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SA-born pilot flies historic Israel –UAE voyage

NICOLA MILTZ

When South African-born pilot Tal Becker, 64, touched down at Ben Gurion Airport on the return leg of the historic, first-ever direct journey from Israel to Abu Dhabi, he shut down the engines on El Al flight LY972 and was instantly flooded with emotion. “All of a sudden it hit me. Wow! That was a little piece of history,” Becker told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.

“It was a moment I will never forget,” said the career pilot who has flown Israeli presidents and prime ministers among others for 40 years for the Israeli Air Force before flying for El Al.

The *SA Jewish Report* touched base with the humble pilot soon after he flew the inaugural Israeli passenger plane through Saudi Arabian airspace for the first time on Monday. This was the first direct non-cargo flight between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

“I did not allow myself to think about the historic moment until it was over. I stayed focused on being a pilot,” he said.

His plane, carrying high-level Israeli and US delegations, flew south-east down the length of Saudi Arabia to reach its destination in Abu Dhabi.

“It was the first time an Israeli plane was given permission by the kingdom to use its airspace. It was a very special moment for me. Usually I pass next to Saudi Arabian airspace and I talk to someone on air traffic control to alert them and there is no reply. Now for the first time they replied.”

Just as the plane readied for take-off from Tel Aviv, Becker (with a hint of a South African accent) spoke to the passengers from the flight deck. He confirmed the route over Saudi Arabia and read out a speech, which he had helped to write, to the passengers. “Shalom and welcome on El Al flight 971 from Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi. We are very pleased to host you on this historic inaugural flight from Tel Aviv to Abu Dhabi.

“This flight records two significant events in the history of the State of Israel and in the region heralding another step towards regional peace – for the very first time an Israeli-registered aircraft will overfly Saudi Arabia and, after a non-stop flight from Israel, land in the UAE.

“The duration of the flight with the shortened route over Saudi Arabia will be three-and-a-half hours, instead of what would have been approximately eight hours as we fly eastbound,” the pilot explained. “At the end of this historic non-stop flight, the wheels of this aircraft, with the flag of the State of Israel on its tail, will touch down on the runway in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE. This will be another significant event in our history, just as El Al was when peace was signed between Jerusalem, Cairo, and Amman.



Tal Becker after landing in Abu Dhabi

“We are all excited and look forward to more historic flights that will take us to other capital cities in the region, advancing us all to a more prosperous future,” Becker said.

“Wishing us all salaam, peace, and shalom,” he concluded, using the Arabic, English, and Hebrew words.

He referred to that moment before take-off, saying: “It was quite an amazing feeling. I felt something in my stomach.”

Becker, who retires in December, was born in Johannesburg. He remembers finishing Grade 1 at King David Primary School Linksfield before making aliyah with his family in 1962. As a young boy, he dreamed of becoming either a firefighter or a pilot, and recalls playing with aeroplanes in the garden of his Orange Grove home. By the time he was in high school, he knew that he was going to be a pilot.

His strong links to South Africa continued to flourish when he

started flying for El Al. He would visit his late grandmother in Berea, Johannesburg during his layover in the city once a month.

He had been at home in Modi’in, Israel since March due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. He was excited to receive a call from the vice president of operations at El Al asking him whether he would like to pilot this special flight.

“I told him I don’t understand the question. There is only one answer: ‘Of course!’”

Asked why he was chosen he humbly replied: “It’s simple, I’m the most senior pilot in the fleet.”

The plane brought senior officials from Washington and Jerusalem to the Emirati capital to lay the groundwork for the so-called Abraham Accord between Israel and the UAE, which was brokered by the US and announced last month.

Meanwhile, a South African couple residing in Dubai, Ross and Elli Kriel, were heavily involved behind the scenes of the historic visit.

Ross is the President of the Jewish Council of the Emirates (JCE), while his wife Elli is the founder of Elli’s Kosher Kitchen which provided all the kosher meals for the delegates throughout their stay.

According to Ross, the Jews of the Gulf nation have spent years building their special, unique community from scratch. Having arrived in Dubai in 2013 as the only religiously observant Jewish family, the Kriels are now among other families that anchor the community.

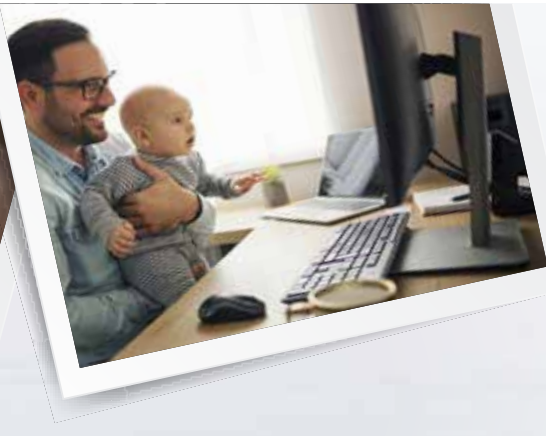
For several years, Ross has been the de facto leader of the tiny community, which, following the announcement of the Abraham Accord, was thrust into the international limelight.

“In previous years, our members have been informal ambassadors of the Jewish people through hundreds of acts of friendship, courage, and loyalty to their Jewish identity. At this moment, and always, we feel proud to be Jews of the UAE. We wish the delegations success in their work, and give thanks for the decisive and visionary leadership [from] the UAE that has allowed for friendship with Israel,” said Kriel.

“It was an honour to pray with Meir Ben Shabbat and members of the Israeli delegation. His dedication to Torah combined with his work at the highest level as National Security Advisor is truly inspiring,” he added.

He said that Rabbi Yissachar Krakowski, senior kashrut supervisor of the Orthodox Union, was flown in to supervise the catering. “Hospitality is at the core of Emirate culture, so Elli worked very closely with all the relevant authorities to make things just right for the delegates,” said Kriel.

“The JCE feels proud that we have played a role in confidence-building in our small way. It’s an extraordinary achievement.”



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Behind the scenes of the ‘back-to-shul’ task team

OPINION

BENJY PORTER



To watch a Barmitzvah boy finally get called up to the Torah, or to stand in (socially distanced) support next to someone reciting Kaddish for a parent who has passed away during lockdown from COVID-19. These are the moving and gratifying results of the recent return to shuls.

However, behind the scenes of the synagogue’s return emerges a remarkable story of a community working in unison.

The complete unity displayed in the process of reopening the shuls was something to behold. COVID-19, despite being a potentially deadly virus, has extracted some of the best elements of the human spirit within our community. What we witnessed in the process of getting the shuls ready to reopen was cohesion and unity, which are possibly one of our community’s core strengths.

It is perhaps a uniquely South African story – after all, how many other communities around the world are able to boast about this cohesion?

Under the brilliant guidance of Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, a ‘return to shuls’ task team was set up. Those involved banded together under the exceptional leadership of Professor Efraim Kramer, to quite literally save lives while upholding spiritual practices.

From esteemed rabbonim, dedicated shul leaders, and representatives of the

Union of Orthodox Synagogues (UOS) to the finest medical experts and Hatzolah heroes; from CSO (Community Security Organisation) security advisers, to computer whizzes and Beth Din *dayanim* (judges), each representative committed themselves to the process with a noble intention. Whether it was through Zoom calls or WhatsApp groups, they collaborated across provinces; from Cape Town to Johannesburg; from the smallest synagogues, to the giants of many generations. All of the representatives were soon liaising, learning, and sharing resources and technical planning. There was an energy and an engagement that truly proved a remarkable meeting of minds and shared motivation.

What we witnessed in the process of getting the shuls ready to reopen was cohesion and unity, which are possibly one of our community’s core strengths.

Perhaps most powerful was the commitment to the collective good. It was palpable in an authentic team spirit, a genuine sense of cohesion, and a thoughtful, systematic approach to adopting a process of opening the shuls without compromising the health and safety of its members. It was true,

courageous leadership – heroic and holy work!

Now we emerge from the planning phase into the application phase, and we are positive that the shuls and their congregations will implement the health and safety protocols with care. Each of us bares a personal responsibility to comply with decisions that will best keep us all safe and well.

What we have learnt is that this is a fluid process, and there will no doubt be nuances and challenges. However, with the courage and unity demonstrated thus far, our community can take comfort in its ability to overcome them, please G-d.

As we pray to one day face a world without the challenges of COVID-19, the lessons we have learnt from this process should spur us on in focusing on the many dynamic possibilities for the community.

Our community has a special place in all of our hearts. And we can all be very proud of the multiple manifestations of unity displayed over this time. Each of our valuable organisations has risen to the challenges brought about through COVID-19. In so doing, they have become frontline heroes.

• Benjy Porter is a member of the ‘return to shuls’ task team, and on the board of directors of the SA Jewish Report.

Torah Thought

Rabbi Julia Margolis,
Beit Luria



Search your heart and take responsibility

The month of Elul is a time of repentance in preparation for the high holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. The word *elul* means search, which is appropriate because this is a time of year when we search our hearts.

During this time, Moses was on Mount Sinai preparing the second set of tablets after the incident of the golden calf. He ascended on Rosh Chodesh Elul, and descended on the 10th day of Tishrei, at the end of Yom Kippur, when repentance was complete.

Elul is also a time to begin the process of asking forgiveness for wrongs done to other people. G-d can’t forgive us for sins committed against another person until we have first obtained forgiveness from the person we have wronged. As people mature, they begin to formulate achievable goals, allowing them to look back and evaluate what they have accomplished and where they fell short.

The Babylonian Talmud teaches that at the final judgement, we are asked three basic questions: Did you conduct your business with integrity? Did you set aside fixed times for study? Did you hope for

better things to come? (Shabbat, 31a).

Each of those three questions is worth thinking about, and we can begin during Elul. The coming year gives us the opportunity to turn – or perhaps return – to a vision of our highest self.

There was a custom in Eastern Europe that the person in charge of *selichot* prayers would make the rounds of the village, knocking three times on each door and saying, “Israel, holy people, awake, arouse yourselves and rise for the service of the creator!”

We should accept G-d’s judgement. We should approach the trial not out of fear, but out of love.

In the book of Deuteronomy 23:4, there is a profound and important verse specifically for our time: “You must fulfil what has crossed your lips, and perform what you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your G-d, having made the promise with your own mouth.”

One of my introductions to Judaism students put meaning into such beautiful words, and wanted to share it here: “Many people talk about doing the right thing – obeying the law, being compassionate

to one’s neighbour, proclaiming that they will follow G-d’s word. Most people today speak with little or no regard for carrying out the words they say to someone else. People often say something, when in fact they have absolutely no intention whatsoever of following through. This practice makes us untrustworthy to our community, but also to G-d.”

I’m sure that many of us will say, “Yes, of course!” It might be that we understand these words on an intellectual level, but do we really follow those instructions, do we take responsibility? Let’s make less vows and have more sincere intentions.

As we greet the New Year together, we are equally treasured by the Holy One. Whether we are online, together around the dinner table, or far from home, may our sanctuary this year be a place of love and respect, of dignity and appreciation for all. My wish is that 5781 marks the beginning of a new, prosperous, and healthy year ahead. *Shana tovah vemetuka!*

south african

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Judgement discards sale to Jewish school

TALI FEINBERG

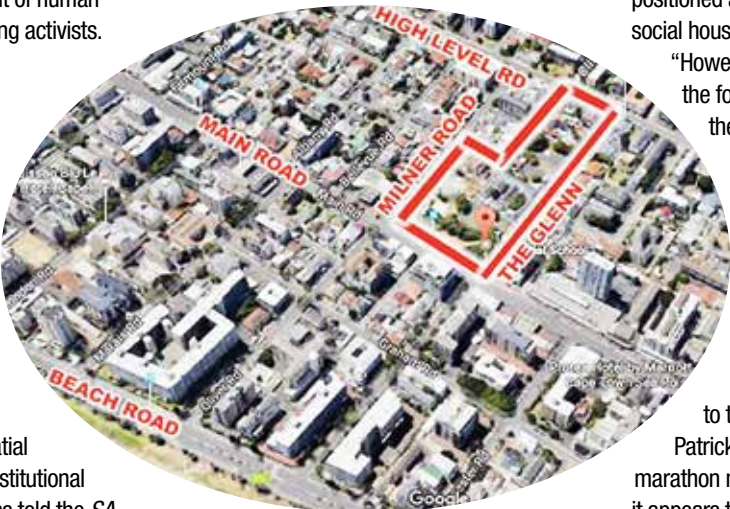
The Cape Town Jewish community lost out on a property in a case in which they were a casualty in a much bigger war. This week the sale of the Tafelberg property that the Phyllis Jowell Jewish Day School (PJJDs) bought from the City of Cape Town for R135 million in 2015 was set aside.

