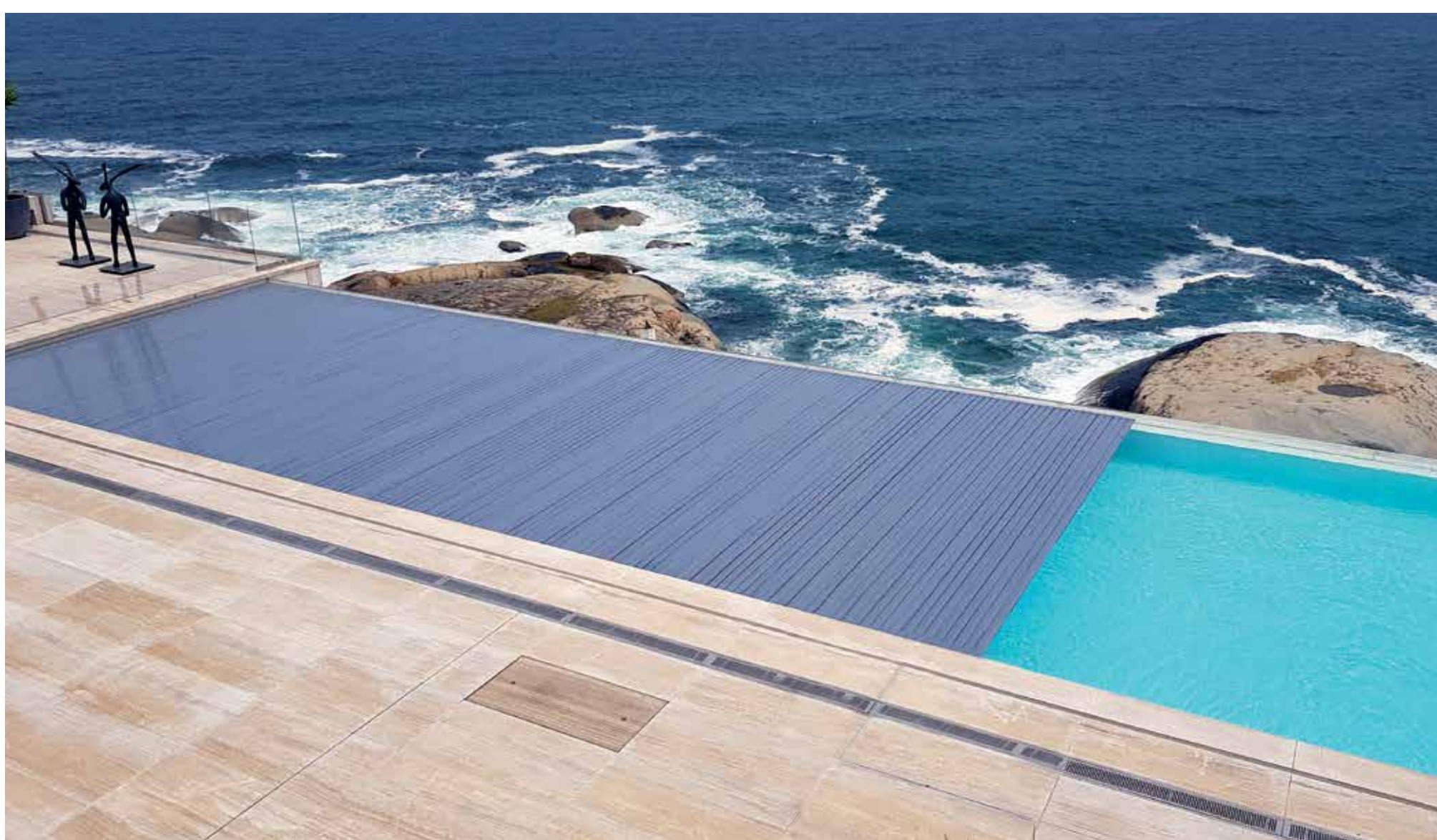
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Finding a way to live with COVID-19

JORDAN MOSHE

When Johannesburg wellness coach Nikki Temkin tested positive for COVID-19, she felt as though her world had caved in.

However, her experience with the dreaded virus has taught her the importance of balancing physical health with mental well-being, and she is determined to share this lesson with others.

