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SA pours cold water on Israel's deal with UAE

NICOLA MILTZ

As widespread international support for the recent deal to normalise diplomatic ties between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel continues to grow, the South African government has slammed the deal calling it “regrettable”.

The UAE last week became the first Gulf Arab country to reach a deal on normalising relations with Israel. The so-called “Abraham Accord”, announced by United States President Donald Trump on Thursday, 13 August, secures an Israeli commitment to halt further annexation of Palestinian lands in the occupied West Bank.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he agreed to “delay” the annexation as part of the deal with the UAE, but the plans remain “on the table”.

The UAE is the third Arab nation to reach such a deal with Israel, after Jordan and Egypt.

The historic agreement has been met with loud applause by many nations including the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Spain, as well as Jordan, Egypt, Bahrain, and Oman, and has been welcomed by the European Union and United Nations.

UN Secretary General António Guterres said he hoped the normalisation of ties between Israel and the UAE would help to realise a two-state solution with the Palestinians and create an opportunity for Israeli and Palestinian leaders to re-engage in meaningful negotiations.

South Africa's largest BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) partners, namely India and China, have also welcomed the deal.

Meanwhile Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas denounced the accord, as did Hamas, which rejected the US-brokered deal. Turkey and Iran also decried the accord.

South Africa, remaining loyal to its international friends, has heavily criticised the agreement.

The Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), said it noted the developments with “concern”, describing the deal as “regrettable” on the grounds that the Palestinian people hadn't been “engaged”.

“While the UAE has the sovereign right to set its diplomatic relations with the government of Israel, it's regrettable that it has done so based on yet another agreement related to the fate of the Palestinian people without engaging the people of Palestine,” it's statement read.

Criticising the agreement, it said it didn't commit Israel to halting plans for further extension of Israeli sovereignty over Palestinian territories and people.

Meanwhile, further normalisation deals are likely to emerge over coming months between Israel and other Arab and Muslim states.

Sudan is rumoured to be seeking a peace agreement with Israel, confirming speculation that more Arab states will follow the UAE in normalising ties.

The vice-president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), Zev Krengel, told the *SA Jewish Report* he was surprised by the government's response.

“This is an earth-shattering moment in the Middle East, and the South Africa government can't see it. It's so embedded in its narrow-minded view on how it thinks the Israeli-Arab conflict should be handled. It's very sad. I'm

dumbstruck by the government's almost sinister response. It's as if it really isn't interested in peace in the Middle East, and just wants to bash Israel.”

Commentator Daniel Silke said the government had echoed the official Palestinian response, and publicly wanted to maintain as much pressure as possible on Israel to advance the Palestinian cause.

He said he believed the UAE would be disappointed with the South African government's response.

“South Africa has had close links with the UAE, and needs a good relationship with it so that it can expedite any extradition issues with whoever might still be wanted in connection with state capture – those who are flitting around Dubai.”

Rather than acknowledging a shift towards a more peaceful environment in the Middle East, South Africa was keeping the Palestinian issue on the front burner, which didn't help its relations with the UAE, Silke said.

“By regarding the Palestinian cause for nationhood as a paramount foreign policy priority, this agreement put South Africa on the

spot. South Africa is finding itself on the wrong side of diplomatic dynamics. Its reaction makes it less of a player when it comes to bringing these sides together,” he said.

“When you have key Gulf countries beginning a closer dialogue with Jerusalem, this calls into question South Africa's foreign policy. It doesn't do itself any favours by seemingly being on the outside on this issue. I believe South Africa would have been better off welcoming the shift towards better relations, but also indicating that it hopes the quest for Palestinian independence will continue unabated,” he said.

Steven Gruz, an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs, said that given the government's staunch support of the Palestinians over the years, this week's statement wasn't surprising.

“Instead of lauding the coming together of two key states in the Middle East in a peaceful way, DIRCO pours cold water on this breakthrough. It's sticking to its guns on a Palestinian state with 1967 borders, which almost no-one sees as practical. It also shows that the UAE's own interests have overridden solidarity. South Africa has been trying to downgrade bilateral relations, the opposite of this agreement. South Africa is consistent, even if many disagree with its stance.”

While South Africa is “defending its pals”, Gruz doesn't see this as helping the Palestinians at all.

The SAJBD said DIRCO's criticism was “unfortunate”, calling it a “knee-jerk, one dimensional” view on foreign policy.

“South Africa has chosen to place itself on the wrong side of the world,” it said in a statement this week.

“By rejecting rather than welcoming a promising agreement that advances peace between Israel and its neighbours, the government is again missing an historic opportunity to play a constructive role in the pursuit of peace in the greater Middle East region.”

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, said improved diplomatic and economic relations

Continued on page 6>>

Back in the ring



Ashley Chiwa sanitises the equipment at BoxFit on Northfield Avenue, Glenhazel, in preparation for the gym's reopening.

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver



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Dissecting human behaviour, from sanitising to Shabbat

STEVEN GRUZD

“In a big crisis, the world turns to social science,” said Dan Ariely, the renowned Israeli-American professor of psychology and behavioural economics at Duke University. “We have asked young people to take a hit in order to save the older generation. Masks are worn for other people as well as ourselves. It’s very delicate – you need real societal cohesiveness for this to work. Health is a public good, but if just 5% misbehave, everyone loses. A very small minority can spoil it for all of us.”

Ariely was in conversation with South Africa’s Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein via Zoom on Sunday. Ariely has been advising the Israeli government since March. “They asked me a simple question: How can they give instructions to people in a way that they are likely to follow?” He has helped tailor messaging on good health practices to the Haredi (religious) community, among other interventions.

“The incentives for good behaviour couldn’t be stronger, yet it’s so hard to guide human behaviour during this pandemic,” Goldstein said.

Ariely noted that Israel is a society that is, in general, positive about self-sacrifice. People go to the army and they are happy to help. “But if you feel you are the only sucker doing it, the system collapses ... generosity requires everyone to be generous. If not, we fall down the slippery slope of selfishness.”



Dan Ariely

How do we create and maintain generosity?”

Goldstein asserted that human nature is a combination of selfishness and altruism, incentives, and generosity of spirit. He said that our initial definition of “I” is very narrow. “Life is about the journey to expand the notion of ‘I’ to your spouse, your children, your community. And leadership is also about expanding circles of influence.”

Both spoke about how, in showing our behaviour to others, we tell them (and ourselves) who we are. “It’s easier to see bad behaviour in others, such as not wearing masks,” said Ariely, “and the way we behave signals to others. Mask wearing in the street has no health effect, but it’s an important habit, a very visible one.”

Goldstein spoke about how in Judaism, we do *mitzvot* and model to people who we are, and they send signals to us. This strengthens faith, compassion, humanity, and kindness in a virtuous circle. “I’m asked, ‘Why are there so many physical actions in *mitzvot*, why is prayer so structured?’,” said Goldstein. “It’s about trying to turn you into the best possible version of yourself.”

Rituals are also important. The ritual of washing hands is a focusing activity, done on waking up and before eating bread. Actions mould thoughts, focus attention, and increase joy. “They create *kavanah* (intention). We think, anticipate, and pay attention,” Goldstein said.

Goldstein has had many conversations with Ariely about the Shabbat Project – his initiative that encourages Jews worldwide to keep Shabbat. They agreed from the get-go that there should be no half-measures; it would need to be “an immersive experience, a full submission” for people to derive the value and gravity of Shabbat. “What seem like restrictions allow liberation and freedom,” Goldstein said.

“Shabbat helps you let down your mental load,” Ariely said. He explained the notion of “depletion”, where we get physically and mentally tired, and it’s harder to make decisions, and harder to exert self-control. “That’s why people eat junk food at night.”

In reflecting on lockdown and the grand global experience that is COVID-19, Ariely noted that some of his habits have changed, like cooking more and meeting people from his living room. “We should make a mental note on those behaviours we want to keep. Zoom is no substitute for being with people. It’s efficient but antisocial – we know something deep is missing.”

As South Africa prepares to reopen its shuls under strict sanitary conditions, Goldstein is looking forward to the relationships and human energy generated by the bonding of communal prayer. He promised to hold more public conversations with behaviour guru Ariely in future.

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
17:33	18:23	Johannesburg
18:03	18:56	Cape Town
17:17	18:09	Durban
17:37	18:28	Bloemfontein
17:34	18:27	Port Elizabeth
17:26	18:19	East London

Torah Thought

Who are we to judge?

A husband turns to his wife after leaving a party, and asks if she noticed an acquaintance of theirs. His wife asks, “Are you referring to the woman with that hideous looking pink outfit?” “Yes,” replies the husband, “I think she was wearing a pink dress.” The wife continues, “Standing in the corner of the room all night, hoping men would notice her on their way to the bar?” “Yes,” her husband answers. “With those oversized earrings?” “Yes, yes, that’s the one I am talking about,” her husband responds. “Well,” the wife says, “to tell you the truth, I didn’t notice her.”

You see, judges aren’t the only ones who judge. Every one of us, to a lesser or greater degree, sits in judgement. We judge people whether they be public figures or common people in our social circles. We question their motives and actions. We judge how they look, and what they say. We accuse, we point fingers, and we are quick to vent our feelings and opinions of them.

This behaviour becomes second nature to the extent that we are no longer even aware that we are doing it.

The *parsha* of Shoftim (Judges) has a profound lesson to teach in this regard. The opening words, “*Shoftim veshotrim titein lecha*” (You shall appoint for yourself judges and officers) contain an important insight. If you look closely, the syntax of the phrase is such that it would flow much better, in Hebrew and English without the word *lecha*, (for yourself). The sentence could just as easily read, “You shall appoint judges and officers”. However, our sages, in their wisdom, derive an important insight from the seemingly superfluous word and, indeed, the fact that it’s in the singular. The task of judging should be an internal exercise. Rather than judging others, we should judge ourselves, and only ourselves.

In the Ethics of the Fathers, Hillel teaches, “Don’t judge another until you have reached his place.” The reality is that we can never stand in another’s

place. Thus, Hillel’s message is clear and unequivocal – don’t judge others.

Our shul, together with many others in Gauteng, will, *baruch Hashem*, be reopening this week. Here too, this lesson is so pertinent. There will be many who will decide not to return to shul, quite correctly so. They may have underlying medical conditions or may simply be afraid of returning to public gatherings at this time. It’s not for us to judge!