This historic court case put the school in the middle of a battle between the City of Cape Town, the Western Cape government, the national department of human settlements, and housing activists.

“This is a landmark judgement, with repercussions that go far beyond this particular case. From now on, when national, provincial, or municipal government are dealing with major land transactions, they will have to consider addressing historic spatial apartheid,” former Constitutional Court Judge Albie Sachs told the *SA Jewish Report*.

Paul Wisenberg, a partner in Maurice Phillips Wisenberg Attorneys, Notaries and Conveyancers, who has extensive experience in property-related disputes, explains: “The setting aside of the sale must be seen as a casualty in the overall theme of the judgement, namely the failure of government bodies to provide ‘affordable housing’ closer to the economic

hub of the city.” Reclaim the City and Ndifuna Ukwazi took the Province and the City of Cape Town to court for selling the property to PJJDs instead of using it for social housing. The human settlements department launched a separate case against the province for not consulting the national minister prior to making the decision to sell. The cases were heard together, and the final judgement was released on Monday 31 August in a more than 200-page document.



Site of the Tafelberg property

PJJDs is a small pre-primary and primary school catering to children aged 18 months to Grade 6, and blends secular and religious education. The school is situated in a relatively small space at the back of the Camps Bay shul, and needed to relocate to a larger and more central area.

When court proceedings ended in December 2019, PJJDs director Lance

Katz told the *SA Jewish Report* that, when the school tendered for the site, they had no inkling of the dispute that would erupt. “PJJDs tendered in good faith, and was selected as the preferred bidder based on the rules and criteria of the tender. Objections to the province’s disposal of the site emerged only after PJJDs had already been selected.”

He added that, “It’s unfortunate that we have been drawn into a matter not of our choosing, and that at times, particularly early on, the dispute was wrongly positioned as a ‘Jewish community versus social housing’ debate.

“However, as time has passed ... the focus has shifted away from the Jewish community to the real issue of the case, which is where and how national government, the province, and the city implement a coherent, efficient, and sustainable housing strategy.”

Adds Wisenberg, “According to the judgement, which Judge Patrick Gamble refers to as ‘a marathon matter of great significance’, it appears that the various governmental bodies, in particular the Western Cape Province and the City of Cape Town, did not follow proper legal process in the sale to the school, and therefore the sale has been set aside.

“The province can decide to proceed with the sale but will need to follow the correct processes, as written in the judgement: ‘Should the Province persist in its decision to dispose of the Tafelberg



property, it will be required to act afresh and, in so doing, it will no doubt be guided by what has been said in this judgement.”

Says Sachs, “The principle of overcoming spatial apartheid is particularly powerful when the authorities deal with public land. But if my understanding of the judgement is correct, the need to overcome spatial apartheid would have to be a serious factor to be considered in relation to planning permission for development of privately owned land as well.

“It is a very thoughtful, carefully reasoned, and rigorous judgement, and my wish would be for the Jewish community to respond in a proactive way,” he says.

“I knew Phyllis Jowell, and everything I remember about her was positive. She was warm, generous, caring, and progressive. I think it would honour her if the community organisation could respond in a warm, generous, caring,

and progressive way to the decision. It would be wonderful if it could think positively about the contribution it could make,” he adds.

“Without abandoning the idea of the school, it could look at the matter with fresh eyes, with a view to contributing towards healing the city. And the first step could be to speak to Reclaim the City and Ndifuna Ukwazi, who brought the case, with a view to developing a joint approach.

“This is an opportunity for the community to apply its brains and hearts to helping create a positive landmark for the city, if it wishes to continue with this venture,” emphasises Sachs. “It can be a landmark of social development that is healing, is good for the city, undermines apartheid divisions, and finds an appropriate niche for the specific interests that the community has for the education of Jewish children.”

Continued on page 14>>

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When can we expect a COVID-19 vaccine?

JORDAN MOSHE

With over 25 million cases, some 861 000 deaths and a monthly loss of some \$375 billion across the global economy, COVID-19 continues to wreak havoc around the world.

The increasingly urgent question is: when can we expect a vaccine?

“We are in phase three of the vaccine trials, which means that we’re testing vaccines on groups of about 30 000 people,” explained pulmonologist Dr Anton Meyberg in a webinar on Sunday. “There are 203 trial vaccines with 26 clinical trials, and six of these [are] in phase three.

“We’re working incredibly fast. COVID-19’s virus genome was sequenced within eight weeks. We must remember that the polio vaccine took 60 years to be produced, and the eradication of polio has taken us 100 years in Africa.”

Meyberg explained that there are currently two vaccine trials being run in South Africa, each using a different approach.

He said: “The Chaddox trial by AstraZeneca uses a weakened form of the virus which is unable to replicate. The other is called NovoVax, and is being tested under the University of the Witwatersrand’s Professor Shabir Madhi. Both trials are testing the vaccines on patients who are immuno-compromised or are on HIV treatment.

“There are very interesting times ahead of us and we may have a vaccine within six to 12 months. It’s a big competition amongst companies, and a real case of winner-takes-all.”

COVID-19 aside, vaccine development involves a number of complex dimensions that need to be borne in mind. This is according to Professor Helen Rees, a foremost public health scientist and expert in the policy and science of HIV and vaccines, who presented last week during a webinar held by the *SA Jewish Report*.

“Two things need to happen very quickly,” she explained. “We need new therapeutic interventions to help the human host, and we also need to hamper the virus at the same time.”

She continued: “The first involves bolstering the host’s immunity in different ways, including altering conditions for viral entry, preventing excessive immune response, and opposing blood clotting. The second entails hampering the virus by interfering with it in a number of ways.”

Vaccines fall into the second category. According to Rees, when a vaccine is administered, the body’s adaptive immunity cells are activated, resulting in two responses.

“Antibody in B-type cells block infection and those in T-type cells act in certain ways to kill infected cells,” she said. “Once you have such a response, if your body detects another infection, it can kick it out again. This is what we’re trying to do with the COVID-19 vaccine.”

Rees outlined the typical vaccine development process, explaining that it typically involves not just a medical evaluation, but also an assessment of the commercial market and vaccine demand. The process involves assessing need and evaluating the commercial market.


“Is it a global demand or a niched one?” said Rees. “This is one of the considerations taken before the process even begins. After that, the first leg in a lab can take up to two years, followed by long phases of trials and testing on small groups, and then larger ones to test safety only.”

It’s only after safety testing that efficacy is tested, with thousands of test subjects involved in a mass clinical trial.

Said Rees: “This whole thing takes six to 12 years and, obviously, that’s really not helpful in a pandemic.”

For this reason, the Coalition for Epidemic

Preparedness and Innovations (CEPI) was established in the wake of the 2014 Ebola outbreak. A major international organisation, the coalition is aimed at accelerating the development of emerging diseases, and simultaneously enabling equitable access for all counties to a vaccine. Consequently, preparedness for outbreaks is stepped up and any vaccine response is made globally sustainable.



“By doing this, the idea was to reduce the standard of 12 years to 18 months,” said Rees. “By consolidating trial phases, a vaccine could theoretically be rolled out within 18 months, with CEPI looking out for outbreak potential and developing potential vaccines against them.”

Among the potential viruses targeted is one known as Disease X, a term referring to a virus about which little is known, and in response to which a platform for a vaccine could be created despite a lack of information.

“CEPI is like a vacuum cleaner with a variety of different head attachments,” said Rees. “It aims to use existing vaccine platforms in turn against the novel virus. If one doesn’t work, you fit another head on. If you successfully identify a genetic sequence, you then plug in the disease pathogen and develop a vaccine using the successful platform.”

COVID-19 fell into the Disease X category when it was first reported in Wuhan, China in January

this year, resulting in CEPI diverting funds towards preparing a vaccine. Its various vaccine platforms have become part of the worldwide vaccine development, said Rees.

“We have over 200 vaccines in development and 31 trials,” she said. “The issue right now is vaccine nationalism, meaning that we’re anticipating unprecedented demand for any effective vaccine, which will outstrip supply entirely for at least 12 to 18 months.”

This means that richer countries will make bilateral deals with developers, resulting in nothing being left for poor and low-income countries, and South Africa falls into this category. In response, the World Health Organization (WHO) and other stakeholders have conceived a funding initiative aimed at ensuring that no country is left without access to a vaccine.

However, it can only ensure that a certain percentage of a country’s population will receive a vaccine, meaning countries will have to decide which groups are most in need of initial vaccine doses.

“We think that by 2021 we might have enough vaccines worldwide to give to some 3% of every country’s population,” Rees prognosticated. “Who do you give it to? The most vulnerable or healthcare workers? Perhaps those stabilising the economy?”

Much discussion and modelling are currently underway to plan distribution strategies, but it will ultimately be up to each country to prioritise for its own population.

“We are only safe if we are all safe,” said Rees. “We can’t have countries thinking they can immunise entire populations. Many populations won’t be protected, and if a continent is left behind, the virus will continue to circulate.”

“We’re not talking about the world having enough vaccines by 2021, but we must start somewhere. Distribution is a global discussion, and it’s likely we will have a graduated approach which is country-specific. We’ll only start to see enough vaccines worldwide by 2022 at least.”

COVID-19 has not gone yet

NICOLA MILTZ

With winter behind us and spring in the air, it appears as if the community is dropping its guard and behaving as if the coronavirus pandemic is over. But data on a global scale shows that this couldn’t be further from the truth.

There is a sense that things are almost back to normal. The sun is shining and the worst appears to be over. But is it?

As restaurants, pavement cafés, and bars fill up; shuls have reopened; traffic has resumed its normal flow; and people have emerged from their COVID-19 cocoons to go about the business of living. However, behaviour will determine whether or not we have a second wave. So, is it ok for people to let down their collective guard?

According to Professor Lucille Blumberg, deputy director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), no, it’s not ok.

“It’s not over. The numbers of cases are down, but there is less testing so I’m not sure it’s a true picture,” she said. “Hospital admissions are down, and the curve is downwards, but there is still a significant number of new cases every day. There are severe admissions and there is death. There is still transmission within the community.”

She advises people to be cautious, especially those with risk factors like obesity and diabetes and those in contact with people who are at risk.

Getting back to a ‘new normal’ following the easing of lockdown restrictions has left many divided. There are those who are continuing to live in lockdown as if there has been no dropping to level two, rarely leaving their homes. And then there are those who are embracing level two, desperate to return to some semblance of normal life.

“We all need to interact socially,

and it’s difficult to socially distance. According to Media Hack’s latest data on 31 August 2020, South Africa had the sixth highest number of total cases in the world behind the United States, Brazil, India, Russia, and Peru. There have been 628 259 confirmed cases and 14 263 deaths.

Cases of the disease are continuing to surge in many countries, while others which managed to suppress

others are adapting to a ‘new normal’. The coronavirus is continuing its spread across the world, with almost 26 million confirmed cases in 188 countries. More than 860 000 people have lost their lives.

Africa has recorded more than a million confirmed cases, although the true extent of the pandemic on the continent is not known as testing rates are reported to be low, which could distort official estimates.

South Africa and Egypt have seen the largest recorded outbreaks so far, with South Africa being one of only eight countries in the world to record more than 600 000 confirmed cases.