“People need to know that you can get this illness and still be OK,” Temkin said on Tuesday. “Yes, there are difficult days, but unless you are at high risk, you have a very good chance of working through this virus smoothly.”

When she spoke to the *SA Jewish Report*, Temkin was over the worst of her illness after testing positive almost 12 days earlier. Her test came after experiencing daily fatigue and exhaustion. After initially putting it down to burnout, she decided to visit her GP for the test after a sudden onset of back pain and shortness of breath. Her results came through two days later.

“I was sleeping. My husband woke me to tell me that the doctor had called, and that I was positive,” she says.

“I was in shock. I burst into tears. I was so upset that I had the illness after repeatedly thinking that I didn’t. The fear was awful – would I be OK? Where were the others who had had it and had emerged from it?”

She immediately began a strict health regimen, including intravenous drips of vitamin supplements, a change in diet, and breathing exercises. Temkin came to the realisation that she had to overcome not only the virus, but the anxiety that came with it. Central to her own healing was the ability to share her situation with others, and establish a network of support to assist any others who had tested positive.

“I was the first person I know of in my circle who had it,” she says. “I had to tell other people so that they would understand it’s actually good to share this with others. I know there are many out there with it who are too scared to say anything, and that makes things worse.”

She took to Facebook to share her situation, addressing the anxiety she felt but also stressing that in spite of her illness, she genuinely believed that she would eventually get well. She also encouraged others to break their silence, making herself available to support anyone in need of comfort while battling the virus.

“The media is portraying only the very worst stories, and I can understand why,” says Temkin. “It wants people to take this seriously, and obey the rules. However, there is a side we

aren’t being shown – the mild cases who are recovering at home and getting on with their lives. No one is talking about them.

“As a wellness coach, I help people deal with anxiety and stress. The fear of this virus, the captivity of lockdown, and the stress the situation causes has had a devastating effect on well-being. Psychological health affects physical health. I want to help alleviate the distress of others by sharing my experience.”

“I had to tell other people so that they would understand it’s actually good to share this with others. I know there are many out there with it who are too scared to say anything, and that makes things worse.”

Most of us, she says, “will survive this, and be okay”.

She stresses that her experience is personal, and might not be the same for others. “I’m not saying you shouldn’t be vigilant or that you should stop wearing your mask,” she says. “You need to be serious about this. Our bodies react differently. I can share only what’s worked for me and my own belief

system.

“I’m not a doctor, and I’m definitely not suggesting throwing caution to the wind. We must remain extremely cautious and vigilant.”

Still, she wants others to recognise that there is more to the virus than just a medical condition. “I simply believe we can’t live in fear indefinitely. While the virus is spiking now in South Africa and we need to be careful, we cannot become paranoid or fearful. We need to learn to live with this illness as it’s not going away in a hurry. We need to find ways to maintain our emotional well-being.

“We need to find a way to live in this new reality, but not be constantly fearful. If you need a cup of socially-distanced coffee with a friend to feel sane, do it!



Many people out there are suffering from illnesses, both coronavirus and others, and we need to connect with them. People need our attention.”

Practically, Temkin says that if most of the population will get the virus, there is little we can actually control, and we need to accept that if we are to remain physically and mentally healthy.

“We can control our inner environment with good nutrition, sleep, self-care, mindfulness, human connection, and support,” she says. “Manage your stress and anxiety, take the right supplementation for immune boosting as best you can.

“Be vigilant where you need to be, but remember we have to find a way to live with this virus, and your mental health is as crucial as your physical well-being.”

Humans need connection.”

It also means that people need to support one another now more than ever, whether because of COVID-19 or any other illness.

“I’m overwhelmed by the kindness, support, and generosity shown to me from family, friends, and the community,” says Temkin. “We need to support each other.

Giving birth in the height of the pandemic

STAFF REPORTER

As Bianca Rubenstein heads for the Sandton Clinic on Thursday evening to give birth to her fourth child the next day, she is anxious about doing it at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in South Africa.

Rubenstein is worried about going into a hospital where there are so many COVID-19 patients. And the run-up to this moment hasn’t been much easier.

“It’s crazy, I’m having this baby in the worst possible week. I’m so worried,” Rubenstein told the *SA Jewish Report* just days before the scheduled c-section birth.