As we enter the month of Elul, let’s strive to be less judgemental of others. Let’s rather focus on self-reflection and self-evaluation.

And, as Rosh Hashanah, the Day of Judgement, nears, let’s remember that there is only one true judge in this world.

If we can heed the lesson and show love, compassion, tolerance, and acceptance of others, we can be certain that Hashem will judge us favourably this Rosh Hashanah. Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Rodney Richard,
Emmarentia Shul



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ISIS training camps in our backyard

TALI FEINBERG

Following the police raid in Kliprivier two weeks ago that may have uncovered a Gauteng-based terrorist cell linked to ISIS (Islamic State), the question remains if there are similar cells or training camps in South Africa.

According to experts speaking on the *SA Jewish Report's* recent webinar exploring ISIS in Africa, such training camps do exist, but not in the form we think.



“Training camps may take on many different forms, as it may be a house or smallholding or farm that may be used as a training camp. The government admitted as far back as 2007 that there might be training camps in South Africa. The fact that these reports keep on resurfacing raises a red flag,” says Willem Els, senior training co-ordinator at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) in Pretoria.

“Conditions in South Africa are conducive for radical groups to move and operate due to the policies adhered to by government. The return of several foreign-trained fighters has been facilitated by the government, and our intelligence and security apparatus doesn’t have the capacity to effectively monitor these individuals,” he says.

An article written by his colleague, Albertus Schoeman, consultant, transnational threats and international crime division of the ISS, confirms the possibility of training camps in the country. “In 2007, Nazier Desai and cleric Ahmed Sadek

Desai were accused, respectively, of running and financing a training camp outside Port Elizabeth. The head of the National Intelligence Co-ordinating Committee at the time, Barry Gilder, conceded that there could be training camps operating in South Africa,” he wrote.

“Government responses to reports of training camps and terrorist financing have provided little clarity. Further, some matters have been dealt with in secret. The extent of the threat, however, remains

and training. It will take a massive and well-coordinated effort to recapture the port.”

Jevon Greenblatt, the head of operations at the Community Security Organisation (CSO) in Gauteng, agrees that it’s worrying. “For the first time in the history of our region, this highly destructive and radical ideology has an established base in southern Africa. This is a significant shift in the status quo and a massive leap forward in the sophistication and scale of the insurgency,” he says.

“If South Africa, through its military, actively gets involved [in fighting the ISIS insurgency in Mozambique’s Cabo Delgado province], we will no longer be looked on as a neutral party and will become a legitimate target for ISIS and its adherents or supporters. Although we have already seen a number of ISIS-linked or inspired plots and attacks in South Africa over the past few years, this could exacerbate and accelerate further attacks,” Greenblatt says. The Jewish community could be a vulnerable target for such attacks.

ISIS may rely on South Africans who radicalise in training camps to carry out such attacks. “There have been numerous reports and rumours of training camps over the years, and I have no doubt that much of this is true. We do, however, need to redefine what exactly is meant by a training camp in today’s context,” says Greenblatt.

“Although the possibility exists that there are still some traditional training camps somewhere on a farm where a group of ‘students’ learn the skills of terrorism, I think it’s much more prevalent that a group of like-minded individuals get together in an apartment, a garden, or some other private place to share ideas and discuss and practice skills, techniques, and tactics that they have learned and read about on the internet.

“There is more than enough training material, how-to manuals, and videos readily available to anyone who is looking. Another rumoured possibility is that individuals or groups partake in activities such as paintball games to hone their skills and learn their trade in an environment

murky. What can be agreed on is that more transparency and better communication from the government is necessary.”

The concern becomes even greater when considering the growing strength of ISIS-linked groups in Mozambique, and their seizing of a port in the far northern town of Mocimboa da Praia last week. “The capture of the town of Mocimboa da Praia and the strategic port is significant. It’s a very strategic port as it’s the lifeline for supplies and equipment to the liquefied natural gas project on the Afungi Peninsula,” says Els.

“ISIS not only occupied the port and town, but also all the strategic towns and settlements as well as the access routes to the port. It has sent a clear message to the government and the region that it’s a force to be reckoned with and that it’s now a very important player in the arena. The longer it manages to entrench itself and occupy the port, the stronger its position will get. The way it planned and executed the attack demonstrates superior military skills, planning,

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that will not raise eyebrows or draw attention.”

Ryan Cummings, the director for Africa-focused political and security risk-management consultancy Signal Risk, says, “‘Training camp’ is an emotive term with connotations of a more formal, co-ordinated, and organised event. However, ISIS is so successful because it extends its reach online, allowing people to ‘self-radicalise’ to become a ‘lone wolf’ attacker or ‘soldier of the caliphate’. So a ‘training camp’ would be through this use of online material and training. These home-based training camps are not unique to South Africa, and are the model ISIS uses to radicalise supporters to become operational the world over.”

The state’s ability to intervene in such informal training is extremely limited. “It’s difficult because it has to uphold people’s rights to freedom of information, freedom of religion, and so on. A government

“If there was a history of co-ordinated attacks in South Africa, it could be possible [to place surveillance on such groups], but we don’t have that history. In addition, we have a population very sensitive to discrimination. The only way to counter such ‘training camps’ would be to fight them with a counter narrative to dilute the messaging or stop the progression to extremism. Also, in South Africa we’re talking about a very small percentage of the population, and if the government rolled out such campaigns, it could have the opposite effect and pique interest. Engaging with Muslim leadership could be another means to present a different narrative.

“South Africans ‘training’ alone or in groups may join forces, and individuals who want to become radicalised will always find a way,” says Cummings. “For the government, it’s a complicated



that places restrictions on internet usage or monitors individuals from a particular ethnic group could be accused of discrimination or becoming a surveillance state,” he says.

process of building up enough evidence to avoid being accused of being Islamophobic or discriminatory. So, South Africa has to be sensitive in how it pursues such cases.”

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As COVID brakes ease, emigration expected to rise

TALI FEINBERG

Emigration is expected to increase in the months and years ahead as South Africans struggle to survive in a battered economy and volatile political climate exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic.

While most South African Jews leaving the country have chosen to settle in Israel, some are looking at other prospects.

Robbie Ragless, the director of New World Immigration, says he has “definitely seen the rate of enquiry [about emigration] increase, especially from business people. The economic climate and political uncertainty mean business people especially are looking at moving”.

“They don’t have confidence in the economy going forward and [in] South Africa being a viable place to conduct business. We have also seen increased interest in family visa enquiries. We focus on skilled migration, and haven’t seen too much of an increase on that front, but we believe this will start picking up due to the uncertainty of the future in South Africa.”

He says people make enquiries first about Australia, then Canada – which has a liberal immigration policy and many can qualify, so it’s very popular – and then the United Kingdom. In between, are enquiries for New Zealand, “which is somewhat difficult, as you need a job offer”.

The challenges of emigrating under lockdown include “border restrictions and job losses abroad, which may result in governments changing regulations to accommodate unemployment in their country. There is talk of that happening, especially in Australia. However the United Kingdom, Canada, and America are all pretty proactive in attracting foreign investment and the right skills set.”

Ragless believes that once people have more access to a disposable income, there will be a huge uptick in enquiries and commitment to the process. “Politics, the economy, crime, uncertainty, the downgrade, and corruption

are all push factors, and these have never been more prominent, so we are expecting a big increase,” he says.

Immigration lawyer Gary Eisenberg says, “The past year has definitely seen an uptick in enquiries about emigration. However, lockdown has created a kind of stasis or moratorium preventing people from moving forward with these plans.”

Russel Fischer of Russel Fischer Properties in Johannesburg says, “We have noticed a trend of young professional South Africans emigrating, seeking more lucrative positions abroad.

“[There were] a few families already in the process of emigrating pre-lockdown, whose plans have been delayed indefinitely. The chosen countries are usually where family members hold ancestral visas or are being sponsored by other members, namely Europe, Australia, and America.”



Spencer Schwartz of You Realty says, “There are many more sellers than there were six months ago. Buyers have so much more choice than before. There has definitely been a huge increase in families emigrating, obviously most that I know are Jewish. They feel the country is slowly getting worse, and therefore, many clients are selling to emigrate. Most that I’m aware of are going to Israel, but there are significant numbers going to London and Australia.”

He attributes the desire to leave to “huge concern about security”. “The highly educated are looking for jobs and career advancement. Many have lost jobs and their business, and would rather opt to rebuild in Israel. At the same time, a complete life change, with more security, and lower education and medical costs are a huge factor in their consideration.”

Tanya Kovarsky emigrated with her family from Johannesburg to Amsterdam in July. Their move was delayed by lockdown measures.

“A few months after our decision, we put our house on the market. We got an offer in February, and then the deeds office closed for level-five lockdown, which delayed the transfer. Fortunately, it opened in level four, so the transfer wasn’t delayed too much and it occurred towards the end of May. Pre-COVID-19, we were aiming to leave in May or June, but our timing was delayed.

“We wanted to be in Amsterdam before the start of the school year [the middle of August] and get our lives going this side, so decided to leave in the middle of July while still in lockdown. Our only option was a KLM repatriation flight, so we were also a bit bound to its timing as it had flights only every two weeks from Johannesburg to Amsterdam. A one-way repatriation flight cost us almost double what a return flight might have cost, and there was some admin needed to travel such as permission from home affairs and the Dutch embassy.

“We chose to leave because we wanted to try out a new lifestyle and have a European ‘adventure’, which included a safer space for our kids,” she says. “While it’s been hard to leave the familiar and our friends and family, we’re happy to be here now. Our lifestyle has completely changed. My son is walking by himself to

school, and we’re cycling to the shops. For now, it makes sense and suits us, and we’re hoping our children will thrive.

“Emigrating during lockdown actually made the separation so much easier,” she says. “For months, I had missed out on being with family and friends, running races, and so on, so leaving South Africa was a little easier as we had left those things behind in March already and a lot of the longing and ‘grieving’ process took place then.”

Shaun Stoch and his wife, Raffaella, made the decision to emigrate to Vancouver, Canada, towards the end of 2018 because of uncertainty in South Africa. “There were also pull factors which were appealing to us,” he says. “We decided to go in July 2020, based on our visa. “We couldn’t let COVID-19 stop us. We had an expiry date on the visas and had to leave.”