The World Health Organization’s chief for Europe, Dr Hans Kluge, warned last month that the coronavirus is a “tornado with a long tail”, and said rising case counts among young people could ultimately spread to more vulnerable older people – and cause an uptick in deaths.

matter which level of lockdown we are in.

“Lockdown regulations have been relaxed mainly for economic reasons, and the school has discouraged social gatherings from the start,” says Srage.

“We have a responsibility to keep each other safe, and the school has instituted all protocols to keep our students and staff safe. Since the school is an extension of the home, we expect our parents and students to maintain strict protocols outside of school as well.”

While news about the coronavirus is still evolving, doctors say the best advice is to follow public health directives and take care of yourself.

The most vulnerable people are those over 60 and those with identified co-morbidities, most notably obesity, diabetes, hypertension, chronic organ problems, and those on immunosuppressant therapy, says Blumberg.

Doctors caution that, until an effective vaccine against COVID-19 is available, people should continue to do the hard, albeit tedious, work of keeping themselves safe and healthy – by wearing facial coverings (masks), keeping social distance, practising good hand hygiene, and staying home when sick.

Scientists and public health officials are racing to find answers to key questions on how the disease is transmitted and why some cases are more severe than others, while they investigate treatments and a potential vaccine.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Shopping at Moishes Johannesburg during lockdown

because the psychosocial issues are huge, but there needs to be balance and care needs to be taken,” says Blumberg. “There is the perception that it is safe to gather in groups at the homes of friends and family ... you know them so you think you will be fine because how could they have COVID-19?”

However, she said a well-ventilated place, preferably outside, is better than being inside someone’s house where the windows might be closed

initial outbreaks are now seeing a rise in infections again. Spain is Europe’s coronavirus hotspot after recording more than 53 000 new COVID-19 cases in the last week. Since Spain eased its strict lockdown in late June, loose restrictions have been blamed for the resurgence.

Cases are also rising in Italy, Belgium, Greece, Germany and in Eastern Europe.

While some countries are reporting an increase in new cases every day,

Kluge said current evidence showed “school settings” have not been a “main contributor to the epidemic”, and pointed to growing evidence that children do play a role in transmission – but more often in social gatherings than at schools.

Principal of King David High School Linksfield, Lorraine Srage told the *SA Jewish Report* that the school has discouraged social gatherings. “From the beginning we have stressed and emphasised the importance of listening to the medical advice, no

Dilapidated, invaded Springs *ohel* symbolic of countrywide problem

TALI FEINBERG

The building that used to be the *ohel* of the Jewish cemetery in Springs, Gauteng, is reported to be in a dire state, with vagrants occupying the former holy space now owned by the municipality. The situation highlights the vulnerability of facilities in former country communities.

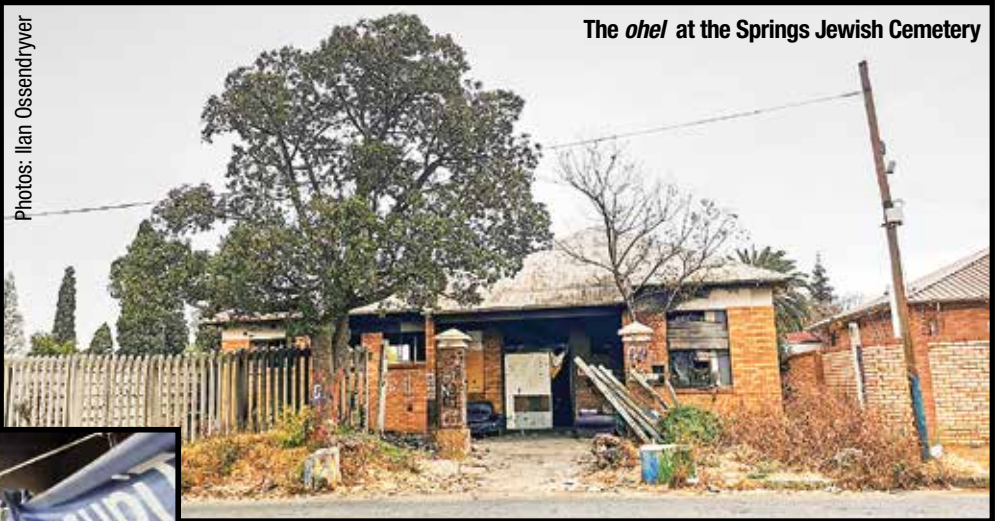
“The building that was once the *ohel* has been invaded by vagrants and is in a shocking condition. More than 10 years ago, we applied to the local municipality to have it demolished. Because the municipality refused permission to demolish the building, we erected an eight foot wall (2.4m) to prevent vagrants from interfering with the more than 600 immaculately maintained Jewish graves,” says Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, the former country communities rabbi of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, and now chief executive of the Small Jewish Communities Association.

“When the *ohel* was vandalised and invaded, we asked to have it demolished. Until then, it remained locked and in good condition. The *ohel* is no longer the property of the Springs Hebrew Congregation Trust, and is owned by the council,” he says.

The graves in the Springs Jewish cemetery were vandalised in 2009 before a surrounding wall was built, Silberhaft says, but the cemetery is now restored and in perfect condition.

“The Springs Hebrew Congregation Trust

Cemetery Road in First Avenue in Geduld to be torn down. Over the years, the structure has fallen apart, and has been taken over by homeless people.” When photographer Ilan Ossendryver went to take pictures of the structure for the *SA Jewish Report*, he found



Photos: Ilan Ossendryver



spent more than R550 000 to secure every grave, and spends thousands of rand a month to ensure that the cemetery is kept in the condition it deserves. This has included setting all of the gravestones flat, securing a wall around the *ohel*, erecting a new wall around the entire cemetery, and removing all trees and grass for ease of maintenance.”

According to a report in the *Springs Advertiser* on 24 June 2020, “Residents say they want the house [the former Springs Jewish cemetery *ohel*] on 2099 Old

about 20 people living there.

“There’s no electricity, water, or toilets, people just do their business anywhere,” says resident Hendrik Booysen.

“PR [proportional representation] Councillor Lorna Beharie says following the complaints by residents in the area, she went to see the property in question.

“The seemingly abandoned property has become home to vagrants who not only reside on the property, but also use the grounds to store and sort rubbish for recycling,” she said. ‘I have contacted our shadow MMC [member of the mayoral committee] for environment and waste management, Ald André du Plessis, to look into this matter. Due to the poor living conditions, I will also be escalating this to

the MMC for human settlements, councillor Lesiba Mpya, to look into the matter.”

Silberhaft says vandalism of former *ohels* in country communities is a common problem across the country, and that the only solution, sadly, is to demolish them. “Otherwise the buildings are stripped of roof sheeting, doors, windows, toilets, hand basins, and vagrants move into them, as we see happen in Springs.”

Other *ohels* in country communities that have been vandalised include those in George, Bloemfontein, Welkom, Graaff-Reinet, and Mokopane. Among the many cemeteries where *ohels* have been demolished are De Aar, Vereeniging, and Brandfort, Silberhaft says.

“It’s sad to demolish a building that was once used for the sacred duty of preparing a person for their journey to the next world, where families spent their last moment with their loved ones, and what was often a proud, historic symbol of Jewish presence in the town. Sadly, after the local synagogue is sold and deconsecrated and when the last Jews leave, it’s the *ohel* that’s usually next to be deconsecrated, and often demolished,” he says.

He advises that if a community that is closing down decides to keep the *ohel* standing, “They must remove all items of Jewish historic importance – minute books, burial registers, siddurim, and so on – to prevent them from being damaged or stolen, and history being lost.

“We must acknowledge the efforts of the Springs trustees for their efforts to maintain the cemetery,” he says. “If people want to help, they can offer to raise funds to assist with the cemetery in which their loved ones are buried.”

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The good guys who keep us together



As the blossoms emerge at the beginning of September and we move into Spring, we’re all feeling a little better about the world. I know the coronavirus hasn’t left us, but it doesn’t feel quite so devastating anymore. Perhaps we’re just getting used to what it means or perhaps we’re just *gatvol* of lockdown and its impact on our lives.

I guess we all want to break out of our cocoons and start living again. We want to make a new start as we head towards Rosh Hashanah. We want to renew our commitment to our lives, even though they will be different from what they were six months ago. We all want change.

One of my biggest learnings through lockdown is that the more adversity we have, the stronger we become. The tougher life is, the more we are pushed to find joy and make it work. And the more we are pushed down, the greater our capacity to rise up higher than before.

As I say that, I think about the many heroes who have come to light during lockdown: doctors, paramedics, nurses, social workers, people who raise money to feed others, and the list goes on. So many people have stepped up to the plate during this time to make a difference in other people’s lives.

There are also so many who do good, yet stay under the radar. They give of their time, money, and energy without wanting anyone to know. They just do it because they can and they want to. They emulate what it is to be a *mensch*. Do you even know an appropriate English word for this Yiddish term? I don’t. A *mensch* is defined as ‘a good and upstanding person – someone with integrity, honour, and a sense of right and wrong’. As it turns out, we all know many such people within this particular community.

In the broader society in this country, do people see a crisis situation and – knowing full well they have jam-packed days working to make ends meet – volunteer to go and sort it out? Perhaps they do.

In this community, it happens all the time. Often it is the same faces and the same big-hearted community-oriented people who do it, and there are quite a number of them.

Benjy Porter – who is one such person – describes in his opinion piece (on page 2), the incredible communal spirit seen across the country as shuls prepared to reopen. He intimates how congregations which may well have competed with one another to boost their numbers, stopped worrying about their own welfare, instead focusing on the greater good of the community. They shared knowledge, work, and so much more.

So, in the depth of a crisis it is clear that, instead of pulling apart, this community bonded. As they worked hard to make it possible for us to go and pray at shul safely, they built bridges and selflessly helped one another.

And then there are businesspeople who, despite trying to survive when the work of so many companies was put on hold during lockdown, have given of their products or wares freely. All this in the name of helping our community.

You and I are never meant to know who they are. That wasn’t why they did this. It was simply because it seemed like the right thing to do... and they could do it.

I would love to name each and every one of them and give them the *kavod* that is due to them, but they wouldn’t like that. It would embarrass them.

The same goes for the many volunteers at Hatzolah and Zaka, and those who give their time to the Geshar Fund to go through all the paperwork and make decisions on who they can help. Same with the Rambam Trust. Organisations abound with individuals who just give and keep giving wherever they can. These people comprise an integral part of our community.

Don’t for a minute think this is just a Jewish thing. It isn’t. Show me a Jewish community in the world just like this and I will write about them. There may be some, but not many.

We are indeed a unique community. I am not saying we don’t have our quirks and idiosyncrasies; oh, we have them in abundance. But it is those folk who give of themselves so selflessly who keep this community so strong and bonded. They are our glue. I often wonder what makes them take on so much when they already have so much on their proverbial plates, but I am so grateful that they do.

Our community is not getting bigger, and we are all having to tighten our belts, but we are getting stronger and stronger. We do things to look after our community that others don’t even think about doing.

And while people may well be emigrating because of the hardships of living in South Africa and their fear for our future, what are they leaving behind?

Where else do people look out for each other in this way? Yes, we can be tough on each other, and sometimes we can be mean to one another, but when push comes to shove, we look after each other. We may not agree with each other’s politics, or how we practise or don’t practise the religion, but we are a close-knit dysfunctional family. And we look out for one another in that family kind of way.

So, when those people wave goodbye to South Africa, believing the grass is greener on the other side, I beg to differ with them. I don’t believe that they will find this kind of community anywhere else in the world – and they will miss it.

And so, as the blossoms start blooming on our tree-lined streets, and people leave their cocoons and start considering what changes they want to make for the New Year, let’s acknowledge what we have. Let’s spare a thought for the *menschen* among us, and also consider what each one of us can do to emulate them.