“So many people around us are contracting this virus, it seems to be all around us. I’m worried that either Daniel [her husband] or I have the virus, because that will have an impact on what happens at the birth.

“While I have been overly cautious, there are many who find out they have the virus, and have no idea how they got it. Others are walking around totally asymptomatic. So, who can tell?” she says.

“I’m anxious about what will happen, but even more concerned about how the kids will be.”

Two days before her scheduled birth, she and her husband had to be tested for coronavirus so that there were no surprises for the medical team dealing with her birth. If they are both clear, they will both spend Thursday night at the clinic before an early morning

birth. Then, Daniel will have to leave, not being able to see his wife or baby until she gets home.

If her husband has the virus, he will have to go into immediate two-week isolation. “If that happens, I have no idea who is going to look after our children while I’m in hospital. We don’t want my parents to get involved because we fear for their health. We simply don’t have a plan B.”

If Rubenstein is found to have the virus, she will give birth under far stricter COVID-19 conditions. “As the doctor says, the baby still has to come out, no matter what,” she says.

In the third-case scenario, if she goes into labour before the release of the results of their tests, she goes into hospital as a “person under investigation” and

is treated as positive. “While my doctor is ready to deliver a baby to a person who is positive, he hasn’t done it before,” she says. He has had two husbands test positive in the deliveries he has done recently.

Rubenstein says this has actually been her easiest pregnancy. She has been so busy at home, especially being involved in the online education of her children – the oldest of whom is eight – and making sure that food is on the table, that she has “hardly acknowledged the pregnancy”. Normally, she is a busy

occupational therapist (OT) and businesswoman who *shlepps* her kids around, goes to gym three times a week, and keeps active. Now, she hasn’t been able to work as an OT and her business has been relegated to late nights. Her days have been dedicated to making sure Judah, eight, who is in Grade 2, and Olivia, six, in Grade 1, are able to carry on with school. And she has struggled to find enough time to work with Ezra, three, who is in his first year of nursery school.

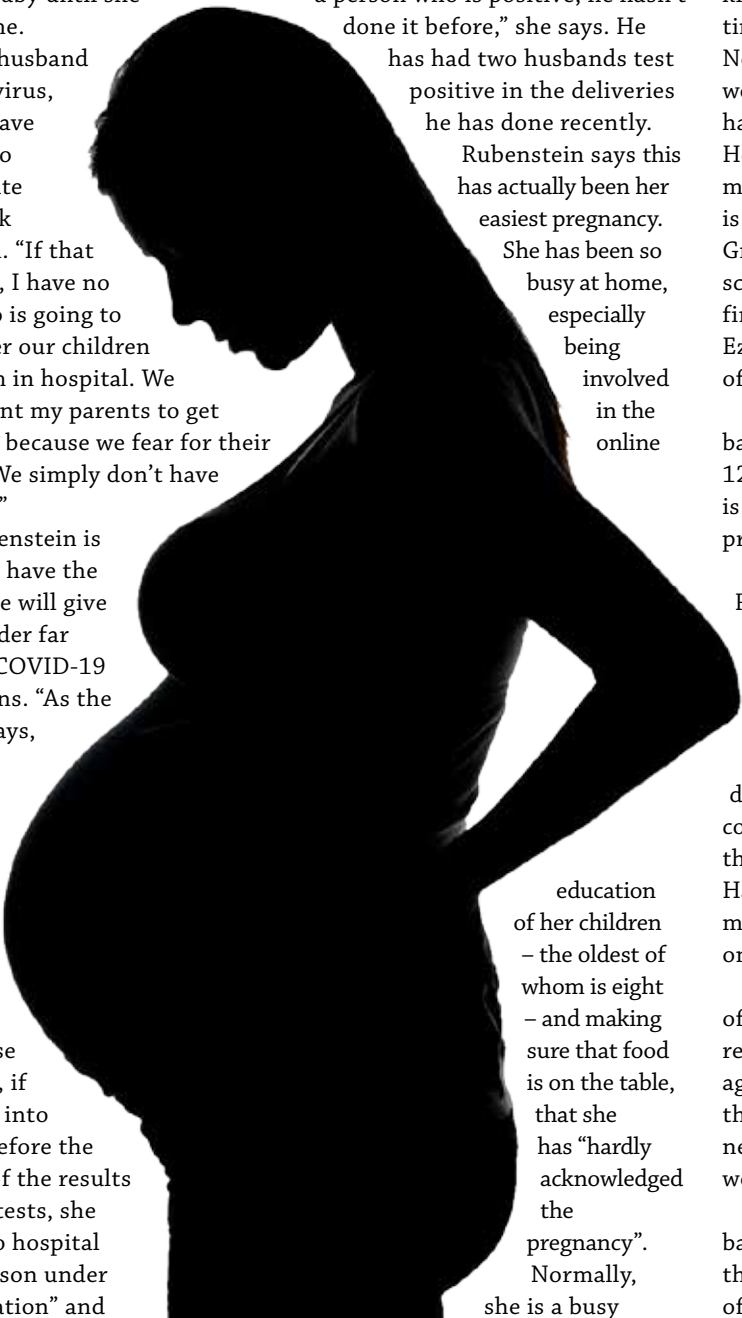
Her daughter has just gone back to school between 07:30 and 12:45, which helps a bit, but there is still no rest for this heavily pregnant mom.