He says the process was tough. “The challenge was in not saying goodbye to many older people that we wanted to see in person due to the risk. Another challenge was booking these crazy, expensive repatriation flights [R45 000 each one-way with extra baggage], along with booking the flights three weeks before we could fly. We packed up many of our things before even booking flights, so we planned ahead, which was good.

“Saying goodbye at the stadium meeting point was hard, and getting on buses to the airport was not a great experience. Flying for 30 hours with masks was tough as well, but we knew it was for the best! We landed and went through the normal immigration process. We taxied with masks on to a house, where we stayed for two weeks.

“We couldn’t leave the house for two weeks, so we ordered groceries and whatever we needed online, and the government called to check on how we were doing, which was nice. It was surreal, but two weeks to settle in and absorb what had happened was actually positive. We might not see family for a while, but thank G-d for video calling.”

Fewer restrictions, but complacency puts us in peril

OPINION

PROFESSOR BARRY SCHOUB



The announcement by the president of progress to lockdown level 2 from 18 August and the consequent lifting of the great majority of infection-control restrictions has been largely welcomed.

The potential recovery from the devastation of the country’s ailing economy mandated that measures to stimulate the country’s economy were urgently needed.

The opening of schools and the imminent opening of shuls have further engendered a feeling of complacency after more than five months of lockdown confinement and restrictions. The news is, of course, good.

Community decisions to open schools and shuls were taken only after very careful investigation, evaluation, and analyses. Indications are that the country’s epidemic curve is entering a downward trajectory, supported

by data such as the 80% recovery rate, a fluctuating but reasonably consistent decline in the weekly or fortnightly average of new cases, test positivity ratios, and others.

However what’s critically important and what can’t be overemphasised, is that the COVID-19 pandemic is unequivocally far from over.

The threat of a resurgence is very real for a number of cogent, viral epidemiological reasons. First, the mass of virus (the viral burden) in the country remains very high in spite of the downward trend of the epidemic curve. We still rank number five in the world in total number of cases, and are amongst the top countries globally with daily new cases.

Second, the great majority of the population – more than 90% – has never encountered the virus and remains susceptible to infection. Third, the further lifting

of restrictions can only promote greater spread of the virus.

It’s precisely a false euphoria which accompanied the relaxation of restrictions that led to the return of the virus with a vengeance in countries such as Israel, France, and several other countries, and most markedly in Melbourne, Australia.

Even the island country of New Zealand, largely insulated from COVID-19, which recently celebrated its 100 days of no community spread of the virus with packed sports stadiums and convivial social hugging, was recently jolted by four new cases, rapidly spreading to 69 active cases as at the end of last week.

An even more sobering lesson can be learnt from the Spanish influenza pandemic. In South Africa, the euphoria after the relatively minor first wave in March 1918 was followed by the devastation of the second wave

in the spring of that year which killed 6% of the population of the country in six weeks – the so-called “black October”.

That there will be a second wave in South Africa is certain. What the force of the infection will be, however, can’t be predicted. That would depend on how carefully the preventive measures of masking, physical distancing, and avoiding social gatherings, particularly in indoor environments without ventilation, are maintained.

The Jewish population in the country has, to date, been especially hard hit, largely because of its age structure. Last week, the *SA Jewish Report* published an extrapolated Jewish population mortality rate of 2 038 per million – more than 10 times that of the general population figure of 197 per million.

As a community, we can’t be lulled into complacency because of the relaxed lockdown restrictions

and the cautious reopening of shuls. Disregarding infection-control protocols for shuls, or returning to large family Rosh Hashanah dinners, can only imperil the community, particularly its most vulnerable members.

The temptation to organise private minyanim over the high holidays in spite of solemn undertakings to “take all of those precautions” will be regretted, hopefully not tragically, by those participants. Now is the time when common sense, social responsibility, and community benefaction will be sorely tested.

• *Professor Barry Schoub is emeritus professor in virology at the University of the Witwatersrand, and the former director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).*

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South Africans stream to Israel, even under lockdown

TALI FEINBERG

A hundred South Africans have made aliyah since lockdown began in March, as South Africa’s economic and political future remain a strong “push factor” for Jews leaving these shores. They join a further hundred South Africans who headed to Israel this year before the pandemic. At this pace, up to 600 South African Jews could make aliyah by the end of the year.

Expensive and long lockdown flights, gruelling bureaucracy, quarantine on arrival, and a difficult job market in the face of coronavirus haven’t stopped South Africans heading to Israel.

“We have had four aliyah flights from South Africa under lockdown, and we are in the process of organising a fifth flight,” says Liat Amar Arran of the Israel Centre in Johannesburg.

“Each flight has taken 20 to 30 South Africans emigrating to Israel.” She says most of these people were in the process of making aliyah before COVID-19, and were delayed due to the lockdown.

A few made the decision to settle in Israel since lockdown began, but struggled with the bureaucracy of obtaining relevant documents. Nevertheless, some of these have already made it onto the repatriation flights.

Dorron Kline, the chief executive of Telfed (the South African Zionist Federation in Israel that assists in the absorption of South African *olim*), says that since the beginning of 2020, 204 people have made aliyah from South Africa. This is 108 “units” of people including 40 spouses and 56 children.

“These numbers don’t include people who, while they are in Israel, make aliyah outside of the Jewish Agency framework by going directly to the ministry of absorption,” he notes.

He says the aliyah numbers at the moment really depend on the number of flights. “So far this month [August], we welcomed 28 *olim* from South Africa from one flight. If there is another flight, we will pass the number 50.

“All aliyah numbers are down because of COVID-19 and the lack of flights,” he says. “When flights are available, people come. If people cannot get their documents organised because of the lockdown, then the numbers will go down. However, if the government opens its offices and provides documents, then 600 *olim* per year from South Africa is a realistic estimate.”

Official Telfed statistics show that only 188 people made aliyah from South Africa in 2002, dropping to 92 in 2004. It peaked at about 335 a year in 2008 and 2009, before dropping again slightly. Five years ago, 231 people emigrated from South Africa to Israel. This has steadily increased every year since, with 346 making aliyah from South Africa in 2018 and 416 people making aliyah from South Africa in 2019.

Even before the lockdown, Israel was the first choice for South African emigrants. According to the Jewish Community Survey of South Africa 2019 conducted by the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town, 32% of community members said it was likely they would settle in Israel. Of the 43% that said they considered emigrating, the preferred destination was Israel (51%).

Kline says people aren’t making aliyah just because they want to leave South Africa. “The Zionist feelings are there. However, the ‘push’ factors are growing, and explain the increase in aliyah numbers.”

Jawitz Properties Chief Executive



Herschel Jawitz says that he has seen a number of South African families leave, and most are choosing to go to Israel. “The emigration trend isn’t only related to the lockdown, but the economic consequences of the lockdown. Families who were thinking about making aliyah have moved from thinking to going based on factors such as work prospects and the economy.

“If things are going to be tough here for a long while to come, the sentiment is ‘we may as well go and tough it out in Israel,’” Jawitz says. “The families making aliyah encompass a broad spectrum in terms of wealth, religious observance, and stage of life. This isn’t just people retiring or those who have real financial means. Israel’s gain will continue to be our loss.”

However, his colleague, Joel Harris, a Jawitz estate agent in the Glenhazel area, says property sales have slowed down. “There was a massive exodus from July last year until January this year, and most went to Israel. I think the lockdown has slowed people’s arrangements, or made them re-think things, and a few have decided to stay. It’s clear that for every Jew that’s leaving, one is staying, and buying property.”

Harris has worked in the Glenhazel area for 29 years, and says emigration comes in cycles every five years or so. There will usually be about six months of emigration, peaking in June or July as people want to get kids into schools overseas by September. “There are always going to be people leaving, but for me, this period hasn’t been more volatile. I thought there would be a massive influx of stock due to emigration and financial pressure. Is it still coming? Time will tell.”

Arran says it’s difficult to compare current aliyah numbers from South Africa to those of other countries over the past five months because each country is facing particular challenges regarding repatriation flights during COVID-19.

According to an article in the British *Jewish Chronicle* on 28 May, the chairperson of the Jewish Agency, Isaac Herzog, predicted that Israel would enjoy a boom in aliyah in the wake of the coronavirus crisis. He also said that there was “no doubt” that the country would see “a big wave in aliyah” shortly, as Israel’s situation was better than elsewhere.

“We are talking about a lot of potential new *olim* who have academic degrees and important skills that will for sure contribute to Israeli society,” he said. And he expected that wave of aliyah from the United States, South Africa, and Australia in particular.

A 32-year-old man, speaking on condition of anonymity, described making aliyah on an Ethiopian Airlines repatriation flight on 5 August. His ticket was originally booked for the end of April 2020. He decided

backwards.” He was told a week and a half prior to leaving that he could get onto a repatriation flight. “There was lots of documentation to organise in just two weeks: questionnaires, health declarations, an affidavit from the police station, and getting my visa renewed. It was all quite daunting.

“The route of travel was Cape Town – Johannesburg – Addis Ababa – Tel Aviv. I had to make my own way to Johannesburg, which I did on a domestic flight.” He describes long queues, checking of documents, waiting around, extremely quiet and closed airports, and even a canine unit sniffing his bags before he made it to Ben Gurion Airport. He was then taken to a hotel to begin his two-week quarantine period.

“I’m fortunate to be at the Dan Panorama Hotel in Tel Aviv. I was mentally prepared that [the repatriation flight] wouldn’t be a smooth transition, but I’m fortunate that I was able to take it. It’s a weird, surreal feeling, but I’m glad I did it.”

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Durban community feels impact of KZN surge

TALI FEINBERG

As the epicentre of COVID-19 moves to KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), five people have died from the virus in the tiny Durban Jewish community of 1 800, all of them elderly.

Three of the deaths occurred at the community's Jewish aged home, Beth Shalom, which has 67 residents. Two of these fatalities were frail-care residents. In all, 11 residents have tested positive.

The community has monitored 42 cases of COVID-19. Five people were hospitalised and have since been discharged, and 25 cases have fully recovered.

On a webinar on 12 August discussing the COVID-19 situation in the Durban Jewish community, South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) KZN Council President Jeremy Droyman said that Beth Shalom, as well as the Jewel House home for the mentally disabled, went into total lockdown on 12 March.