So, when those people wave goodbye to South Africa, believing the grass is greener on the other side, I beg to differ with them. I don’t believe that they will find this kind of community anywhere else in the world – and they will miss it.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Shofar-blowing competition
We are trying to find South Africa’s greatest shofar blower. Is that you? Submit videoed proof of your outstanding shofar-blowing prowess to enter our competition via email to webinars@sajewishreport.co.za before 17 September 2020. If you already tried, and the email didn’t go through because we had the wrong email address in last week’s newspaper, please send it again.

Lithuania doubles down on Holocaust revisionism

OPINION

GRANT GOCHIN



On 18 August 2020, the Lithuanian Supreme Court issued a final ruling denying the review of the merits of a complaint alleging that the Lithuanian government agency known as the Genocide Center deliberately revised Holocaust history.

Lithuanian law supposedly prohibits Holocaust denial, but the Lithuanian government regularly participates in Holocaust revisionism without consequence. All avenues to truth within Lithuania’s highly politicised legal system have now been exhausted. The case is now to be presented to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

In addition to being politicised, Lithuania’s courts have a reputation for corruption. Multiple judges have been arrested for selling judicial decisions. Reminiscent of the Soviet judicial system, judges are also known to follow political instructions on how to rule. The ECHR, being independent of the political forces in Lithuania, is likely to hear and decide this case on its merits.

Lithuania achieved independence in 1990, and promised a truthful accounting of the Holocaust. Instead, it has developed a sophisticated strategy of deception to show Lithuanians only as victims, never persecutors. Instead of truth about Holocaust perpetrators, perpetrators are converted into national heroes and their histories falsified.

Lithuania will impose criminal and civil penalties on individuals who “defame” its Holocaust perpetrators. This isn’t unlike Soviet Russia, where criticism of Stalin’s crimes was prohibited and punishable.

During World War II, 96.4% of the country’s Jewish citizens were murdered, a higher percentage than in any other country, mostly at the hands of their ethnic Lithuanian co-citizens. Not a single murderer of a Jew has been punished by Lithuania since it regained independence.

In 2015, 19 of Lithuania’s leading intellectuals (including Lithuania’s own member of the European Parliament) signed a petition to ask the government to tell the truth about a Holocaust perpetrator – Captain Jonas Noreika.

He was the all-powerful ruler of western Lithuania when the Jews in the area were thrown out of their homes, crammed in temporary concentration camps, and then methodically starved, raped, beaten, and murdered. The government responded by publicly accusing the 19 of being “agents of the east” (Kremlin agents), “Jews, and other stupid people.”

This was intended to intimidate truth seekers into silence, and succeeded. It’s a standard practice in Lithuania to blame anything inconvenient on the country’s Russian enemy. In such a fashion, it’s still possible in Lithuania for one citizen to “denounce” another for inappropriate ideology.

Lithuanian police have “interviewed” people who have discussed Holocaust crimes by Lithuanians. One Lithuanian author who discussed the country’s participation in the Holocaust, Rūta Vanagaitė, was subjected to such government contempt and private threats that, fearing for her personal safety, she left Lithuania for several years.

The Lithuanian government has been discredited internationally for its Holocaust revisionism, however, this doesn’t dissuade it from its quest. Its customary response is either to ignore, or hold out a distraction which it claims shows its love of Jews.

After the United States Congress formally protested Lithuania’s manipulation of US congressional documents to distort its Holocaust record, Lithuania had no choice but to replace the director of the agency. Instead of acting responsibly, the new director promptly appointed a master Holocaust revisionist and antisemite, Vidmantas Valiūšaitis, as his new senior advisor. This reflects the government’s position on

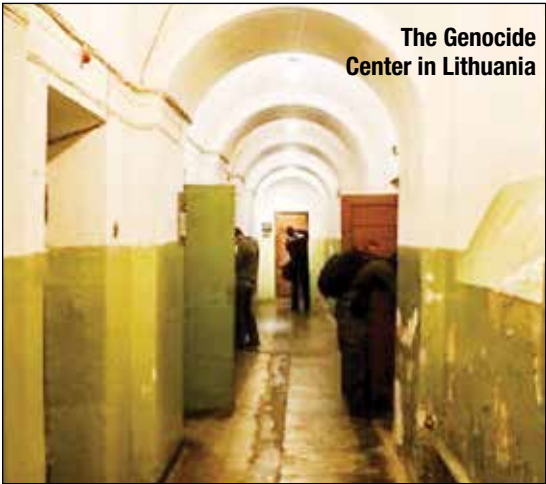
doubling down on its re-writing of history, and makes clear its intention of never being truthful.

International awareness of Lithuania’s revision programme has resulted in multiple American cities issuing formal resolutions of condemnation of Lithuania. Other cities worldwide are currently consulting about adding their voices. Lithuania’s appointment of Valiūšaitis has made its programme so blatant and obvious, that many more cities are expected to pass similar resolutions.

The orthodoxy of the Holocaust lie inside Lithuania has become absolute. It’s tied into patriotism and nationalism, promoted by the national government, and validated by the legal system. It has become its fundamental truth, and isn’t subject to correction. The foundational narrative of Lithuania is built on the purity of its partisan heroes.

To admit that so many were Holocaust perpetrators calls into question the very essence of the state created. Valiūšaitis’s appointment reflects the cementing of ideology over facts, and is a slap in the face of every murder victim in Lithuania. It exposes the sham of Lithuania’s outreach to Jews.

In August, the Lithuanian government gave



The Genocide Center in Lithuania

Juozas Streikus Stumbras a state funeral. He was a known Holocaust perpetrator. President Gitanas Nausėda called him a “very brave hero, a real freedom fighter”.

Just one month earlier, the Lithuanian government signed a pledge with the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) not to convert Holocaust perpetrators into national heroes. Its signature on international pledges is clearly worthless.

Lithuania would like to develop a commercial conference centre on top of a historic Jewish cemetery in the capital city. This is consistent with its previous sales of murder pits of Jews for a venue for parties and weddings. This will be the biggest land and development project in Lithuania. In an environment of zero trust, its project is paralysed. The Lithuanian government takes steps only to increase distrust between itself and Jews, and where there is no reason for any trust at all, no progress is possible. All of this therefore has real world economic consequences in Lithuania.

Lithuania’s exposure on the international stage has had a negative result inside Lithuania. Open displays of antisemitism have increased, and Jews inside Lithuania are under increasing pressure. Lithuania’s consistent choice is ideology over facts, and the stability of the nation. There is little we can do to change its behaviour, we can only watch, bear witness, and report.

• Grant Arthur Gochin is the Emeritus Special Envoy for Diaspora Affairs for the African Union, which represents 55 African nations. He has spent the past 20 years documenting and restoring signs of Jewish life in Lithuania. Gochin is the author of “Malice, Murder, and Manipulation”, published in 2013. His book documents his family history of oppression in Lithuania. He is presently working on a project to expose the current Holocaust revisionism within the Lithuanian government.

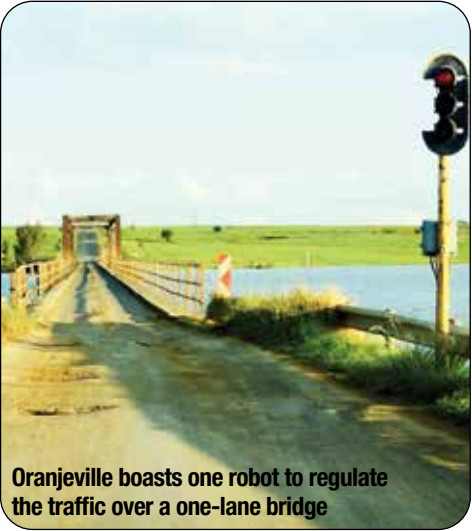
A yeshiva in the Free State

HOWARD FELDMAN

The village of Oranjeville in the Free State boasts a healthy ratio of two churches to two bars. It has a tarred road, with more potholes than actual road, that runs through its centre where there is a general dealer and an estate agent. There is one traffic light to manage the traffic over a single-lane bridge, but it hasn't worked for as long as anyone is able to remember. It also has a library that cost way more than it should have, and which might not actually house any books.

Oranjeville was typical of peaceful but neglected "towns" in the area, and sits on the edge of the Vaal. That was until it became home to the only yeshiva in the Free State. Now, if one drives down the sand road, the hum of learning and prayer will be heard around the small yeshiva complex.

The yeshiva is the brainchild of Rabbi Raff of the Maharsha community in Johannesburg. Troubled by the closure of shuls and places of learning, and aware of many young boys who would ordinarily have gone abroad to continue their studies but weren't now able to do so, he sought a creative solution – to construct a COVID-19 safe "bubble" far away enough to remain medically secure, where the boys could continue with their education. On the advice of medical experts, the students and two rabbinic families went into self-isolation before being cleared to be able join the yeshiva.



Oranjeville boasts one robot to regulate the traffic over a one-lane bridge

The Raff family have had a connection to Oranjeville for many years, making it a natural choice. It was there that an old, dilapidated property was identified, and renovation began at break-neck speed. The goal was to be able to be open by the beginning of the Jewish month of Elul, which is one month before Rosh Hashanah. The time frame was short, and the work significant. There was also the matter of the IT infrastructure that would be critical to the success of a place as remote as this.

While the 20-something boys remained in isolation, the rebuild went ahead, and the yeshiva was able to open as anticipated. Two rabbinic families also moved to the village to manage not only the curriculum, but also the small matter of food supplies and everything else that is required. The size of the property (with ample room for soccer), the proximity to the Vaal, and the fresh air all contributes to the appeal.

According to Rabbi Raff, "While the idea of developing a property in 'Oville' as a safe, out-of-the-way location for school camps and spiritual getaways has been simmering for many years, with boys unable to return to their yeshivas in *eretz Yisrael*, a need was keenly brought to the fore."

An unintended consequence of the pandemic has been to make the religious world more comfortable with the use of technology. Whereas many environments might have chafed against the use of the internet, COVID-19 has shown its tremendous advantages for the field of education. What this means for the Oranjeville yeshiva is that it has access to some of the world's most prominent rabbonim and teachers, many of whom have already undertaken to give *shiurim* to the students.

Says Rabbi Raff, "With the 'Zoom boom', we realised that these boys could have access to *roshei yeshivos* and *magidei shiur* right here in the heart of the Free State. *Shiurim* from leaders in Torah learning have been scheduled weekly as part of the



The students partake in *shiurim* as well as self-study in the new learning centre

programme."

More than 20 students have already taken advantage of the facility. It's designed for boys with a high level of learning and observance.

With the launch of the yeshiva in the Free State, Rabbi Raff has redefined the concept of remote learning. The "bubble" might have started off as a safe refuge from the pandemic, but it's easy to imagine that even once this has passed, it will have appeal and relevance to many.

Where some consider remote learning to be a Zoom class at home, for attendees of the Oranjeville yeshiva, remote learning means real connection to a world of Torah study. That and a two-hour journey to the banks of the Vaal, just over a bridge, with a traffic light no one can remember working.

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Danica 08/11/2020

Tributes to Mike ע"ה Baum

"One does not work at the Chev
One works to assist someone in need"

~ Mike Baum

It is not often that one comes across a person like Mike who is so universally loved and respected by all who know him. Mike's dedication to our community and to our Organisation was boundless. He worked for 25 years at Selwyn Segal in an official capacity and volunteered there for several decades before that. In the last two years he added Sandringham Gardens to his portfolio. He knew and loved every resident, particularly at Selwyn Segal, but also at Sandringham Gardens and Our Parents Home, because he cared so much about every one of them. He often commented on how much he learned from them and how he looked forward to coming to work every day.

In everything he did, and by his very presence, he raised the benchmark for consistency, humility and devotion. Mike was affectionately called the Chev's "Chief Hugger" because of the warmth, love and joy he brought to every encounter with others. He was totally accepting and never judgmental – the perfect Ambassador to the Chev. There were many additional responsibilities he quietly assumed, like visiting the bereaved and making calls to thank donors for their kindness.