With all this going on at home, Rubenstein planned to have the baby on Friday so that she could be back home on Sunday, and be there for school on Monday.

“I guess I’m in complete denial,” she says. “I have convinced myself that I’m having the baby and going back to school. Having said that, I can tell that my kids, particularly the two older ones, are anxious.”

What with the unpredictability of this pandemic, Rubenstein was ready to give birth three months ago. “I got overly prepared back then, and bought what I would need because I didn’t know what would happen.”

Now, all she wants is to have the baby, and get home to the rest of the family without any indication of the dreaded virus.



Young engineer breaks the ice in Antarctica

TALI FEINBERG

We may not be able to travel in the near future, so the next best thing might be to explore the world through other people's adventures, and what better place to start than at the end of the earth?

Jamie Jacobson travelled to Antarctica last year on the SA Agulhas II, a South African icebreaking polar supply and research ship owned by the department of environmental affairs. At just 24 years old, he got to go where few have ever tread, sailing through storms, icebergs, and undisturbed landscapes in order to conduct groundbreaking research on the sea ice that has an impact on our climate.

Jacobson, who matriculated from Herzlia in Cape Town in 2014, was invited to fill one of two coveted spots on this prestigious winter expedition. He says growing up in the Cape Town Jewish community and attending Herzlia were key factors in getting him to where he is today. As a Master of Engineering student at the University of Cape Town, he is working to create a series of inexpensive robots that can transmit data about sea ice. The trip would allow him to test his research.

Going to Antarctica in winter isn't ideal. It's harsh, bitterly cold, and remote, but that's when the sea ice develops. On a wintery Cape Town day in July 2019, he boarded the SA Agulhas II, part of a 100-person international research expedition comprising 17 teams from at least 22 countries.

"The trip of seven days was

exhilarating, but we only had about half a day without a storm," says Jacobson. "As soon as we were out in the open sea, we were in storm conditions. It was ten times the strength of the South Easter [the wind that batters Cape Town in summer], there were huge swells, rain and snow, and we felt everything. In fact, for the first three days, everyone was seasick.



Jamie Jacobson on the SA Agulhas II

"This is because we were in the latitudes between 40 and 50 degrees south of the equator, known as 'the roaring forties', the area of the world with the highest number of storms at any given time. It's a giant 'mixing pot' of storms and swells.

"Then, one day we woke up, it was calm, and we were surrounded by ice. We hadn't noticed the temperature dropping, but it was suddenly cold. All of a sudden, the sea was flat, almost like syrup," he recalls.

"All around us, the water had a glowing luminescent quality, and we started to see ice, which at first looked

like jellyfish. These ice blocks got bigger and bigger, until it looked like a desert of flat 'pancakes' in the ocean. These discs extended for miles – it was beautiful and surreal. We saw birds, albatross, penguins, and even a walrus. We had birdwatchers with us, who taught us about the bird life we saw."

They eventually reached sheets of ice

that extended for miles. "The SA Agulhas II is an icebreaker, and it was amazing hearing the crunching and crackling of the ice and looking back to see the ice parting behind us."

While the environment outside the ship was harsh, inside it was surprisingly luxurious.