Considering the "weak link" of staff at these facilities travelling on public transport, the SAJBD immediately set to work constructing a "home away from

home" for staff members to live in. It also arranged transport for them. The Durban Jewish Centre (formerly the Durban Jewish Club) was transformed, with showers, beds, toilets, and water installed. Three meals a day were provided for staff by the community.

As lockdown lengthened, workers were allowed to go home for a week, but then spent two weeks in quarantine in community facilities before returning to work. The Beth Shalom staff was divided into two teams to allow one team to be relieved. There were huge costs involved, especially when it came to buying personal protective equipment and conducting COVID-19 tests, and Droyman thanked donors for carrying the costs.

There was also a quarantine ward set up at Beth Shalom, and the home had one COVID-19 case around 1 June. All Beth Shalom residents and staff were tested – a total of 132 tests altogether. Tests were conducted again towards the end of July, when 17 staff members and 10 residents tested positive. It was then that three COVID-19-positive residents passed

away. The home is currently COVID-free, and a particular triumph was seeing one 99-year-old resident recover from the virus. There have been no cases of COVID-19 at Jewel House, which has 12 residents.

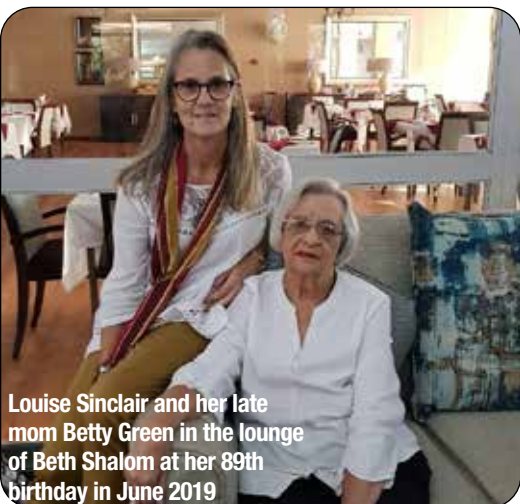
The community has a COVID-19 monitoring programme modelled on

Social Services (DJSS) has experienced an increase in requests for aid and food parcels as the lockdown takes its toll on the economy. Said director Janine Saperson, "DJSS still continues to see new cases. There is always someone having some form of difficulty especially now as a result of the effects

of COVID-19. There is a lot of uncertainty among our clients, but not our residents in Jewel House, who remain remarkably calm and peaceful. We're seeing increased feelings of anxiety including loneliness, fear, anger, and irritability.

"We are seeing many who feel guilty, or are experiencing feelings of worthlessness. It's an unusual and trying time for all no matter the circumstances they find themselves in," she said. "Our staff are doing an outstanding job around the clock to support our residents and clients in the community. We'd like to thank

all those who are so loyal to our cause, and who continue to support and donate to DJSS and our residents in Jewel House from Durban, South Africa, and around the world. We simply couldn't do this without you."



Louise Sinclair and her late mom Betty Green in the lounge of Beth Shalom at her 89th birthday in June 2019

Hatzolah's system in Johannesburg. Oximeters and thermometers are given to COVID-positive community members who are monitored closely, and a local doctor is on call to offer advice.

Droyman said that Durban Jewish

New bond between Israel and UAE good for all sides

OPINION

HARRY JOFFE



On Thursday, the news broke that Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) had agreed to a full normalisation of relations, the first peace treaty between Israel and an Arab country in 26 years. The question is, why did it happen now or, to put it another way, how do all sides benefit from this?

Whether Donald Trump was actually the driving force behind the deal or not, (his team clearly did help mediate between both sides to get them over the line), there is no doubt that he will claim the credit. There is also no doubt that his "deal of the century" plan, which allows Israel to annex about 30% of the disputed territories, created some urgency from the UAE side to act. It would have known that had Israel gone ahead and annexed, it would have put an end to any chances of a peace deal.

This deal gives Trump a major foreign policy success just before the election, his only one so far.

By arguing that it staved off annexation, the UAE can claim that it has kept the two-state solution alive. This deal gives it a valuable ally against its arch enemy, Iran, especially seeing as the United States is no longer seen by the Gulf states as reliable.

After all, the US did nothing to help Saudi Arabia when two key Saudi oil facilities were attacked in September last year by Iranian missiles and drones (even if not proven to be directly by Iran). In addition, all the Gulf states are terrified that if Joe Biden becomes president, the US will go back to the nuclear deal with Iran and end its isolation.

The deal allows the UAE to increase security and intelligence co-operation with Israel openly, and obviously this can be done more effectively if there are embassies and diplomats in each other's countries. The UAE can now effectively partner with a country which has shown itself willing and able to stand up to Iran aggressively.

Just as importantly for the UAE, this deal won't only increase its stature and influence in the Middle East, it will also cement its relationship with Washington, and bring it closer to President Trump (or Biden if he is president after the November election), as he has also praised the UAE move as a "welcome, brave, and badly needed act of statesmanship". As the saying goes: a peace treaty with Israel buys a lot of goodwill in Washington.

It will never be known whether Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Bibi) actually did intend to annex part of the disputed territories, or if this was a giant bluff to force the UAE/Gulf states to act. However, one point is clear. Bibi isn't given to risky moves. This is clearly evidenced by his reluctance to engage in a major invasion of Gaza.

Given the major diplomatic and strategic risks of annexation, (even pro-Israeli countries like the United Kingdom came out strongly against annexation, and there were mutterings in the European Union of sanctions if it took place), it

was uncertain whether Jordan would cancel its peace treaty if annexation took place.

Add to this the threat of violence escalating in the territories, Bibi might well have decided that annexation at this stage carried too many risks. This deal with the UAE allows him to back away from annexation, with the cover that a peace deal with an Arab country is a more valuable prize. He can pacify his right wing with the claim that annexation hasn't been permanently removed from the equation, as in terms of the deal, it's only suspended.

More importantly for Bibi however, this peace deal elevates his stature considerably. He's now a giant on the international stage, being one of the few leaders able to claim good relationships with Presidents Trump, Putin, Modi, and now, increasingly, with many Arab leaders (as more will surely follow this deal). Even if he does cut a divisive figure in local politics, he bestrides the international stage like a colossus.

This deal clearly has major benefits for Israel. First, it will open up massive business opportunities with an economic powerhouse in the Middle East. Israel also gains a very useful strategic ally right across the water from Iran. One can imagine the intelligence opportunities that having an embassy stationed in the UAE will afford Israel.

However, even more importantly, a wall has now broken. Where the UAE has gone, others are sure to follow. The *Jerusalem Post* on Sunday was already speculating which country in the region would be next, with Oman and Bahrain the favourites. Saudi Arabia, the big fish, must eventually follow. Israel's isolation in the Sunni Arab world has effectively come to an end.

Finally, and most interestingly, is the sea change in the approach of the UAE and the other states that will follow it. Up to now, its approach to Israel has been "no normalisation in relations until you do a deal with the Palestinians". However, now, with the Iranian threat no doubt deemed to be more important than the Palestinian issue, the approach has been softened to "we will do a deal as long as you don't annex and destroy the two-state solution".

This removes the pressure on Israel to do a deal with a Palestinian leadership that is seen to be corrupt, untrustworthy, inept, and ineffective (remember how it refused desperately-needed coronavirus-related aid from the UAE recently), as well as enter into a deal that would be risky at the current time with the threats posed by Iran, Hamas, and Hezbollah.

The deal is therefore good for all sides, and the confluence of various events led to perfect timing. It should even benefit the Palestinian people on the ground, with an infusion of Gulf money flowing into the territories creating jobs, opportunities, and better living conditions for ordinary people.

• Harry Joffe is a Johannesburg tax and trust attorney.



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'It's my fault' – living with the guilt of passing on the virus

TALI FEINBERG

In a heart-wrenching post on the Joburg Jewish Mommies Facebook group last week, Tracy-Lee Langlois shared the tragedy of having passed COVID-19 on to her mother, Claire Purto, who subsequently passed away.

Langlois is far from alone in unintentionally passing coronavirus on to a loved one who passed away, but for many, it causes immense feelings of guilt.

"No-one wakes up in the morning and says, 'Today I want to cause death and destruction to my family'," said local psychologist Sheryl Cohen. "The tendency to blame and shame the self is a kind of anger turned inwards. The source of that anger is the wish to gain control over overwhelming emotions."

Langlois told the *SA Jewish Report* that her parents had recently sold their home, and had moved in with her about two weeks before. "We planned to build a cottage for them on our property so they could enjoy their retirement years with their grandchildren."

But Langlois contracted COVID-19, and by the time she realised she was infected, around 7 July, her whole family had caught it, including her mother, who was 73. "She was young at heart. Although she had some health issues, she was doing well a week into contracting the virus. However one morning, she woke up feeling very light-headed."

Hatzolah was called, and her blood pressure was low, with blood tests showing inflammation markers slightly elevated. She also had extreme nausea.

Hatzolah monitored her every day, and her oxygen levels fluctuated. She was eventually admitted to hospital, and put on oxygen. This included frightening moments for Langlois, such as when her mother called her around 01:00 saying she wasn't able to breathe and couldn't get the nurse's attention. The next evening, she was taken to high care.

Early the next morning, Langlois missed a call from her mother. When she phoned back, they couldn't hear each other, and when she tried to call again, the phone kept going to voicemail. Langlois called the ward and was told they were dealing with an emergency.

"I just knew it was my mother," she said. "When the clinical assistant eventually phoned, they confirmed it, and said my mother had to be ventilated. The prognosis wasn't good, and we had to take it hour by hour."

Langlois called her rabbi, her doctor, and her sister in Australia. They prayed for a miracle while her mother was in the intensive care unit. Her young daughter asked to send a voice note of her singing to her grandmother, and when it was played for her, "the doctor said that her eyes flew open and stayed open the entire time the voice note was playing".

A rollercoaster ride of emotions followed as her mother entered a "cytokine storm", when the immune system essentially attacks the body as it attempts to fight the virus. In spite of the doctors' best efforts, her mother passed



Tracy-Lee Langlois with her mom, Claire Purto

away on 24 July.

"I feel guilty," Langlois said, "but I also know how careful I was. The thing is, once you're sick, you've already passed it on, and there are very real consequences. If it can happen to someone like me who is so careful and tries so hard, it can happen to anyone."