When Mike passed away the hundreds of messages we received from staff and residents alike, all shared the same sentiment – that Mike the Mensch would be deeply missed. I count it an honour and privilege to have known and worked with this unique, gentle and kind human being. I see him in my mind standing in Shamayim on the right side of Hashem, warmly welcoming people with his broad smile and genuine love for each one.

~ Saul Tomson

Chief Executive Officer

Mike was, a true mensch, a real gentleman (he literally stood up for me every time I entered a room). Nothing was ever too much for him and everything he did, he did with his whole heart and a huge smile! For many years now Mike has helped at Yeshiva College along with Carol on Purim to collect matanot leevyonim. The request was to be there by 6, but Mike was always insistent on being there at 5:30 just in case someone wanted to contribute beforehand and he didn't want to miss the opportunity for them to give or for him to collect tzedakah. It was an honour and privilege to know him, to work with him and I have no doubt he has left a giant imprint on so many hearts.

~ Michelle Falk

Activations Team

Mike was a man of true integrity and immeasurable kindness. His generosity of spirit made an indelible print on all who knew him. There was never anything that was too much for him and his big smile and charming manner was always a source of so much comfort. A true mensch that will be sorely missed. The kindness that he has shown to others should be for a blessing for his Neshomah. Wishing his special family strength and courage at this time and may their beautiful shared memories bring them comfort always.

~ Lisa Rubinstein

Fundraising/ Relationship Manager

* These messages are just a sample of the hundreds of tributes we received from staff, residents and community members in honour of Mike Baum. Those wishing to perpetuate the memory of Mike can do so on the Chevrah Kadisha website:

www.jhbchev.co.za/funerals-unveilings/

A list of donations made in Mike's name will be sent to his family.

What is the measure of a man if not in how one's life is changed forever as a result of knowing him? Mike Baum was a luminary. He touched the heart of every person he met, making each feel special, important, and deserving. He never missed an opportunity to ask about you and your family, and took personal interest in the answer, displaying genuine happiness and pride in your accomplishments, and genuine sadness in your loss and difficulties. This was true for colleagues, residents, and all who he met. He dedicated his life to the Chev's ethos of compassion, care and upholding the dignity of all people. To Mike, every person was deserving of the utmost respect, kindness and consideration. Mike's life goal was all about giving. He always displayed absolute humility, never expecting anything in return. What Mike never realised is that he, himself, was the gift. We count ourselves blessed for having known him, and our world will always be that much brighter for having had him in it. His wonderful virtues and legacy will live on in us all, inspiring the life-sustaining work we all hope to achieve as we follow in his footsteps. BDE. May his memory always be a blessing.

~ Joni Angel

Group Manager People

I did not know Mike well, but he touched my life one day when I was overwhelmed with my car that broke again and I struggled to get the bonnet closed. He walked up to me in the parking lot and greeted me with so much kindness and care, not like a stranger who saw a woman at the end of her emotional energy. His kindness and care that day dried my tears and calmed me and stayed with me all this time. He was an angel for me that day, and I am sure that is not the only time when his kindness made a difference in people's life.

~ Freda Steenkamp

Social Worker

Albert Einstein said: 'The value of a man is in what he gives and not in what he receives'. Mike was a man who truly gave without expecting anything in return! He gave warmth, caring, kindness and compassion. While he was part of our Gift Shop family he gave friendship, comradeship and commitment. He gave a little piece of himself to each of us. Thank you Mike for all you gave us and most of all for being YOU!

~ Joan Block

Gift Shop Convenor

Whenever I walked into a shiva house Mike Baum was there. Sitting quietly, his gentle presence was calming and few words passed his lips. I once asked Mike why I happen to see him at shiva houses. His reply was that he tries to go to every shiva house - "What a mitzvah it is to sit with mourners who are so broken and bereft". That was Mike. He was larger than life itself. Always with a smile on his face. I often watched him as he sat with residents at Sandringham Gardens. He made them feel like they were the most important people in the world. May his memory be a blessing for his beautiful wife Carol and his whole family.

~ Shirley Resnick

Intake Consultant

Mike was the true definition of a mensch, with a kind, gentle soul. He cared so deeply for every resident at Selwyn Segal and for all the staff. He was affectionately known as "Mr. B". He touched so many lives with his warmth and sincerity. Mike will be forever remembered and missed. May Hashem comfort Carol, his children and grandchildren.

~ Lara Milner

Care Manager Selwyn Segal

What a wonderful man, he was close to all the staff and residents. We are sorry that you passed away, you were the best person who did the Seders and Shabbos for us. We all miss you and we are sorry that you are no longer with us. Lots of love from all of us here at Segal.

~ Phillip Leader

Selwyn Segal Resident

To the family of Mike Baum, I would like to wish you long life for the passing of Mike. He was such an amazing person to the whole of Sandringham Gardens and Selwyn Segal. We always had lots of jokes and laughs together. You will be missed by the staff and all the residents will miss you very, very much. May your soul rest in peace.

~ Gavin Rimer

Selwyn Segal Resident

Mr Baum was very, very good to me. I am failing to find the correct words to explain to anyone how Mr Baum treated me. I will miss his humility. His continued encouragement and positivity. I wish Mrs Baum and all the family a long life. I will remember Mr Baum forever.

~ Richard Khosa.

Messenger

Mike and Carol will always be special people to me and my family. They often included us in their Jewish holiday celebrations (especially Succoth) and taught us much of the Jewish traditions with the genuine Baum warmth that came with it. They made us feel so welcome and we made many memories with the Baum family. I will miss seeing Mike every morning in the office, and still sense his presence here with us. He will be missed by many because he was a thorough gentleman and he always had time to listen to everyone. Mike you will always hold a special place in our hearts.

~ Gail Cowling

Creditors Supervisor

This verse from Pirkei Avot, Ethics of Our Fathers, epitomised who Mike was and the mark he left on this world. He touched so many lives with his kindness, empathy, care and warmth. He was loved and respected by all who met and knew him and he will be sorely missed. I never once heard Mike complain or say a negative word. He always smiled and gave one a sense of optimism and belonging. His values stood firm and true to those of the Chevrah Kadisha and he was The True "Chev Ambassador", bringing comfort and consolation to those in need in their time of need. He went about his work quietly and proudly. He did not chase honour and glory, but his acts of kindness came from deep within his soul and were based on true Torah values. I am sorry now I did not chat to him more and learn more from his wisdom and warmth.

~ Frikky Beukes

Maintenance Supervisor

Mike was a true mensch, a real gentleman (he literally stood up for me every time I entered a room). Nothing was ever too much for him and everything he did, he did with his whole heart and a huge smile! For many years now Mike has helped at Yeshiva College along with Carol on Purim to collect matanot leevyonim. The request was to be there by 6, but Mike was always insistent on being there at 5:30 just in case someone wanted to contribute beforehand and he didn't want to miss the opportunity for them to give or for him to collect tzedakah. It was an honour and privilege to know him, to work with him and I have no doubt he has left a giant imprint on so many hearts.

~ Liora Glazerson

Human Resources

Right
Messages from Selwyn Segal

ChevrahKadisha

The near-fatal accident that fuelled a Paralympic champion

TALI FEINBERG

Shireen Sapiro was water-skiing with her family shortly before representing South Africa in swimming at the junior nationals at the age of 13, when she fell and another speedboat went over her, its propeller cutting her almost completely in half.

In a miraculous turn of events, she survived and thrived, becoming a Paralympic backstroke swimmer and breaking the world record at the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008, where she also won the gold medal.

Sapiro told her story to the *SA Jewish Report* webinar titled “From ordinary to extraordinary” on Saturday, 29 August, along with English Channel swimmer Dr Karon ‘Kiki’ Marx, and peace negotiator Liat Amar Arran.

She said her original dream was to become an Olympic gymnast, as her mother had represented South Africa in gymnastics, and she assumed this was the path she would follow. But this changed when she began swimming with a friend after school. Gymnastics began to lessen in importance as she fell in love with the water. Clearly a talented all-rounder athlete from a young age, Sapiro soon overtook her friend as their school’s top swimmer.

“Swimming became my entire life. I knew I wanted to be an Olympic swimmer. I was doing double sessions every day from the age of nine or 10 years old. At 13, I was chosen to represent South Africa at the junior nationals, but then I had my accident, so I couldn’t go.”

Sapiro related how she fell while water-skiing on the Vaal Dam on that fateful day. Her parents put up a red flag to warn other boats she was in the water, but “another speedboat drove straight over me. The propeller came in at my naval, basically ripping my body in two. The only thing keeping my legs attached to my body was the inner skin in my groin. My pelvic girdle was separated into nine pieces and my hip joint was completely detached. When my parents pulled me out the water, my mom had to ‘catch’ my left side and push it up into the speedboat,” said Sapiro.

She was airlifted to Union Hospital in Alberton, where she spent the next eight months flat on her back in traction. Doctors told her parents that it was unlikely she would survive, and if she did, she would never be able to walk again. But the teen had other ideas, and always knew she would walk one day – and hopefully swim too. “The first time I stood up was for only 10 seconds before I fainted. I used crutches for a long time. The one half of my body [from the abdominals downwards] was completely paralyzed.”

She had to re-learn how to walk, and then swim. In spite of the shock and loss she had to endure at just 13, Sapiro said she never felt angry or despondent.

She spent two years at Netcare Rehabilitation Hospital in Auckland Park, and it was here that the physiotherapist suggested disability swimming. At first, she was against it. “But eventually my mom convinced me. There were disability galas once



Shireen Sapiro swimming at the 2008 Summer Paralympic Games in Beijing

a month. I swam the 50-metre freestyle, and broke the South African record.

“That’s when I started training hard. My accident was in 2004, and by 2008, I had managed to make it all the way to the Paralympics in Beijing.” She broke the 100-metre backstroke world record and came away with a gold medal. She was also South Africa’s youngest ever Paralympian.

Reflecting on that race, Sapiro said that just before it started, the only thing she could hear was her own heart beating. “When I finished the

race and looked at the board to see gold medal and ‘new world record’ next to my name ...” Her voice became emotional as she struggled to finish the sentence, but she felt a huge sense of relief, as the pressure she was under was immense.

“You can’t put into words what that moment is like. It changes you for the rest of your life. It was so surreal. You’re working on it for four years, with blood, sweat, and tears. Then after three weeks, it’s over.”

After Beijing, “My career just took off. I trained in the early morning for

a few hours, then I would do school, then by midday, I would be in the gym lifting weights, then more school, then in the evening, I would be back in the pool for a few hours.” She is grateful that her coach insisted that she get her matric as well as train.

In spite of painful shoulder injuries, Sapiro won a bronze medal at the Paralympics in London in 2012. “To walk away with bronze was one of my proudest moments because I had to work so much harder for it.” She even went on to compete at the Paralympics in Rio de Janeiro in 2012, and then retired. She said most athletes retire after one Olympic Games, so she is proud to have competed in three.

“Sometimes I can’t believe this is what my life became,” she said. “If it wasn’t for the accident, I don’t know if it would have materialised, and I’m so humbled by it. I couldn’t be more grateful for the journey.”

How did she do it? “I’m a ‘100% person’. If I take on a task, I’m 100% committed. It’s like I have tunnel vision – the whole world outside my goal becomes irrelevant.” She now

teaches swimming and gets much joy in seeing youngsters progress in the sport. She hopes to start her own swimming academy one day. “I want to teach people what it means to fall in love with water.”

As a role model for the able-bodied and disabled, “I have so much responsibility to show what it means to endure hardship and accept our bodies,” she says. “I have the biggest scars all my over my body, but I want to show that no matter what your body looks like and what it can do, that’s okay.”

In an interview with Heslop Sports, she said, “I grew up in a Jewish home, and I believe that G-d presents everyone in the world with opportunities. We just need to be brave enough to take them. G-d has given me the strength to become the person and athlete I am today.” On the webinar, she said she might settle in Israel one day.

To anyone overcoming obstacles she says, “Everything you need exists inside you. No matter what life throws at you, you’re going to be okay.”