"It was like being on a cruise ship. We had to dress up for dinner, everything was in immaculate condition, and there was so much to do. It was like being in a hotel except it also had research laboratories where we spent a lot of our time. It also felt like all we did was eat! There was breakfast, lunch, tea, and

dinner, and the food was phenomenal. Everything ran perfectly and on schedule. The crew were fantastic, friendly, helpful, and hardworking. Most people on the ship were South African but I also met people from Spain, Australia, Sweden, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe."

Passionate about the ocean and technology from a young age, Jacobson elaborates on his research. "Following a massive anomaly in the sea ice in 2016, an international research effort formed and set out to study the dynamics of the region from as many angles as possible. When observing the ice cycle, it was found that 60% of the sea ice had disappeared during the crucial formation months. In order to understand why this phenomenon occurred, the SCALE [Southern oCean seAsonAL Experiment] research initiative was born. It forms part of a bigger study of understanding Antarctica and its impact on climate change. If anything shifts in the climate there, we feel it in our weather in Cape Town and around the world.

"South Africa is one of only 20 countries with access to Antarctica. It's not sustainable to send research teams on a continuous basis, as it costs about a million rand a day to run ships there. So it's important to develop tools that can monitor the region and be deployed for a few years."

Once they hit the ice, Jacobson got down to work. "I don't think I slept for three days. No one slept. I remember having a quick rest at 23:00, and waking up again at 03:00 to continue working. We wore arctic gear, and spent most of

our time being lowered off the boat in a little hanging basket where we drilled for ice cores and deployed the robots on the ice floes [a sheet of floating ice]."

It was a bittersweet time as Jacobson battled with the challenges the environment posed for his work. Although he had anticipated problems like the effect of ice on batteries, in the end, his robots weren't able to conduct data.

"It's a new environment that few people have built robots in, and things went wrong. But it was also a success because we learnt so much about what we need to do to get a working device."

After four days on the ice, the ship began its slow journey home, stopping every now and then for researchers to collect more ice samples. "I was sad to leave the region. I saw things I never thought I would see. It was unforgettable, and I'm eternally grateful. As we approached East London [where the ship would dock], we saw the looming coastline, the wind and waves died down, and it was suddenly warmer. Coming home was a great feeling, but it was also hard."

For him, the expedition is over, but not the project. "The world doesn't judge you on how far you go, but how you deal with failure. Will you let it define you? Or will you learn from it and build on it?" He plans to do the latter, and will continue to work on creating a robot that can monitor sea ice. He encourages young members of the community to look into the engineering field. "Anyone with passion and interest can be an engineer," Jacobson says.

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Visit to Iran turns into life-saving mission

JORDAN MOSHE

When American Rabbi Sholem Ber Hecht decided to visit the Jewish community of Tehran in 1978, he simply intended to strengthen ties with Jews there. Little did he know that he would become an integral part of a mission to save their lives.

“I was supposed to stay for two weeks,” Hecht, the rabbi of the Sephardic Jewish Congregation & Center of Forest Hills, Queens, told an online audience last Tuesday (16 June).

“Our message was that we came from America, were interested in the Jews of Iran, and wanted to help them strengthen their *yiddishkeit*. We ended up starting the process of relocating the community to America.”

Hecht played a leading role in Operation Exodus, a Chabad effort to assist the Jews of Iran, and get them safely to the United States. From 1978 to 1980, the operation successfully brought hundreds of Iranian Jewish children to the US.

The process began in August 1978 when Hecht and Rabbi Hertzell Illulian visited Tehran to establish a connection between Chabad and the Iranian Jewish community.

“In 1978, the Iranian Jewish community was successful and wealthy,” recounted Hecht. “Many Jews had become prominent, and often rabbis came to Tehran to raise money. People thought that was what we came for, but our aim was to strengthen them.”

At that time, the Jewish community of Iran could trace its history back more than 2 500 years. The destruction of the first temple and subsequent exile of the Jewish people at the hands of the Babylonian empire had resulted in Jews settling in Persia (today Iran), maintaining a continuous and strong presence until Hecht arrived.

At the time, Iran was under the leadership of a king, Mohammad Reza Shah. He had come to power in the 1940s, and had helped the country modernise, making it more democratic and even giving Jews more freedom to integrate into Iranian society. He believed that Jews were central to securing Iran’s place as a first-world country, earning him the respect and even adoration of many Jews in the country.