As someone who has faced tragedy before when her first husband died in a car accident 11 years ago, she has come to believe that "you can't question it. Everything is as it's meant to be, even if we don't think it's right or fair."

How do you cope with the knowledge that you have passed the virus on to a loved one? Said clinical psychologist Ilana Edelstein, "A helpful lens through which we can understand the social impact of the virus is a term which is new to most of us: 'moral injury'. This is a transgression or perceived transgression of one's own, and can manifest as guilt, shame, the inability to forgive oneself,

demoralisation, and in worst-case scenarios, self-harming behaviour.

"Moral injury can happen both from action and inaction, or other people's actions or inactions. People may feel that they could have done more to protect a family member, or may feel that they are being asked to make impossible choices that will cause conflict between their morals and the reality of the pandemic," she says.

"Moral injury is a type of invisible wound. It's distinct from the more widely recognised condition of post-traumatic stress disorder or survivor's guilt. It's an infliction of conscience, sometimes described as a 'wound to the soul'. It's important for people to realise that if they are feeling huge remorse, then they are likely to have huge compassion, and if they have huge compassion, they wouldn't willingly have wanted to harm another person.

"Survivors often overestimate their sense of personal responsibility for a negative event. We need to help the person to accurately appraise their role and to examine whether they purposefully did something that was wrong. What was their intention?"

"It helps to look at the limited options they really had, and how they may have done their best in an untenable situation. We're all in this together, and are all potentially responsible for the harm of others. We can't blame others and point fingers. We need to recognise the

profound dual pain such a person might be experiencing – the loss of a loved one and feelings of guilt. It's important to recognise that your loved one wouldn't want you to get into self-destructive mode."

To offset the effects of moral injury, Edelstein advises, "It helps to create a routine. This is especially important given that there is so much we currently can't control. Don't be alone – reach out for support and offer virtual support. Try not to dwell in a negative narrative. Look for positives."

Cohen agrees. "Be kind to yourself. This is hard enough without the guilt. The loss of a loved one leaves us all feeling helpless and vulnerable. The human psyche likes to balance helplessness and power in order to create 'psychic-equilibrium'. One example of that power is the thought that 'I could have stopped it' or 'I'm to blame'. Why? Because it's easier to blame oneself and have a sense of control than to sit with the pain of loss and the intense helplessness that a loved one has died.

"A more helpful alternative to 'psychic-equilibrium' is to balance the helplessness with the power of what you can do positively in this traumatic time of loss. Perhaps it's taking care of your family; perhaps it's making people aware of your story; perhaps it's planting a tree in memory of your loved one. Whatever it is, focus on the power that comes with gain rather than the blame that comes with loss. Victimising yourself is destructive. Building the world in the memory of others is constructive."

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New Jewish school in Cape Town greeted with optimism and relief

TALI FEINBERG

Aimee Chiat, Herzlia Constantia’s foundation phase head of department, has taken a step that some might say is risky, but has been met by relief by many parents.

Chiat is opening Salisbury House, a new, independent Jewish primary school in Cape Town’s southern suburbs, in January 2021. The move comes after United Herzlia Schools announced in June that it would close its Herzlia Constantia primary school campus next year, and that Jewish children from the southern suburbs could be accommodated at its other campuses which they could travel to on free bus rides.

“It has long been my dream to start my own school,” she says. The school, for grades 1 to 7, will be registered with the Western Cape Education Department, and will follow a CAPS syllabus. The education received at Salisbury House will be officially recognised by other schools when the pupils move on after Grade 7.

“We are a community-based school, striving to inspire children to be creative and critical thinkers as well as responsible citizens ready to meet the challenges of the future,” said Chiat in a webinar for interested parents on Tuesday, 11 August, attended by about 48 people.

Current Herzlia Constantia parent, Professor Amanda Weltman, says the school is needed. “According to the Kaplan Centre Jewish Community Survey of 2019, roughly 25% of the

affiliated Jewish community live in the southern suburbs, so it’s critical to the lifeblood of this community that there is a Jewish primary school [in the area],” she says.

“The launching of Salisbury House is an important and needed response to the sudden closure of Herzlia Constantia. [Chiat] has stepped in to fill the educational and communal gap, with no large donors behind her, just her own beliefs and ideas about what a community school means to our community,” says Weltman.

“She is clearly building her school on Jewish values and with a ‘no-Jewish-child-left-behind’ mentality that I suspect will come as a great relief to many in the community who have felt abandoned in recent months.”

Chiat says the school will be accommodated at the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation (Temple Israel) campus in Wynberg. It will offer pluralist Jewish education, and some of the Jewish studies and Hebrew lessons will be taught by Temple Israel’s three rabbis. Pupils will celebrate *chaggim* and Shabbat, and the school will close at these times. It will be open to children of all backgrounds, and children following all streams of Judaism are welcome. Hebrew and

Jewish Studies will be taught three times a week during the school day.

Says Rabbi Greg Alexander of Temple Israel, “Our congregation supports Jewish education in all its forms, and like many in the community, we were very surprised at Herzlia’s announcement that the Constantia campus would be closing next year.”

Continues Temple Israel’s executive director, Eric Beswick, “We immediately reached out to our members who were directly affected by this to see how we could support them at the time.

Some families asked if we could make space available on our Wynberg campus for a Jewish school, as



Aimee Chiat

we have classrooms already set up for our *cheder*. We were clear that it could go ahead if the school was liberal in nature and taught both Progressive and Orthodox approaches to Judaism.

“Meetings since then led to the formation of Salisbury House. We have stipulated that we don’t want to own any part of the school, but that we are looking forward to having a Jewish school in the southern suburbs that is committed to teaching pluralistic Jewish values to its learners.”

Beswick says there is no desire to compete with Herzlia Schools, “as many of our members are Herzlia families. However, we have found that after decades of varied approaches to Herzlia to open its Jewish studies curriculum to Progressive teachings, we are still in the same situation that only Orthodox materials and only Orthodox rabbis and teachers are permitted to teach our children. This doesn’t reflect nor serve Herzlia’s position as the largest community school in Cape Town, or the Jewish demographic reality in our city.”

Rabbi Alexander says that the Progressive movement is “strongly invested in building a cross-communal ethos in Cape Town, and that we will do everything we can to help connect all Jewish schools and pupils in the city”.

Chiat says Salisbury House will be a co-ed school with a ratio of ten pupils per teacher. There will be “multi-grade classrooms” where learners will

work on the same theme but do tasks at their own level. This will give pupils the flexibility to reinforce areas where they may be weaker, or to push on towards the next grade’s work if they are ready.

Outings or interactions with guests will occur at least once a month. The school will follow government protocols regarding COVID-19. Fees will be in line with other “cottage schools” and private schools.

The school will operate out of three classrooms that are in good condition, and there will be a large outdoor area that will have play equipment and astroturf. The Cape Jewish Seniors Association utilises a room in the building, and Chiat envisions interactions between school children and the elderly, which is beneficial to both. She says she has a number of excellent teachers who are interested in joining the staff, but it all depends on numbers. The school hopes for a cohort of 20 pupils when it opens in January.

Chiat says she is “passionate about education, and can’t imagine doing anything else”. She attended Herzlia for her entire school career and spent a gap year in Israel on kibbutz. She returned to Cape Town, and completed her Bachelor of Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, followed by Honours in inclusive education. She has taught in the Herzlia system for ten years, and is currently a Grade 3 teacher at Herzlia Constantia as well as being head of department and head of a portfolio assisting pupils to initiate campaigns to protect the environment.

A ‘revitalised, representative’ SAJBD Gauteng Council

JORDAN MOSHE

Menashe Selamolela wants to ensure that the Jewish community continues to fight antisemitism and contribute positively to South Africa. He is a member of the Lemba community, a proud Jew, and a brand new member of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Gauteng Council as of this past weekend.

Selamolela believes it’s time for us to deal with the challenges of our history in a constructive way. “As a Jewish community, we must continue to highlight our positive ongoing contribution and commitment to South African society,” he says. “We must strengthen our identity through proper education, knowledge, and tikkun olam, so that we can be a strong contributor to our society and be recognised as such as we move to new heights.”

Selamolela is one of the three first-time members of the 15 newly-elected members of the council announced on Sunday. Their names were shared in a livestream by Harold Jacobs, the vice-chairperson of the council.

Selamolela joins Shaun Matisonn, who is head of international markets for the

and executive producer of Oscar-winning film *Tsotsi*, Liza Essers; business maverick Reeva Forman; Lesley-Anne Gatter, the head of people at Investec; and Professor Karen Milner, associate professor of psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand.

Although the SAJBD typically elects council members after a nomination process, no formal election was held this year, SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn, told the *SA Jewish Report*.

“This year, an election wasn’t required as 15 nominees qualified for the 15 available places,” she says. “Gauteng has had elections in the past. This year, an online election process had been put in place for the elections should they have been required.”

The election process for the SAJBD is governed by the Gauteng Council Constitution and the SAJBD National Constitution, she explained. All affiliate bodies to the Gauteng Council are entitled to vote proportionally according to the number of their members.

“Shuls, schools, youth organisations, women’s organisations, and other Jewish communal organisations in Gauteng are registered communal organisations,”



The names of the newly-elected council being announced

Vitality Group, a division of Discovery, and a director of the *SA Jewish Report*; and Rabbi Dovid Hazdan, the rabbi of Great Park Shul and the dean of Torah Academy, in bringing new blood to the council.

They bring diverse knowledge and skills to an already impressive group of people. These include, among others, the owner and director of Goodman Gallery

Kahn says. “From six weeks prior to the election, each affiliate organisation is informed of the election and conference and are encouraged to put through nominations for the council.”

The newly-elected members told the *SA Jewish Report* they looked forward to investing their time and effort in the community.

“It’s a privilege to be given the opportunity to participate in the umbrella leadership of our unique Jewish community,” says Hazdan. “Particularly in these extremely challenging times, we have all seen and benefited from the outstanding role that the SAJBD has played in and beyond the Jewish community.

“I hope that my experience in rabbinic leadership and in education can add spiritual and Torah input into the deliberations and decisions of the Gauteng Council.”

Hazdan looks forward to adding to the exceptional unity and camaraderie that exists in the Jewish community and to working on building more bridges to address the broader needs of our fellow South Africans.