A Zoom gathering of the clan

JORDAN MOSHE

A family reunion under COVID-19 is certainly a special occasion, but when 53 members across five branches of a family come together after 160 years, the reunion is sure to be memorable.

Such was the case on 1 August 2020 when the descendants of the King and Bloom families gathered over Zoom from homes across four different continents.

South African expat and genealogy enthusiast Joel Levy instigated this reunion, marking the first gathering of descendants from five siblings born in the 1800s. It was the result of years of painstaking research, remarkable discoveries, and a whole lot of effort.

“I always thought I was just a Litvak,” Levy told the *SA Jewish Report* this week from his home in England. “In fact, I am a descendant of two families who arrived in the United Kingdom (UK) from Poland in 1820, one settling in Bristol, and the other in Wales.

“Why they chose to settle there is beyond me. It certainly wasn’t a popular choice for Eastern European Jews, but it would have a tremendous impact on their descendants.”

Levy has spent the last 40 years tracing the history of these two families, exploring how the Kings and the Blooms merged and proliferated across the 19th and 20th centuries.

The story began when Solomon Bloom moved his family to Wales, at the same time when Moses King settled his clan in Bristol. Married to Ann, King had five children, one of whom would marry Bloom’s son and go on to become Levy’s great-great-great grandmother, Miriam King.

Accounting for the exploits of the four other children has been Levy’s mission for the past two decades.

He explains: “The eldest brother, David, landed up in Missouri, and the younger two brothers, Barnett and Aaron, also ended up in the United States (US). They arrived in Texas in 1855 and, after dealing in décor, established King’s Paints, and then the biggest supplier of painting equipment. When the American Civil War broke out in 1862, they had no choice but to fight for the Confederate Army, which is probably something few of us would be proud of.

“Just imagine it: two Jewish boys who know little about America riding on horseback and fighting in a

war. It’s not your average part of history.”

Both survived the war and married Lutheran sisters and, although only one of the women converted to Judaism, both their husbands remained devoted Jews who played instrumental roles in their respective Jewish communities, and returned to their family in Wales. All of this was unknown to Levy until he discovered the information in one of the least likely places: A Holy Bible.

“I had no idea about Texas or what happened to those branches of the family,” he says. “I wondered what had become of them. Aaron had eight children and I couldn’t find any trace of them, and though I’d found the graves of Moses and Ann in Newport, I could hardly make out any of the inscriptions.

“Aaron actually kept a family bible, and because he had a Christian wife, he followed the common Christian practice of recording family births and deaths in the front of the bible. He wrote both the English and Hebrew dates and, considering that he married out, this is incredible. He still hung onto his Judaism.”

The bible was discovered in Canada, the result of Aaron’s wife moving there after her husband’s death. It was on its pages that Levy found mention of Moses and Ann (both their names written in Hebrew), as well as other family names and dates.

“I’d searched everywhere and, recorded in a family bible sitting in Canada, was information I could find nowhere else,” says Levy.

Another one of Levy’s fascinating discoveries concerned the antics of the elder Moses King, whose stint as a fence dealing in stolen goods had a considerable impact on his children and their descendants.

“Moses was caught in possession of stolen goods and tried in 1837,” recounts Levy. “He was in his mid-40s already but was found guilty and confined to a prison hulk in Portsmouth before being sent to Tasmania where he was put to work. He even tried to be elected as the local Jewish community’s *shamash* [shul servant] but received not a single vote.”

Despite his deportation, Moses reoffended and was condemned to serve another 14 years, bringing his sentence to a total of 28 years. Surprisingly, he would return to his family in Wales after his release.

Says Levy: “He could have started a new life, yet he chose to go home and rejoin his wife, a woman who had single-handedly raised her children. When Moses returned, he and Ann relocated to the US so that he could reconnect with his sons there before they returned to live in the UK.

“Think about that: Here was a man who moved from Poland to the UK, sat aboard a prison hulk, went to Australia, came home, reunited with his wife,

went to Texas, came back to Wales, and died at the age of 95. To me, that’s extraordinary.”

Eager to share these findings with his fellow King descendants and connect them with one another, Levy was determined to arrange the first family reunion this year. When COVID-19 scuppered plans of an in-person gathering, he decided to gather as many descendants as possible for a Zoom reunion, and contacted his relatives from across the US, Canada, Sweden, Australia, and South Africa.

“I was not expecting people to be interested,” Levy says. “History is not for everyone, and I thought I’d have perhaps 15 people in all. More and more people came onboard as August approached, and in the end, we had 53 people involved, the eldest of whom is 95.”

The reunion was a tremendous success, with descendants discovering their fellow King clansmen (some of whom lived down the road) and some even discovering they were halachically Jewish.

“I’m still overwhelmed,” says Levy. “Since that day, it keeps hitting me just how incredible the whole thing was. I keep getting messages from people saying how meaningful it was, especially under lockdown. Connections have been made, and we’re now all in touch over Facebook.

“I really feel a sense of achievement, and I’m thrilled I could open my ‘family’ up to their heritage, culture and history.”



Names and dates recorded in Aaron King’s family bible



The King Family online reunion

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400g KFP

R720
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TRIGZ 28g Mixed Case Small
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Kettle Crunch & Chutney flavours

R200
40@R5

TRIGZ 85g Mixed Case Large
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Kettle Crunch & Chutney flavours

R192
16@R12



Litaly
Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1 litre KFP

Litaly
Olive Pomace Oil
1 litre KFP

Bucca
Olive Pomace Oil
3 litre KFP

R1320
12@R110

R840
12@R70

R720
4@R180



STEINZ
Concorde
Grape Juice
1 litre

R300
6@R50



STEINZ Tradition
Tempranillo semi
dry red wine (SPAIN)
750ml

R800
12@R66.66



STEINZ Alegria
Tempranillo semi
dry red wine (SPAIN)
750ml

R900
12@R75



RIBERTINELO ITALY
Moscato (Sparkling)
750ml

R1560
12@R130



RIBERTINELO ITALY
Sparkling Rosé
750ml

R1500
12@R125



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Light Red 750ml

Light Pink 750ml

Light White 750ml

R1140
12@R95

R1140
12@R95

R1140
12@R95



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750ml

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12@R199



J FOLK Rosé
Wine in a can
250ml

R720
24@R30



BARTENURA ITALY
Moscato (Sparkling)
750ml blue bottle

R2388
12@R199



BARTENURA ITALY
Malvasia (Sparkling)
Sweet Rosé 750ml

R2388
12@R199



NOAH ISRAEL
Cabernet Sauvignon
750ml

R1800
12@R150



JOYVIN ITALY
Red (Sparkling)
750ml

R1680
12@R140



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The tennis champion impacted by antisemitism

TALI FEINBERG AND
SY LERMAN

When tennis champion Angela Buxton died last week at the age of 85, she was lauded as a “pioneer against prejudice” on and off the court. After spending much of her childhood in South Africa, she succeeded on the international tennis circuit in spite of facing blatant antisemitism every step of the way.

Buxton became the first British woman in 17 years to reach the ladies’ singles final at Wimbledon in 1956, losing to American Shirley Fry. She also won the women’s doubles title at both the French Championships and Wimbledon in the same year with doubles partner Althea Gibson.

The two women’s names are bound up with each other. They were each “half of an outcast duo... outsiders in the starched white world of elite 1950s tennis, superb players but excluded from tournaments and clubs and shunned on the circuit because of their heritage”, according to the New York Times’ obituary on Buxton’s death.

“Anyone who wins a title at Wimbledon automatically becomes a member of the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club [the formal name for Wimbledon]. Until their dying days, both Angela and Althea were never made members because of antisemitism and racism,” says Marlene Bethlehem, who represented South Africa at Wimbledon in the 1960s and won the Ladies Singles Plate event there in 1962.

Following her Wimbledon victory, Buxton applied for admission to the club, believing she would be admitted as one of England’s top tennis players. However, her application, along with Gibson’s, was never accepted. Over the next 63 years, Buxton continued to apply for admission without success. In 2004, she said, “I think the antisemitism is still there. The mere fact that I’m not a member is a full sentence that speaks for itself.”

She later told The Observer, “The antisemitism made me more isolated. It made me more determined, more detached. As a result, I was often on my own. For a different reason, Althea was on her own too. And then we came together and beat everybody.”

Buxton was the daughter of Violet and Harry Buxton, who owned a chain of cinemas in England. When World War II began, her father sent her, her mother, and brother to South Africa for their safety. Buxton was six years old at the time.

In an article in the Times of Israel (2014), Buxton fondly recalled her seven years in various cities in South Africa, including Johannesburg and Cape Town. Described by many as a bright and eternally feisty individual, Buxton delighted in looking back at her days here, saying she had attended a convent school with other Jewish children, and was taught by nuns. It was in South Africa that she began to develop her tennis skills and was recognised for her talent.

She told the *Times of Israel* that it was also in South Africa that she first experience racism. Friends and neighbours were disapproving of the friendship she had with the daughter of the neighbour’s domestic worker, with whom she “played hopscotch and similar games”, telling her she shouldn’t mix with black people. However, Buxton said, “My mom was no-nonsense when we came across it.”

In a similar incident, the Buxton family was approached by a young black woman

looking for some cleaning work, she told the publication. Several days later, she appeared with her six-month-old daughter, desperately seeking a place to stay.

“We offered her a job and a place to sleep – on the stoep of our flat” until the landlord threatened to evict them. In spite of her mother’s acceptance, she was also pragmatic and said, “We are guests of the country. We need to keep our heads down, and noses clean.”

“This incident stayed in my mind until I met Althea,” said Buxton.

It was in South Africa that she also first felt the brunt of antisemitism, according to the Times of Israel.

Her mother, Violet, was arranging her hair in the common bathroom shared by several flats. When a man asked if she was finished yet, he then remarked, “You Jews are all the same. You think you own the world!” Violet took her comb and hit him. “Twice,” recalls Buxton.

Buxton reflected on the reason for the man’s comment, and suggested, “There was no good reason – the war was on, and Jews were being sent to the slaughter.”

Returning to England in 1946, her parents got divorced, and she was sent to a boarding school in Wales where her coach immediately saw her talent and developed it through local competitions.

“I was head and shoulders above the rest. During the war, they had no rackets, no balls, and no nets in England. I was beating girls of 18!” Her success in tennis caught the attention of various coaches

including George Mulligan from Liverpool, who said of Buxton, “This is a potential Wimbledon champion!”

Buxton was later coached by Ben Tilden in the United States, an ex-Wimbledon champion with whom she played mixed doubles.

Both Bethlehem and Buxton ended their tennis careers at the age of 22, Bethlehem because she got married, and Buxton because of an injury. But before that, when they were both stars at Wimbledon, Buxton invited Bethlehem over for Shabbat dinner.

“We met up during my second year at Wimbledon. Angela knew I was Jewish, and invited me for Shabbos dinner. Her husband was Donald Silk, a solicitor and the chairperson of the Zionist Federation of Great Britain and Ireland. Her parents were Russian, and she told me that when she was in South Africa, neighbours laid a complaint about her playing tennis with black kids.”

The antisemitism Buxton repeatedly experienced deeply informed her worldview, and led her to team up with Gibson.

“When she and her mother went back to live in England, she tried to join the Cumberland Club. They told her, ‘You’re good enough to play here, but we don’t take Jews.’ It was very open,” says Bethlehem. “She eventually went back there, determined to win the tournament, which she did, twice. She said when she won, they didn’t even give her a cup of tea.”

Buxton was repeatedly refused access

to training facilities because of her ethnicity. From the mid-1950s, she was able to practise at the private indoor court of Simon Marks, the Jewish owner of department store chain Marks & Spencer, who was aware of the antisemitism she faced.

Bethlehem recalls when Buxton and Gibson first crossed paths. “Angela was on tour with a group in India in 1955 when she noticed Gibson. She was the only black girl, and was on her own a lot, so Angela befriended her. Then the coach said that Althea was having difficulty finding a doubles partner. Angela decided to join her.”