Said Hecht, “Jews were given more freedom and discrimination eased. They entered business, and many of them entered universities as well.” Assimilation also crept into the Jewish community, causing certain lapses in observance.

The Shah faced opposition, however. Demonstrations against him had been taking place since the 1940s, and a few broke out early in 1978. However, no one believed them to be of any major consequence, so Hecht and Illulian pressed ahead with their trip.

“We met the leadership of the community, and were invited to speak in local shuls,” said Hecht. “They received us warmly, and we saw potential for Chabad to set up infrastructure there.”

However, the growing civil unrest would change their plans completely.

“All of a sudden, violence erupted across Tehran,” Hecht said. “Different forces suddenly emerged against the Shah. It was the start of a revolution, one led by socialist workers.”

State media coverage caused a stir amongst Jews, causing people to reach out to him to help them get their children out of Iran and into America. Hecht had initially offered a few places to students interested in studying in America, but the demand increased exponentially.

“They began to understand the situation could become a real, violent revolution,” said Hecht. “I returned to the US to begin arranging student visas and permits for those wanting to come.”

Hecht needed permits from institutions willing to take the students in, but found that few were eager to assist. “The list kept increasing, the number of applicants kept growing, and no educational institutions in America were willing to help,” he said.

However, with the assistance of his late father, Rabbi Jacob J. Hecht, he successfully arranged places for 30 students at Jewish institutions established by Hecht senior’s schooling network. The demand soon exceeded availability, however, leading the Hechts to make a decision that would alter the course of Jewish history.

“We reached a turning point in history for the Jews of

Tehran and world Jewry,” said Hecht. “The Jewish diaspora of Persia left in droves, Jews who had lived there continuously for 2 500 years. A few thousand would end up staying, but the bulk of the community left for good.

“The Iranian Jewish community was transferred to America, and my father started that process.”

Over the coming months, Hecht and others were involved in helping hundreds of Jewish students relocate to the US. The operation had the support of leading Chabad figurehead, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (the Lubavitcher Rebbe). As the plight of the Iranian Jewish community became increasingly desperate, more applications kept pouring in, reaching a fever pitch in late 1979, when the country was in the full grip of revolution.

Hecht recalled, “I got a phone call at 04:00 begging for more permits than we’d ever given. The man told me, ‘Rabbi



Hecht, you have to send us permits. It’s terrible here. The Shah has run away, Khomeini has taken over, there’s a war with Iraq, boys are getting kidnapped for the army, and girls are afraid to go out for fear of being raped. Please do what you can so we can get our kids out of Iran.”

Hecht’s father went out of his way to bring as many of these children to America as possible, putting them up in dormitories and with Jewish families across Crown Heights in Brooklyn. Eventually, more than 1 800 Jewish youngsters were successfully extracted from Iran and made a part of American Jewry. This came at considerable financial cost for Hecht senior, but he never once waived in his commitment. Nor did his son.

“The Rebbe wanted them to be part of a functioning Jewish community with a structured leadership,” said Hecht. “The Rebbe wanted them to be part of strong Jewish life, and we strove to give it to them.”

Caracal close encounter ‘the best gift ever’

TALI FEINBERG

First it was a zebra in Glenhazel, now it’s a caracal in Camps Bay. Natalie Barnett was enjoying her usual Sunday walk with her husband, daughter, and dogs on Sunday, 13 June, when she spotted movement in the brush nearby. The next moment, she came face to face with a caracal – a dream come true for this wildlife fan.

“My instinct was that I was seeing a wild animal, but I did a ‘double take’ as I know wild animals usually run away from people and dogs,” says Barnett. “The dogs were closest to it, but had walked right past it with my husband and daughter. I then realised it was a caracal, and stopped to take a photo. He came round a bush, walking casually, and sat down three metres in front of me. He stayed there for about 15 minutes. It was a very spiritual moment. He looked at me, licked his lips, yawned, and blinked. It felt like he gave me permission to be there.”

A caracal, also known as a rooikat, is a medium-sized wild cat, native to Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, and India. It’s relatively rare to see one in the Cape, especially up close, during the day, and for more than an instant. The spot where Barnett encountered this caracal is next to the busy road entering Camps Bay, which has mountain and a forested area on either side.