Selamolela is equally determined to make a positive mark on the community. He believes he is able to contribute a perspective that isn’t typical to the South African Jewish community.

“I’m able to talk about current issues from a much broader worldview and experience than, perhaps, most other members of the community,” he says. “The key to a successful future in South Africa is truly being able to live together while respecting each other’s differences and

Continued on page 14>>

Romy Saitowitz plans to send her daughter to the school. “Jewish families in the southern suburbs are passionate about our community and the values of diversity and inclusion. To this end, we are thrilled that outstanding educator, Aimee Chiat, has taken the initiative to open a Jewish school in Wynberg that will allow our children to benefit from a well-rounded education based on our Jewish values,” she says.

“Small classes and a nurturing environment are of great value to me. I love that the school welcomes parental involvement, and the fact that it’s close to my home means that I can be involved in my daughter’s schooling while she is young. In the midst of what has been an exceptionally difficult year, I’m excited for 2021 and grateful that my daughter has a place at Salisbury House.”



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Looted heirloom finds its way back to SA family

JORDAN MOSHE

Debbie Meyer grew up close to her grandmother, who was fortunate enough to have escaped Nazi Germany before the horrors of the Holocaust.

However, when she learned that a looted family heirloom had been discovered and was being returned to her family, that connection was strengthened in a way she could never have imagined.

On 7 July, Meyer, a volunteer at the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC), received a package containing her maternal grandmother’s Jewish song book given to her in 1927 when she was about 13 years old.

Published in 1836, the book is a family heirloom which passed through the hands of other family members before it came to Meyer’s grandmother, Anneliese Roer. It had been discovered in the library of the School for Jewish Studies in Heidelberg, Germany, by a librarian determined to return it to its rightful owners.

“I knew my grandparents were refugees,” Meyer told the *SA Jewish Report*. “I knew their story. I went back with my gran to her native town of Minden in Germany. She showed me where she had lived, where she and her family had shopped, and other places of her childhood. “I didn’t know about the book at all, so when it arrived via courier, I didn’t know what to expect. It was incredible to open the package and see it. I was just blown away.”

The restoration is the culmination of efforts across three different continents. The process of restitution began earlier this year when German librarian Philipp Zschommler set out to trace the history of the book.



Debbie Meyer

“I started to work for this project at the beginning of 2019,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*. “Our Centre for Jewish Studies got a lot of books from different places like bequests and donations. Unfortunately, it’s likely that many pre-1945 books were looted by the Nazis.

“Our chief librarian had the idea to initiate the project. For years, professors and students were aware of the possible past of our books. Maybe it was because it was a Jewish institution that we didn’t act until now, but we have no right to keep other people’s property on our shelves.”

In tracing owners, Zschommler searches names (where they appear in books) in numerous databases, seeking to identify any living descendants. His research into the song book started with the identification of a book seller’s label.

“I saw a little label from a bookshop of Anneliese’s home city of Minden,” he recounts.

“In different databases, I found that there was a Beermann family [Anneliese’s maiden name], and I asked at the city archive and it confirmed that there was an Anneliese Beermann who emigrated to South Africa. I also found an article where it was mentioned that she visited her home country in the 1980s.”

However, the trail ran cold at this point, and Zschommler could find no further information. He therefore turned to a trusted colleague and renowned provenance researcher, Anne Webber, the founder and co-chair of the Commission for Looted Art in Europe based in London. Working closely with governments, museums, and private families, the commission undertakes policy negotiations, and helps identify, locate, and recover looted items, including paintings, manuscripts, books, and other treasured possessions.

“I’d done work with Philipp before, and he contacted me in April to ask for help in tracing descendants of a family in South Africa,” Webber recounted this week. “We do a lot of this type of work, sometimes without much to go on. We agreed to help, and I started searching.

“It was actually a rather straightforward case. I found Anneliese’s daughter, Eve [Meyer’s mother] on Facebook, but found that she was no longer alive. However, I also saw that she had three children, Kevin Hurwitz, Janice Lipchin, and Debbie Meyer. I couldn’t find them in the phone directory, so I turned to a South African friend and told him that I was looking for these people, and that they had lived in Malmesbury.”

A genealogist by profession, Webber’s contact knew immediately who the family was, and found a close friend of Hurwitz who could provide contact details. Webber wrote to Hurwitz, who put her in touch with Meyer. The two made contact in May, and arranged for the book to be returned.

“Anne and Philipp had done so much work, and I couldn’t wait for the book to arrive,” says

Meyer. “When I held it, I realised I was looking at something that was more than a hundred years old and that my gran and her family had treasured it. I saw a gem I could pass on to my own children.”

The book is the Heidelberg Centre’s first restitution, with thousands of others waiting to be processed. Zschommler says it’s possible that more cases will lead to South Africa. “In the years after World War II, Germany wasn’t eager to deal with restitutions and the families of the victims were treated as petitioners,” he says. “Sometimes they got nothing. Now, we have to do what we should have done earlier.

“Books can’t compensate for monetary loss, but I hope to give back the families a part of their lost identity.”

Webber agrees. “The news is often full of cases to do with high-value items being restored, but items like this are just as important,” says Webber. “Whatever the item is, it connects people to their family.

“The Nazis did their best to erase these connections, to erase Jews from history. We feel we’re helping restore a little of that connection which is so important to all of us. A book is a very special thing.”

Tali Nates, the founder and director of the JHGC, says that this story marks a critical

junction. “This is a form of restorative justice – giving looted artefacts and family heirlooms back to their rightful families,” she says. “It’s so important, and shows how Germany continues to grapple with its painful past. It’s never simple, especially when it’s a country that perpetrated genocide.”

Meyer says that her late grandmother knows that her granddaughter has her book, and is watching her with a smile.

“I’m holding a book that she held,” she says. “She read it when she was a girl. My family left Germany with nothing, and through the work of incredible people, their belongings have come home. They took such trouble and care to reunite one little book with one family.”



A page from the song book returned to Debbie Meyer

UCT’s golden age for Jews – a mixed picture for liberalism

MOIRA SCHNEIDER

Emeritus Professor Howard Phillips sees 1948 to 1968 as the golden age of the University of Cape Town’s (UCT’s) medical school, as well as the best years for Jews on campus, both in terms of staff and students.

Phillips, speaking about his recently published book, *UCT under Apartheid: From Onset to Sit-in 1948 – 1968* is a graduate of UCT and London University. He also taught in the department of historical studies and department of public health at UCT from 1974 to 2014.

The most obvious but by no means the only example of our community’s influence, he says, was the very marked growth in numbers of Jewish staff and students at the medical school during those years. Jews in fact constituted a “significant minority” amongst the white students.

“Because the profession of medicine had been such a major instrument of social mobility for Jews – for the first generation of South African-born Jews, that was the way to go – many were in the medical profession and were willing to do part-time teaching,” says Phillips.

The best-known Jewish figure at the school

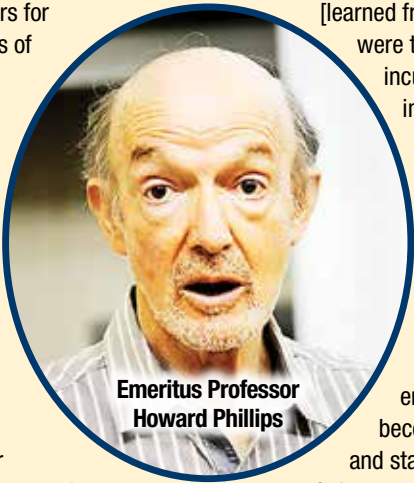
at the time was the late Professor Frank Forman who was one of those who laid the foundations of the “efflorescence” of the medical school during those years, Phillips says. “He was certainly a man whose teaching style and bedside manner [learned from his Scottish teachers]

were the stuff of legend. In terms of inculcating that into students, his impact is widespread indeed.

“Forman was reputed to be able to speak to people in a way which wasn’t top-down, and this made an immense impression on his students.”

An illustration of what Phillips terms the “congenial environment” which UCT had become for its Jewish students and staff, was when it gave a leave of absence to 77 Jewish students who wished to volunteer during the Six-Day War. “One member of senate thought this infringed on South Africa’s declared policy of neutrality in Arab-Israeli matters, but refrained from raising this ‘in the light of the strong Jewish representation in the senate’.”

While UCT has the image of being a liberal institution during apartheid, Phillips shows that this was not always uniformly the case, but rather dependent on particular principals and



Emeritus Professor Howard Phillips

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'We construct our reality in which we thrive'

JORDAN MOSHE

True freedom can be found in your own mind, and the key to unlocking it is in your pocket. No matter how dire life may be, every one of us has the potential to construct a reality in which we can not only survive, but flourish.

This was the message of hope offered by Dr Edith Eva Eger this past Sunday in a unique online interview hosted by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. A renowned psychologist and author, the 92-year-old Holocaust survivor spoke to CapeTalk presenter Africa Melane, sharing powerful insights into the capabilities of the human mind in the face of adversity.

“There are no problems in our world, only challenges made to be overcome,” said Eger. “So often, we say things like ‘I always’ or ‘I never’. You can’t speak that way, because reality can change. If you focus on something, the chances are it will turn out that way. You have that ability.”

Born in Hungary, Eger was a teenager when she and her family were sent to Auschwitz in 1944. Although both her parents perished, she miraculously survived the horrors of the infamous death camp with her sister, Magda, going on to marry and emigrate to the United States.

Said Eger, “I call Auschwitz an opportunity to discover something you never thought possible. When

we were in the cattle car, my mother said, ‘We don’t know where we’re going or what will happen there, but remember that no one can take from you what you have in your mind.’

“My mother taught me the power of thinking. What we think, we create.”

Eger implemented her mother’s teaching upon arrival at Auschwitz, when she was forced to dance for the infamous Angel of Death, Dr Josef Mengele, who would decide whether she should live or be sent to the gas chamber.

“When I looked at Dr Mengele, I saw those eyes looking at me,” she recalled. “I closed my eyes and pretended I was hearing Tchaikovsky and was dancing in *Romeo and Juliet* at the Budapest Opera House. I prayed that I wouldn’t go to the gas chamber, but I also escaped with my mind in that moment. I discovered how to use my mind.