The rest is history. “A couple of weeks later, they won the French championship and Wimbledon. They became extremely famous,” says Bethlehem. “But many years later, Angela got a call from Althea saying that she was in a care home in New York and was struggling financially. Angela put a notice in *Tennis Week* magazine calling for support, and after a while, the money poured in. She raised nearly a million dollars, and Althea was able to live the rest of her life in comfort and security. Their lives were definitely tied to each other.”

Bethlehem and Buxton exchanged Rosh Hashanah greetings every year. Buxton went on to coach tennis and basketball, and faced challenges in her



Angela Buxton at Wimbledon in 1956

personal life, including divorce from Silk, and the deaths of two sons. She wrote tennis coaching books and founded the Angela Buxton Tennis Centre. She died two days before her 86th birthday. “Being Jewish was very important to her. And I think her years spent in South Africa also influenced her life,” says Bethlehem.

Buxton was inducted to the Jewish Sports Hall of Fame in 1981. Sandra Harwitt, an international sportswriter who has covered more than 70 Grand Slam tennis events, includes a chapter about Buxton in her book, *The Greatest Jewish Tennis Players of All Time*: “Angela lived in a time when women didn’t have a significant voice, yet Angela never held back from offering thoughts and opinions on everything, and pushing for her rights. She always speaks her minds and has opinions,” Harwitt wrote.

Probing SA’s problems in one easy podcast

JORDAN MOSHE

We all complain frequently about the corruption of the African National Congress (ANC), but what really caused it? Could Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma’s ban on cigarettes and alcohol be the result of a puritanical education? What can we really do to change the way South Africa is run?

These are just some of the questions veteran journalist Toby Shapshak and academic Dr Ivor Chipkin have set out to grapple with in their recently launched podcast. The “Filling the Gapp” project was launched this month to go beyond the typical discussions about misgovernance and incompetence and get to the heart of what truly ails our beloved country.

“There is always a need for solid and reliable information in South Africa, but we must also understand how the things we hear about came to be, and what caused them,” Shapshak told the SA Jewish Report this week.

“We can all say that our government is corrupt, but do we consider how exactly it all unravelled? How did we really get to where we are? If we can understand this, perhaps we can figure out how to rebuild what we have, and better understand the country we live in.”

A seasoned technology journalist, Shapshak teamed up with Chipkin to create the podcast after the two contemplated the idea for almost 15 years. Friends for almost 20 years, they share a common interest in South Africa’s political reality and are both sons of parents renowned for their architectural genius.

Says Shapshak, “Ivor’s father, Clive, was well-known for his books about architecture in Johannesburg, and my grandfather, Rene Shapshak, actually appeared in one of his books. My mother was an architect and a role model at a time when women hardly entered the profession. She was a Jewish, English speaking woman. She broke the mould at the University of Pretoria.”

He continues, “Beyond our shared backgrounds, Ivor and I have been talking for years about the kinds of things we think should be introducing into the political discourse.

“Ivor wants to go past knee-jerk responses to corruption, and look at the deeper causes. Although my day job isn’t political news, I’m just as concerned, and together we hope to shed some light.”

Understanding the political background and context is key to resolving the issues we face as a country, Shapshak says.

“Without context, it’s hard to understand the real causes and shifts. If we look at the roots of corruption in South Africa, we could perhaps unpack the profound shifts we’ve seen over the past few years and better equip ourselves to deal with the challenges.”

Although only one podcast has been released to date, Chipkin and Shapshak have already jumped into the deep end.

“When the ANC took over in 1994, apartheid-era legislation allowed municipal councillors to own businesses,” says Shapshak. “This was only amended in 2000, meaning that for the first five years of our democracy, the practice wasn’t illegal, though it was unethical.

“A fact like this allows you to look back at our problems and understand how networks of government enrichment became so established in the country, where they started, and perhaps suggest how we can deal with them.”

Also discussed is the apparently bizarre ban on cigarettes and alcohol during the initial stages of lockdown, a move which might be explained by looking back at history.

Shapshak asks, “Could it be that the ANC elders backing it have educational backgrounds in a variety of very well-run mission schools defined by a puritanical element that marked their upbringing? Could that perhaps underlie the rationale for the ban and help us



Toby Shapshak

understand why it came into force?

“We’re not saying it’s a definitive answer but it’s part of our investigation into why things like this have come about.”

Given the extent to which the COVID-19 crisis has laid bare the extent of corruption in South Africa, the timing of the podcast’s pilot is especially appropriate.

“Our situation has shown us where we need to look to rebuild South Africa,” says Shapshak. “Our reality is now far more complicated than before. We have on our hands economic devastation which has made our corruption issue and the damage it causes far more pressing.

“We are now forced to ask: How do we return our public service to operational excellence and make the country work? Where did our leaders pick up their characteristics? If we know this, perhaps we can do something about it.”

And Shapshak remains hopeful. “My survival mechanism when I go through something tough is to think of something tougher someone else survived,” he says. “I look at people who went through the Holocaust and the camps and yet walked out alive, got married, had families, and carried on.”

He applies this philosophy to our current hardships. “The human condition is about surviving and evolving. It’s our best skillset. Our forebears survived the Holocaust, South Africa survived apartheid, and we’ll come through this in the end.

“We may be a lot poorer and our ANC politicians may continue to disappoint us, but humanity will always survive what gets thrown at it.”

- *Filling the Gapp* is available on all major online podcast platforms including Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

Shtisel creator a hero among Haredim

GILLIAN KLAWSKY

When a former ultra-Orthodox student at the illustrious Ponevezh Yeshiva created one of Israel’s biggest international television series, he was worried he would be ostracised by the community in which he grew up.

But *Shtisel*’s award-winning co-creator, writer and director Yehonatan Indursky, told a recent webinar brought to South Africa by Sydenham Shul, that the opposite had happened.

Shtisel became a huge success amongst the ultra-Orthodox in Israel. “Before the show was aired, I was worried that I wouldn’t be able to return to Jerusalem, and that the ultra-Orthodox sector would be upset with the way it was portrayed, but the opposite happened,” Indursky said. “This was the first time they were able to see themselves portrayed in an authentic way without framing that exoticised them or placed them within existing stereotypes.”

Indursky spoke of his own childhood in a Haredi Jerusalem neighbourhood. “In Israel today, growing up in a Haredi house means you are completely isolated from the rest of Israeli society which is mostly secular,” he said.

While he said he had a largely beautiful childhood, some memories were less than happy. “Yet even these I remember with a lot of nostalgia,” he said. “When I was 14, if I wanted to have a meaningful life, I had to be responsible and, to some extent, give up on my childhood. I had to leave the games, the fiction books I loved, the friends and the fun, and devote my time to studying the Talmud and rising to imminence and spirituality.”

He was later accepted to Israel’s most respected all-male yeshiva, Ponevezh. While his parents were proud of him, they worried how their little boy would survive in the big, demanding yeshiva, where everyone was motivated by the desire to become the next big rabbi.

“Before you get there, you think that you are worth something, but each student that comes is the best in his yeshiva. For me, it was a moment of crisis, of fracture, and the moment that I realised that I wouldn’t be the next big rabbi. This is what led to my departure from the yeshiva three years later.”

While his yeshiva years were difficult, Indursky said he wouldn’t give up a moment spent there. “When I was 19, something in secular culture fascinated me though. People, books, and art interested me more. Life in the yeshiva revolved around intellect, but it didn’t enable me to express myself through emotion. So, I decided to search for a new home. My biggest fear was how my parents would deal with my decision.” Yet his loving parents accepted his choice, understanding that they needed to let their son be who he was.

Indursky found his passion in cinema, sometimes attending three screenings in a row. “I felt how each film I saw was changing me into a new person.” While he initially felt the world of cinema was beyond his reach, Indursky was inspired when he attended screenings of the work of late Israeli documentary filmmaker, David Perlov. It was then that he realised he could also create films.

Indursky attended the Sam Spiegel Film and Television School in Jerusalem. Working on an assignment one day, he dressed up in ultra-Orthodox clothing to film at a Haredi shul. “On the bus, I saw my classmate from the film school. We looked



at each other, but because of my ultra-Orthodox dress code, he didn’t recognise me. But more than that, he didn’t really see me, it was like I was transparent. There was a sense of alienation that I couldn’t explain to myself. Suddenly, I remembered and understood how people in Israel look at the ultra-Orthodox. It’s not hatred, and it’s also not alienation, I think they simply don’t see them.” It was this experience that inspired Indursky to create *Shtisel*.

Soon after graduating, he collaborated with his *Shtisel* co-creator, Ori Elon, to write a script that went beneath the surface of a Haredi family. “We see tens or hundreds

Continued on page 14>>



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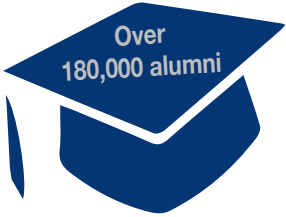
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On a mission to find father’s artworks looted by Nazis

JORDAN MOSHE

Miriam Friedman Morris grew up in awe of the way in which her father, David Friedman, put brush to canvas. It has motivated the artist’s daughter to pay tribute to her father in a singular way: by tracking down his early paintings looted by the Nazis.

“Art shaped my life,” Friedman told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “My father fought antisemitism and racial hatred by showing his Holocaust art to the world. After my father’s death, I grasped the enormity of his legacy and the responsibility that came with it. I had to rescue him from obscurity.”

Born in Austria in 1893, Friedman was a passionate artist whose promising pre-war career was cut short when the Nazis came to power. Renowned for his life-inspired portraits, he fled to Prague with his first wife, Mathilde, and daughter, Mirjam Helene, and relied on his artistic skills to survive.

Tragically, he and his family were transported to death camps (his wife and daughter perishing at Auschwitz), his artwork was looted, and his rise to artistic renown abruptly ended.

Although Friedman went on to achieve professional success as a post-war artist in Israel and the United States (starting a second family along the way), he resigned himself to the fact that his early works were lost. His daughter has made it her mission to track them down.

Says Friedman Morris, “Since childhood, I

watched my father paint with intensity and passion. I was intrigued about his pre-war life and the fate of his Nazi-looted art in Berlin and in Prague. He had little to show from a collection that numbered more than 2 000 paintings, drawings, lithographs, and etchings.

“I felt sad that there was little to show for his fame. It fuelled my passion to find his works, and rescue him from oblivion.”

Friedman Morris began her search after her father’s death in 1980 by writing to German archives and institutions, but received little new



information. However, on her first research trip in 1994, she found artwork everywhere she went, including Poland, Czechia, Germany, Israel, the United States and other countries all over the world.

“My father wasn’t a renowned artist whose early artwork was on walls in homes, he hadn’t got there yet,” says Friedman Morris. “He was cut off before he could become great, and

decided to leave his early accomplishments behind him.”

“I’m the one pulling the pieces together to give my father back his lost world and career. I’m bringing the pieces together and figuring out what they mean.”

Friedman’s endeavours enable her to better connect with a father with whom she shared a special bond, she says.

“I was named after my father’s murdered daughter, Mirjam Helene,” she says. “My father didn’t sit down with me to discuss his past; it was too painful. I met his first family through photos and learned [about] his experience from his artwork. Over time, snippets of information slipped out, and I could read articles about my father in newspapers, which led to conversations.

“However, I learned even more about my father by finding his artwork.”

Her quest has led to a worldwide revival of an artist obscured by the Nazi regime. Friedman Morris has continued her father’s mission to show his art to the world, facilitating exhibitions, lecturing, writing, and dedicating herself to the preservation of his art legacy.

“My father was an eyewitness to Nazi crimes perpetrated against the Jews,” she says. “He fought antisemitism and racial hatred by showing his art to the world. His art wouldn’t be silent. Each and every artwork tells a story, documents an event, or captures the essence of a moment lost in time.