“The only time it reacted with a hiss, arching his back and baring his teeth, was when it caught sight of my dogs, but it then settled down again. Other people came past, and I told them there was a caracal ahead, and he didn’t flinch. His ears twitched, and you could see he was listening to everything, but he wasn’t bothered that there were people near him.

“I wasn’t scared, and nothing in his body language showed that he felt threatened. He exuded a sense of confidence and belonging. He eventually walked back down into the brush, looking back at us and the mountain three times.”

Barnett called the encounter “the best gift ever”. She has a life-long love affair with animals, and majored in zoology during her undergraduate degree at the University of Cape Town. She once dreamed of becoming a game ranger, and still hopes to fulfil that wish.

“I’m always on the lookout for wildlife whether driving or hiking, and always with my phone to snap interesting creatures I see,” she says. She had to cancel two trips to the bush because of the lockdown, but her encounter with the caracal made up for some of that disappointment.

Barnett reported her sighting to the Urban Caracal Project, which



tracks caracals in the Cape, and aims to learn how they are adapting to human-dominated landscapes. She has since found out that this particular caracal has been named Hermes by the project, and will continue to follow his story.

“The Cape Peninsula is a biodiversity hotspot that has lost almost all its large mammals. Caracals may play a vital role in maintaining ecosystem balance since they are the largest remaining predator in the area,” says the project’s founder, Dr Laurel Serieys.

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Serieys says, “We estimate that there are perhaps 50 caracals in the peninsula at any given time, which isn’t a lot considering that they are completely isolated. That means that there are no caracals moving in and out of the Cape Peninsula bringing new genetic material with them. So, for decades, the caracals have existed in a closed population with relatively few individuals. The consequence is that there has been a lot of inbreeding and reduced genetic variation, which is problematic for the population.”

She says Hermes is sighted quite often. “He covers a large area of about 70 square kilometres. Hermes is particularly interesting because he has been hit by a car at least twice, but you wouldn’t know it from looking at him.

“He was about one to two years old when he was hit by a car, so now he is about four years old. That’s relatively old for an urban caracal. He’s in really good condition, but based on X-rays, he has had a really bad break to one of his hind legs, and that leg is now slightly shorter than the other. It doesn’t seem to slow him down though.”

Asked if it’s unusual that he was so low down the mountain and next to a busy road, she says, “It’s perhaps a little unusual, but we have had similar reports elsewhere, and not during lockdown. Some caracals are more habituated to human activity and let themselves be seen. Hermes is certainly one of the more habituated caracals we’ve observed – he’s seen at least on a weekly basis. A lot of people want to credit wildlife reclaiming cities during lockdown, but I don’t think that’s necessarily happening with local caracals.”

If you encounter a caracal, “Give them space, and keep dogs on leash! Caracals are frightened of dogs, but if a caracal were cornered by one and didn’t have a way to escape, it would defend itself,” she says.

Serieys emphasises that caracals aren’t a threat to people or children. “They are very timid animals. The risk is if they are cornered and feel their life is threatened, but whatever their response, it would be out of fear.

“It’s true that caracals prey on domestic cats, although we have done a diet study and found that domestic cats are only about 5% of the caracal diet. Most often, they eat rats, guinea fowl, Egyptian geese, dabbies, and cormorants. The best advice we have is to keep domestic cats inside, especially at night.

“I would also add that life in urban areas is hard for caracals. We find that they are regularly hit by cars. We’ve documented more than 60 caracals killed after being hit by cars in the Cape Town area just since 2015. Caracals are also poisoned by household rat poison.”

If you do spot a caracal in the Cape, Serieys recommends that you “take a minute to feel blessed by the sighting, and enjoy it!”

Great Park Lag B’Omer generates warmth in Alex

This week Afrika Tikkun distributed hundreds of blankets to families who lost their homes and belongings in shack fires in Alexandra, Gauteng, last week.

These blankets were the result of funds generated at Great Park Shul’s Lag B’Omer Zoom celebration. While there may not have been a bonfire this year, the hearts of the community were still full of warmth, generosity, and kindness.

The funds generated bought the blankets, which forms part of an annual Lag B’Omer drive to assist the less fortunate in South Africa.