“I turned hatred into pity. I decided the Nazis were prisoners, not me. I saw them as brainwashed and believed that someday, they would pay for their sins. I created a world they couldn’t touch.”

This was the first of numerous lessons Eger would learn from her time at Auschwitz. In spite of the daily horrors which surrounded her, she learned how to overcome the brutality of her reality and find opportunity in every moment of every day.

“Auschwitz gave me opportunities

to discover,” she said. “Yes, it was terrible, and I will never forget what happened to me. I have nightmares until today, and will never really overcome what happened.”

“Still, I came to terms with it, and call it my cherished wound. I saw that people who were only for themselves never made it. My curiosity, just like my faith, helped me survive. I found my inner strength at Auschwitz, and it helped me to

discover how we can rise above the ‘me’ and commit ourselves to each other. All we had was each other.”

Eger also maintained her faith in spite of her privation.

“G-d has given me love, joy, passion, and purpose,” she said. “My

G-d was with me in Auschwitz. Some people ask where he was during the Holocaust, but he was with me. I was told I’d never get out alive, that I was subhuman. But my G-d cared for me.”

Eger applied her lessons to the reality of COVID-19, which she believes highlights the importance of connecting with others.

“People truly empower each other,” she said. “You can be you and I can be me. We are all beautiful loving children of

G-d made to help one another.”

At the same time, however, she stressed that our circumstances also teach us the need for self-care.

“This situation gives us a chance to take stock of ourselves and our own lives,” said Eger. “The more we depend

on others to make us happy, the less chance we have of being happy.”

As we cope with the unexpected, we have been given an opportunity to rediscover who we really are.

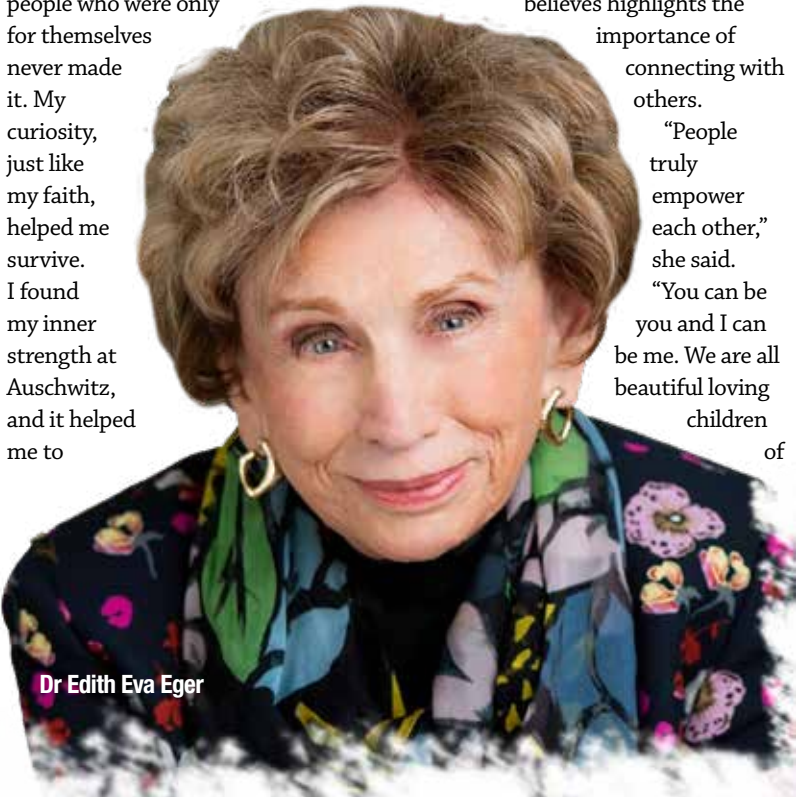
“Life is like Shakespeare,” said Eger. “You get a role with an expectation. My mom said I had brains and no looks, and that my sister was the beautiful one. When we had our heads shaved, we looked identical. Magda asked me what she looked like, and I told her that I could finally see how beautiful her eyes were now that her hair wasn’t covering them.

“We often base our self-worth on what others say, and forget who we are. Self-love is self-care. It’s not narcissism.”

Eger hopes that imposed isolation and lockdown have afforded people an opportunity to reflect on who they really are and their life’s purpose.

“This is the time to regroup, reconsider, and reflect,” she said. “We get to decide who we really are. When I lived through Auschwitz, I decided that I wasn’t a victim. That wasn’t my identity. I continued to tell myself that I was a human being, not subhuman or a cancer to society. G-d saved me for a purpose, and I needed to be me.

“I ask people to talk to themselves and ask themselves if what they’re doing is working,” Eger said. “It’s good to have a goal to follow and an arrow to direct you. Life is short, every moment is precious, and you need to know who you are.”



Dr Edith Eva Eger

UCT’s golden age for Jews a mixed picture for liberalism

>> Continued from page 12

students and staff marched through the streets departments.

“One needs to look at UCT in a comparative context and, in contrast to many other South African universities, UCT and Wits [the University of the Witwatersrand] were certainly far more so than Rhodes or the University of Natal – and we’re not even talking about the Afrikaans-medium universities.

“So relative to other South African universities, UCT certainly was liberal.” But, he says, one has to draw a difference between UCT’s public profile and what often happened in-house, describing the situation as “a mixed picture”.

“Its public profile was that it stood up very courageously against the imposition of apartheid; students and staff marched through the streets of Cape Town against the introduction of university apartheid. All of that is in keeping with UCT’s public image as a defender of academic freedom.

“But within the university, there are many

Phillips describes the 1968 sit-in at UCT as a “watershed” in that this was the first time that students had protested against the university.

practices which are anything but in accord with that public profile and that is because it was also part and parcel of white South African society and it often reflected those outlooks. When it had to deal with government institutions like Groote Schuur Hospital, it had to bend to its requirements, so medical students had to fit in with the racial segregation at the hospital and UCT didn’t take a significant stand against that.”

On an individual level, one comes across even more marked racist attitudes, he says. In the book, Phillips documents the experience of black students who felt “very seriously discriminated against”, a phenomenon that surprised Phillips most in his research of the period.

He cites the example of black fine arts students who, when it came to life drawing, were told that they had to go into a separate room as they were

prohibited from drawing a white model – a coloured woman would pose for them.

This information was gleaned from the late intellectual and activist Adam Small in an interview during which Phillips asked him if his parents had been outraged at this. “My mother was outraged, because the idea that I should see a naked woman was absolutely unacceptable to her, whether she was white or black,” Small replied.

One needs to recognise the nature of the society at the time, Phillips comments, and not necessarily try and separate UCT from the context of the society of which it was part.

When architectural students were required to come up with a plan for a state or institutional building, separate toilets and separate entrances for different races were incorporated “without anybody commenting on it”, according to Phillips, who labels the phenomenon “unconscious racism”.

It underlines the importance of oral testimony in providing the full picture, as personal experiences wouldn’t be documented in the formal archives.

Similarly in the faculty of medicine, black students weren’t permitted to be present when white patients were presented, and had to leave the lecture theatre. Forman got around this by only presenting black patients to the class.

Phillips describes the 1968 sit-in at UCT as a “watershed” in that this was the first time that students had protested against the university. Until then, the two constituencies had been united in their protests against apartheid.

Dubbed “The Mafeje Affair”, the sit-in was the result of UCT bowing to government pressure to withdraw the appointment of black academic Archie Mafeje to its staff. Instrumental in driving the sit-in was “the highly articulate zealot”, Raphie Kaplinsky, the chair of the Radical Students Society, who went into exile in Britain after his passport was withdrawn in the wake of the sit-in.

Phillips also wrote *The University of Cape Town 1918 – 1948: The Formative Years; Cemeteries and Synagogues: The Foundation of Organized Jewry in SA*; and *The Centenary of the Great Synagogue, Cape Town, 1905-2005*.

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Cadena SA volunteers Ilan Goldberg and Mendy Graumann (Head of Operations), prepare for the distribution of JNF food parcels to the people of Mamelodi

JNF distributes 500 food parcels in Mamelodi

The Jewish National Fund of South Africa distributed 500 food parcels to the Mamelodi community in Tshwane on 11 August with the assistance of volunteers from philanthropic organisation Cadena. The delivery, scheduled for the previous week, had to be halted due to civil unrest, in keeping with the Jewish mitzvah of pikuach nefesh (not putting lives at risk). The JNF acknowledges all donors and particularly the South African Jewish

Board of Deputies food relief fund and The Angel Network for their generous donations to this project. The recipients are affiliated to the JNF Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre in Mamelodi, a JNF outreach project initiated in the early 1990s to bring Israeli eco-practices to this semi-rural South African community. JNF South Africa continues to be committed to the centre’s ecological impact, and the welfare of the extended Mamelodi community.

Letters

THAWING RELATIONS WITH THE UAE GOOD NEWS, NO MATTER WHO TAKES THE CREDIT

In my letter to the *SA Jewish Report* on 18 June criticising the pending annexation of parts of the West Bank by Israel and citing warming relations with the European Union and some Arab countries, I wrote that Trump isn’t good for Israel in spite of all that he is perceived to have done. Thankfully, the annexation didn’t take place. It has been put on ice due to the announcement of strengthening ties between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. The announcement is indeed good news and if it can hold, will be of great benefit to the region and perhaps an incentive for more to follow. The “breaking news” by Trump together with an assembly of his inner circle including Kushner was so contrived and so noticeably staged to enhance his failing image, it was almost laughable. There was much commentary on international news channels about the behind-the-scenes relations between the Gulf States and Israel, who never miss the opportunity to malign Israel’s “brutal occupation”, as well as condemnation from the Palestinians and other hardline Arab quarters. Trump and Netanyahu, two of the most despised world leaders by the international press, are fodder

for negative comment on their own. But a theory was put forward that this deal was engineered by Netanyahu through his announcement of annexation a while back, which created a frenzy of condemnation from so many quarters, then stalled for a few weeks, and suddenly there was “breaking news”, with Trump taking all the credit. Perhaps it was a form of payback by Netanyahu to help bolster Trump’s image at home as well as garner more support from the United States prior to the upcoming elections in the US. A plausible theory, nevertheless. It gains some traction insofar as it shows the Arab world that it was the US and not any direct contact with Israel that consummated the arrangement, demonstrating the arms-length attitude towards Israel. One can conjure any number of theories, what’s important is that the world is growing weary with the Israeli-Palestinian problem and this move, in spite of that naysayer Ben Wedeman of CNN, gives hope to the revival of the two-state solution which must ultimately come to fruition if there is ever to be a peaceful co-existence in the region, especially in the post COVID-19 era. – **Allan Wolman**,

DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH UAE WILL BOOST PALESTINIAN ECONOMY

The historic bilateral mutual establishment of diplomatic relations between the United Arab Emirates and Israel will be a huge boost for the Palestinian economy within Israel and in the areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority. We can expect tens of thousands of Emiratis to flock to Israel, where they will naturally seek out those amenities such as hotels, restaurants, entertainment, and tourist sites which cater to their cultural preferences. This will particularly benefit those hotels in East Jerusalem which are owned and managed by Palestinians. Some of the best hotels like The American Colony Hotel and the Seven Arches Intercontinental Hotel, both rich in historic significance, are located in East Jerusalem. Certain visitors will obviously want to visit friends and families located in the areas beyond the Green Line, in towns like Ramallah and Jenin, where there are no shortages of quality hotels and guest houses. Arab cuisine is much appreciated throughout Israel, and some of the most vaunted restaurants are located even in Tel Aviv, where many of them are Arab owned. The open-air markets and those small shops hugging the narrow alleys of the “Old City” will be significant beneficiaries particularly of

those tourists visiting the Haram esh-Sharif on which are located the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aksa Mosques, the third most holy sites in Islam. The largest part of the “Old City” is the Arab Quarter, and it’s populated by many eateries where visiting Arab tourists will be spoilt for choice for authentic Arab food. Palestinian tour guides and travel agents are already well-established, catering to pilgrims and tourists, and the demand for their services is likely to increase substantially. With Dubai playing a leading role in Arab high tech, it follows that businessmen and investors will seek out opportunities in Israel, the “start-up nation”. Here, too, they will find many opportunities to link up with Palestinians, as already there are many Palestinian-Israeli start-ups. In years gone by, Beirut in Lebanon was a magnet for Arab and Emirati tourists as it offered a blend of cosmopolitan and sophisticated culture that was unique in the Arab world. With Beirut now in ruins, the cosmopolitan attractions of Israel’s diverse population will offer a fitting alternative. Hopefully, Palestinians will now also see that co-operation offers a future of hope rather than despair. – **Ben Levitas, Cape Town**

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A ‘revitalised, representative’ SAJBD Gauteng Council

>>Continued from page 10 recognising that we have a shared future. I believe I can bring this to the table with a fresh and dynamic energy.” Selamolela studied Judaism at the Ohr Torah Stone Yeshiva in Israel, and is a member of the Hyde Park Shul led by Rabbi Mendel Lipskar. He takes pride in his Jewish heritage, promoting Judaism as a faith of tolerance and understanding, and intends to bring this to bear on his new role. “It’s a great honour for me and the Hyde Park community to which I belong,” he says. “When I was approached a few years ago to stand for the seat on the board, it meant a great deal to me, but with humility, I turned down the offer for various reasons that made it impossible at that time. However, having seen what this organisation has done over these past few years and continues to do, it’s clear to me that I belong here.” Selamolela says the challenge is to make South Africa the type of society we all envisioned 25 years ago. “The Jewish community has always played an outsized role in South Africa, and has contributed immensely to the development of this country,” he says. “For me, this will be an opportunity to make South Africans realise that as a Jewish community, we can provide a light unto this nation.” Matisonn believes communal involvement is essential to our community. “Where a person has time and capacity, community involvement is one of the most crucial things they should pursue,” he says. “Everyone needs to make their own contribution where appropriate. The community is much stronger for it. For some, it means Hatzolah, for others it’s the CSO [Community Security Organisation]. Yes, the

board needs to deliver on its mandate, but the community needs to make its voice heard as to what it needs, and get involved. “There are generations who came before us who built our community, and those to whom we will leave it, so it’s incumbent on all of us to make our own contribution to this Jewish community.” Matisonn has served on a few community-oriented boards over the years, giving him opportunities to engage with the community and develop organisational skills central to communal upliftment. “We’ve seen throughout lockdown how vibrant and strong our community is, but we’ve also noticed what our weaknesses and challenges are. I hope to make some contribution to steering us through those challenges and capitalising on our opportunities,” he says. The council’s strategy will be discussed and determined by incoming members as its new executive is elected and the new council meetings convene. Kahn believes the nominations this year reflect the diversity of Gauteng Jewry. “The nominees put forward include representatives from the business and legal communities, academia, the rabbinate, and the professions,” she says. “The council is also representative of the Orthodox and Progressive communities, and is 50% women. This representation, diversity, and broad skill set will enrich deliberations, decision making, and leadership on the council. “The broad range of organisations that made nominations will ensure that the community will be represented on this important body,” she says.

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Yeshiva College announces student leaders for 2021

Yeshiva College last week announced its new student leadership for 2021, with the positions of head boy and head girl going to Akiva Fox and Kayla Sifris respectively.



The new student leaders of Yeshiva College Boys School

“A student leader should strive to be a *kiddush Hashem*, standing up for what’s right, and not simply doing what’s easy. In addition, they should emit empathy for their peers, and create harmony for the school at large,” the school said. “These are two outstanding students who emulate these qualities and lead by example.”

Pointing out that it prides itself on developing students who are academically accomplished and have a sense of community responsibility, the school said, “The vice-heads, Ethan Lewus and Sara Barnes, will no doubt support the head leaders while leading the school effectively in their own right.”

Yeshiva has also elected committees from the Grade 11 student group, which will develop and run initiatives that represent the values of the school. These include inspiration and unity, Israel, *chesed*, media, environment and advocacy, sport, and arts and culture.

Voting was done by students via an online voting system during the school day on Thursday, 13 August.



The new student leaders of Yeshiva College Girls School

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Record participation in Gauteng council conference

The first-ever online South African Jewish Board of Deputies regional conference went ahead without any serious hitches on Sunday, 16 August, with speaker Dr Edith Eger drawing attendance well in excess of 14 000 to the second part of the event.

Prior to that, delegates learned more about the work the Board does, including in the media, to combat antisemitism and safeguard Jewish religious rights, and had the opportunity to engage with the outgoing Gauteng council executive in a lively Q & A session.

The conference was also an opportunity for us to present a detailed overview of the work that has been and continues to be done in terms of dealing with COVID-19, on behalf of our own community and further afield in terms of assisting fellow South Africans who have been especially badly affected. For those unable to attend on the night, full conference proceedings can be accessed on our Facebook page.

In the course of the conference, the new Gauteng council was announced. I congratulate those elected to represent our Gauteng community over the next two years, particularly those who will be serving on the board for the first time, and wish them all success in their term of office.

Historic Israel-UAE agreement

In the wake of so much sobering news regarding our COVID-19-stricken, controversy-ridden planet, the announcement that the United Arab Emirates had become the third Middle

ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



Eastern state after Egypt and Jordan to formally normalise its relationship with Israel came as a welcome boost. The historic agreement represents a further significant advance in Israel’s acceptance by its neighbours as an established component of the group of states making up the Middle East, as opposed to being treated as an unwelcome intruder whose very existence should be opposed. It further helps to advance the cause of peace in this troubled part of the world.

Significantly, four Middle Eastern countries – Egypt, Jordan, Oman, and Bahrain – were among the nations which welcomed the agreement, and hopefully more will follow. Regrettably, our own country not only failed to follow suit, but was among those states that expressed opposition to it. In its response to the department of international relations and cooperation’s statement, the Board roundly deplored this inexplicable departure from South Africa’s normal approach when it comes to conflict resolution around the world. By rejecting rather than welcoming a promising breakthrough, the government has again placed itself on the wrong side of developments in that part of the world and again missed an historic opportunity to play a constructive role in pursuit of peace in the greater Middle East region.

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

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

Zooming into perspective

On Sunday, we celebrated the Barmitzvah of the son of a close friend. It took place on Zoom, as has been the 2020 way. Although I initially felt saddened that I couldn’t be at the *leining* and the party, I was quickly drawn into the energy and *simcha*, and surprised myself with how much I enjoyed it. I somehow felt part of the function and connected to the family, all through the lens of my Macbook Pro.

At the end of the session, which lasted exactly an hour, family and friends were invited to hang around (if they wanted to) and share their wishes and thoughts. The camera whipped around the world from Australia to Israel, over to the United States, popped into Cape Town, headed off to the United Kingdom, before settling back in Glenhazel, Johannesburg.

And it was here, in the neighbourhood, where the most profound words of 2020 were uttered by a “Joburg Jewish mom”. “It’s been a divine Zoom guys!” said “M” of Ridge Road. (I have used “M” to protect Melanie’s real identity). And it was, indeed, a “divine Zoom”.

Earlier in the week, I sat down (on Zoom) to record a podcast with Batya Bricker who is general manager of books and brands at Exclusive Books. I wanted to get a sense how reading habits and styles have changed during the lockdown. What she said was fascinating. She called them “perspective” books, and said that they are what people are engaging with.

I was shocked to hear that Viktor Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning* is on the top-20 list, as well as books like *The Choice*. Both are Holocaust-focused. What’s interesting to me is that although



INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

we can hardly compare a temporary alcohol ban (now over) with Auschwitz, there seems to be a need for people to make peace with and understand the world that we are now living in.

One of the books that Bricker referenced was Charlie Mackesy’s *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse*. It’s a delight, and the kind of book that everyone should own and give to someone they care about. It’s one of those books aimed at readers from 8 to 80, and is a delight of perspective on every page. Perspective, it seems, is all the rage. And everyone’s doing it.

It’s perspective that allows us to adjust our thinking and enjoy a Zoom Barmitzvah, where six months ago, we would have found the concept bizarre. It’s perspective that gives us the permission to appreciate the time spent in lockdown with our family, and to celebrate the return (albeit cautiously) to school, shuls, and life outside the home. It’s perspective that clears up some of the confusion as to what is and what isn’t important.

It’s perspective that allows “M” (Melanie), to say, “that was a divine Zoom”. And if that doesn’t do it, then perhaps this quote from the *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse* might:

“Is your glass half empty or half full?” asked the mole.

“I think I’m grateful to have a glass,” said the boy.

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