“My role is to tell the story of a father and daughter’s bond through his art to encourage understanding of the Holocaust and lost cultural history. My father’s work appeals to the world community as a testament against hate and intolerance in all its many forms. For those dedicated to learning and teaching the Holocaust and keeping memories alive, his artworks are priceless, invaluable, and irreplaceable.”

Friedman Morris’s quest has taken her from Israel to the United Kingdom, from private collections to galleries worldwide. To

date, she has found about 50 pieces, including lithographs, etchings, and paintings. Not all of them are in her possession, however, as several pieces have been donated to the New Synagogue Berlin Centrum Judaicum and the Leo Baeck Institute in New York and Berlin.

Fascinatingly, Friedman has even followed a lead to South Africa, seeking portraits that may have arrived on our shores with immigrants fleeing the Nazi terror.

“A few months ago, I received an email from a woman in Denmark who wrote that her mother had inherited three paintings from a Hermann Philippsthal who had escaped Nazi Germany and had lived in Sweden and Denmark,” she recalls. “The paintings were hanging on her mother’s walls for decades, and suddenly she was curious about them. Searching the internet for David Friedman, she found me, and a half an hour later, we were in contact.

“I researched the genealogy of the Philippsthal family, and discovered there were eight siblings, and I recalled my father had corresponded with Paul Philippsthal in Johannesburg. I discovered that at least three of them had collected my father’s art.”

Friedman says that Paul Philippsthal was born in 1898 in Neustadt, Germany, now Poland. “He was a sculptor, and I believe his wife’s name was Elizabeth,” she says. “Their address in 1952 was P.O.B. 6563 Johannesburg. The last note is from 1958, but my father’s correspondence is largely lost.”

Because thousands of refugees fled Nazi Germany and some managed to take along artwork, Friedman hopes that everyone looks on the walls of their homes for her father’s lost artwork.

“I would be grateful for leads to any pieces by my father,” she says. “My aim is to create a catalogue of his works, evidence of his brilliant career the Nazis couldn’t destroy.

“My father would be thrilled to know his work has survived. I appeal to the readers to join my search and preserve the legacy of this remarkable artist.”

Judgement discards sale to Jewish school

>>>Continued from page 3

Mandisa Shandu, executive director of Ndifuna Ukwazi, says, “Even though this case has been four years in the making, it’s really about over 400 years of land dispossession and exclusion in Cape Town. The High Court’s decision requires the Province and the City to urgently come to grips with and implement their legal duties to redress spatial inequality.”

The court ordered the Province and the City to draw up a combined plan on how branches of government will jointly address the legacy of spatial inequality in central Cape Town and present that policy to the court by 31 May 2021.

Western Cape Premier Alan Winde said in response to the judgement that “the Western Cape government is deeply committed to addressing the

needs for affordable housing and redressing the spatial legacy of apartheid,” but in some instances had been prevented from doing so, ironically because housing activists are occupying these sites and refuse to leave.

Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation Minister Lindiwe Sisulu welcomed the ruling, saying she “sincerely hopes that all affected parties will respect and abide by the High Court ruling and put first the needs of the people we are here to serve”.

Says Wisenberg, “Because of the ‘great significance’ of the judgement, it is extremely likely that after consideration of the judgement by the Province and the City, leave to appeal will be sought. So, we haven’t seen the final chapter in this ‘marathon’.”

Shtisel creator a hero among Haredim

>>>Continued from page 13

of people each day, many of whom we don’t even notice,” said Indursky. “Yet we remember people when we know their stories.

“I can say almost eight years after the first season was aired, it drastically influenced how secular people approach the ultra-Orthodox in Israel, and now after it’s been seen on Netflix, all over the world,” said Indursky. “Because they see the person behind the stereotype.”

“I truly believe that *Shtisel* isn’t a series about ultra-Orthodox people, but one that deals with human beings,” he said. “The story deals with conflicts which aren’t necessarily related to the ultra-Orthodox way of life but which can be understood and identified with by everyone.”

Therein lies its power.

“Not only could I return home, but I became a kind of hero among the people in my hometown,” he said. Through his art, series protagonist Akiva Shtisel goes through a similar journey. “Sometimes we discover that the only way to return home is through a story,” said Indursky. “In your story – and in every story – home remains exactly how you left it. You can leave home endless times, but it will always wait for you. The most important thing is that your mother is waiting inside with soup, bread, and of course, kugel.”

• *Season three of ‘Shtisel’ is being filmed in Israel.*

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Will Rosh Hashanah never end?

There is a part of me that feels that we should cancel Rosh Hashanah this year. Or at least postpone it for the time being. We wouldn't do this due to lack of interest or of faith (G-d forbid), but because in many ways, the past few months have forced us to do everything that Rosh Hashanah could ever have hoped to.

We have had the high holy day for five months! We have spent weeks contemplating our own mortality, we have obsessed about those close to us, we have spent hours upon hours in deliberation and in introspection.

No rabbi, no chazan, no choir, and no festival could ever hope to rival the lockdown experience. More than that, months of lockdown has even deprived us of the opportunity of committing meaningful sin!

No alcohol, no cigarettes, and no cavorting. We have not even seen a neighbour's ass to covet! We are free of sin. That is aside from gluttony, which I'm not even sure is one of ours.

We have also already experienced many of the sermons. The "Zoom boom" has brought a rabbi into each of our homes. So much so that with the abundance of shiurim options, it felt like it would never end. Pretty much like a normal day in shul.

Each year on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, we stand before G-d and wonder out loud who is going to see it through to the next year. Who will live and who will die? Who will shuffle off the mortal coil at the designated time, and who will surprise us all by doing so just when we least expect it?

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



We even allow our imaginations to get ahead of us and ponder, if we were to die, how we would go-down. Would it be through sickness or something more gruesome? Fire perhaps? Maybe water? A sword? The alternatives go on.

If you were like me, however, you skipped right over the "plague" option, because no one dies of that anymore. And we want to keep it as realistic as possible.

No point in being ridiculous.

Try as I might, I find it difficult to remember last year's service. I'm certain I found it moving, and that I asked G-d to care for me and for my family. I'm certain that I asked Him to take away the pain of those around me, to heal those who were ill, and to continue to assist me in getting done the job that He has designated for me. I'm certain that I thanked Him for all my gifts, and for guiding me as He always had. Even for the times when I refused to be guided.

What I know for certain is that I could never have contemplated the year that awaited us. I could never have imagined what the world would endure and what humankind would be asked to handle. Because if I had any idea, I know that I would have put in an extra word, prayed a bit longer, concentrated a little bit more, and even sung just that little bit louder.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Changing of guard at Cape Council conference

In my National Chairman's message delivered at last month's South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) Gauteng Council conference, I applauded the outgoing council for providing the firm, forward-looking, responsible leadership that these testing times so urgently call for. This Sunday our Cape Council will be holding their biennial conference and I will, without hesitation, be able to similarly commend our colleagues down south. In rising to the unique challenges of the day, they have shown boldness, energy, innovation and unfaltering dedication, providing the community with as much guidance, reassurance and support as possible.

On behalf of the National Board, I say *yasher koach* to the outgoing Cape Council, and especially to its chairperson Rael Kaimowitz. It has been a real pleasure to have worked with Rael over the past two years. His impressive leadership skills and extensive communal experience, combined with his exceptional personal qualities, have contributed immeasurably to the excellent working relationship that exists between the National Board and the Cape Council. I am pleased to report that Rael was recently appointed to the Board of Governors of the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture (MFJC) in recognition of his more than two decades' involvement in the Foundation's flagship Nahum Goldmann Fellowship Programme. He joins past SAJBD President Marlene Bethlehem, who in June stepped down as President of the MFJC after serving three consecutive terms. Together with former Cape Council director, David Jacobson, Rael was one of those at the forefront of pioneering the concept of regional Nahum Goldmann programmes, several of which have since been held in the Western Cape.



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev

Tribute to Dr Mickey Helman

Bloemfontein has had a Jewish presence since as far back as we can remember, and for much of the last century it was one of the country's most vibrant centres of Jewish life. Even today, despite its greatly reduced numbers, the community remains active and committed. Last week saw the passing of one of the former stalwarts of the community, Dr Mickey Helman, who headed up the Free State Council of the Board for many years before moving to Cape Town. Those of us who sat with Mickey on the SAJBD National Executive Council will remember him as a true *mensh* and gentleman. We extend our sincere condolences to his family on their loss.

Window for Middle East peace

On Monday, following the historic announcement that Israel and the United Arab Emirates would be normalising relations, a senior US-Israeli delegation arrived in Abu Dhabi to finalise the agreement. The delegation travelled on the first-ever commercial flight between the two countries, and it was also the first time Saudi Arabia had allowed an El Al flight to cross its airspace. After so many years of both countries refusing to accept Israel's legitimacy and maintaining a strict boycott against it, these are encouraging developments indeed. Hopefully, it will lead to further diplomatic breakthroughs, which in turn will help foster a favourable environment for the renewal of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.

• 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

Giving with the hand and the heart

"You do the most vital work for the community, and we are all so grateful. You are literally out there saving lives, lifting up families, giving people hope, strength, and dignity. You, together with your amazing team at Yad Aharon & Michael, are doing Hashem's work in the world, every day." – Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein.

Yad Aharon & Michael, Johannesburg's leading, independent Jewish food fund, prides itself on being able to deliver food parcels and dignity to the most vulnerable members of our community on a weekly basis.

Allow me to share an invaluable lesson which I learned from Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler: "If one's primary concern in the *mitzvah* of *tzedakah* is to give others the opportunity to give, this infuses them with a giving spirit, and in the merit of sharing the Almighty's work."

Our recent annual soup-kitchen appeal demonstrated that, even in a climate of unprecedented economic uncertainty, our fragile community, once again, reached out with compassion, empathy, and generosity, qualities which perfectly illustrate the two aspects of *tzedakah*: giving with the hand and the heart. By participating in Yad Aharon's pivotal role to alleviate hunger, the community contributes and owns the end-result, thereby joining our ranks as agents of change.

Yad Aharon's attitude towards the poor is best summed up by a single word of the biblical text: *achikha* (your brother). Seeing each needy person as our sibling created *b'tzelem Elokim* (in the image of G-d), cuts through any attempts to separate ourselves from him or her. Rather, we see ourselves as channels of Hashem's compassion in this world, as succinctly expressed by a treasured recipient's comment:

"Your enterprise is one which produces exhilaration at work because everybody is committed in their souls to providing a helping hand without any bias. As a result, your beneficiaries feel respected, loved, and valued as active participants in the *mitzvah* of *chesed*."

This year, more than any other, not only do we desperately need the assurance that our Father in heaven is there to console us in times of tragedy and suffering but, as we approach Rosh



Alice Friedman The Jewish Food Fund



Hashanah, the Almighty expects us, as agents of change, to do what's necessary to emulate His love and compassion towards the needy in our city. Hashem has made us responsible for this world and for one another and, with more than 660 families relying on us to put food on their tables over the upcoming high holy days, feeding the poor must take precedence on our list of priorities.

Over the past five months, we have experienced change in every facet of our lives, and Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur will be no exception. Yom Tov without going to shul, hearing shofar blowing, and celebrating the New Year surrounded by extended family and dear friends is inconceivable.

The impact of not being invited out for festive meals will be acutely felt by our recipients, not only because Rosh Hashanah will be a night and day like any other, but also because, having all the meals at home means foregoing the sense of security which putting aside certain items from their Yom Tov food hampers would provide.

This humbling reality sends out a crystal-clear message: the need by the poor and vulnerable in our midst to feel heard and supported has never been more urgent. Acts of kindness have a cosmic power, particularly in the month of Elul. The simple act of reaching out to others, putting another's troubled mind at rest, and meeting someone else's most basic needs can't be overlooked, not only because "everyone deserves a sweet New Year", but also because *ahavas chesed* (kindness underpinned by love) lays the foundation in transforming us as agents of change.

May our increased observance of *tefilla*, *tzedoka*, and *chesed* inscribe and seal us for a year of blessing and healing.

• Alice Friedman is managing director of Yad Aharon & Michael.

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