Hundreds of blankets distributed by Afrika Tikkun to families who lost their homes and belongings in shack fires in Alex

Donations warm our heart

Generous donations from the community have enabled the provision of winter essentials for elderly, indigent, and lonely members of the community through the Jewish Women’s Benevolent Society’s Benevolent Care initiative.

Dedicated volunteers packed the items, which were delivered to residents of Sandringham Gardens, Sandringham Lodge and Square, the Selwyn Segal, Our Parents Home, Yale, clients of Kosher Mobile Meals, and members of the broader community in need.



A JWBS winter warmer care package

As COVID-19 has had a severe impact on so many families in the community, this initiative has been expanded to include children who have outgrown their winter clothing, and whose parents can’t afford to buy new clothing for them. Donate via our website, jwbs.co.za, or by EFT to JWBS, Nedbank, Siemert Road branch, account no. 192 300 5359. Reference: your name + care.

Letters

KOSHER CONSUMERS SHORT CHANGED

Kosher consumers are being ripped off at certain establishments in the Glenhazel/Fairmount area, not only in the price of meat products, but in terms of other items as well. We sometimes pay between 10% and 20% more than the shelf price for certain items.

For example, on erev Shavuot at a certain supermarket, I was surprised to be charged more than R3 more for each of several kosher cream tubs marked R34.99 on the shelf. I spoke to the manager, who apologised and refunded the difference. How many others paid the higher price without noticing the discrepancy? The time wasted in sorting out such matters is also not inconsequential.

At a second shop, several items of cheeses were rung up at R4 more than the indicated price of R22.49.

Why? The manager’s excuse was that they were under pressure and didn’t have time to adjust the price at the till to the shelf price.

At another establishment, a 10c shortfall in change was greeted with the cynical response, “What’s 10c?” before handing over the correct change. Ten cents obviously isn’t a big amount, but it’s the principle that the correct change be given. Who knows how many other customers are short-changed in various amounts without noticing?

I have had similar experiences to the above several times before. There are, of course, other shops/supermarkets which are scrupulous about charging marked prices, but isn’t it time we all become more careful in checking our slips?

– Chonnie Romm, Netanya and Johannesburg

JUST SETTLEMENT ONLY HOPE FOR DEMOCRATIC ISRAEL

Two articles in last week’s *SA Jewish Report* (19 June 2020) struck a chord that can’t be ignored, namely the proposed annexation of parts of the West Bank under the so-called Trump peace deal.

I have always maintained that Trump isn’t good for Israel, and will never be, in spite of all that he is perceived to have done.

In reality, he has caused more anti-Israel sentiment than any of his predecessors. But that aside, Israel is enjoying a period of political prosperity – the European Union, in spite of decades of criticism and covert hostility, has mellowed substantially. Trade relations with the West, in spite of the COVID-19 pandemic, are positive. Relations with India and China have never been better, in spite of pressure from the United States to make hard choices. But most importantly, Arab countries, and in particular the Saudis and the influential Gulf States, aren’t only talking to Israel, but certainly there’s a much warmer wind blowing from the desert.

After more than 70 years of living in a hostile neighbourhood, things are changing. Other than the intermittent attacks from Gaza and isolated terrorist incidents, things are pretty safe and peaceful.

A recent immigrant having arrived in Israel 18 months ago, I’m encouraged when walking along the beachfront in Tel Aviv and Jaffa to see family groups of Israeli Arabs enjoying the summer, having their picnics in groups alongside their Jewish neighbours with absolutely no hostility from either side. It’s this atmosphere that could be achieved by a just and peaceful settlement, something that as a citizen of my new country I see as the only hope for the future of a democratic Jewish state.

Like Warren Lewis in apartheid South Africa, other than voting for Nelson Mandela in the first free elections, I did little to effect change, but was very proud on the day I voted in a democratic country and it’s a democratic country that I want to live in. I lived in a pariah state for too long, had to have visas to travel, and was never proud of that passport. Currently I can travel to most countries without a visa, but for how long if annexation goes ahead?

Benjamin Pogrund, who has for years defended Israel from the accusation that it’s an apartheid state, clearly says that if annexation goes ahead, he may not be able to defend the indefensible. **– Allan Wolman, Israel**

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