

Volume 24 - Number 33 ■ 11 September 2020 ■ 22 Elul 5780

# south african Jewish Report

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## Battle over will hurts East London community

TALI FEINBERG

The East London Chevrah Kadisha (ELCK) is in an ugly dispute with the former rabbi of the coastal city's community, which has led to the breakdown of the congregation in spite of extensive efforts by the Beth Din to mediate a resolution.

And as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur draw closer, it's likely that the 38-strong congregation wouldn't have gathered in shul if the lockdown was not in place.

As the conflict with the rabbi unfolded, the community's cohesion crumbled with it. This once thriving, albeit dwindling community used to gather every Friday and Saturday morning in shul for a service. They would celebrate *chaggim* together, have *brochas* after shul, and generally enjoy the fruits of a healthy congregation. Today, there is much animosity.

The whole sorry saga revolves around the will of the late Israel Bayer, who died at the age of 92 on 5 December 2018. The will has become the subject of litigation in the High Court and before the Beth Din, with applications and counter-applications between the ELCK and a rabbi accused of attempting to divert funds from Bayer's estate that were originally intended for charity. The community is caught in the middle.

The congregation's now former rabbi, Rabbi Chanoch Galperin, went before a disciplinary process that concluded in February this year, and was presided over by attorney Janette Gordon.

Her finding from the hearing stated, "The employer (ELCK) advised that as a result of the employee's [the rabbi's] conduct, the congregation has all but

been dissolved. Shul is no longer held, and the majority of the members of the congregation have stated that they no longer want the employee to continue as the rabbi. It was evident from the process that the relationship between employee and the congregation/employer has irretrievably broken down."

In a notice of motion submitted to the High Court Eastern Cape Division in Grahamstown on 7 July 2020, which has since been withdrawn for procedural purposes, the ELCK alleges that Galperin tried to gain control of Bayer's estate by forging his will, which would enable him to receive a third of Bayer's estate.

However, both parties agreed to a hearing by the Beth Din on 19 September 2019, which found the rabbi to be innocent, and the allegations of him forging the will to be "rejected and without any merit".

The advocate representing the ELCK, Stanley Pincus SC, was critical of the Beth Din's process. However, the rabbi,

represented by his attorney Michael Bagraim, applied to make the Beth Din's decision an order of the High Court on 27 August 2020. Pincus says the ELCK will oppose this, and bring a counter application, which if granted, will result in the ELCK not being bound by the Beth Din ruling.

Dayan Rabbi Gidon Fox says, "The issue was investigated thoroughly and impartially. This is a complex issue, and the judgement speaks for itself. Furthermore, with the claim of fresh evidence, the Beth Din was willing to revisit the ruling based on said evidence. This offer has, to date, not been taken up by the claimant [the ELCK]."

However, recent correspondence shows that the ELCK wanted a retrial with the Beth Din, but Galperin rejected it.

In an affidavit, the rabbi writes that he had a "healthy and friendly relationship with the late Mr Israel Bayer, and assisted him with his affairs. In the last will and testament of the deceased, dated

22 March 2018, the deceased bequeathed one third of his estate to me."

In a letter to a number of ELCK members dated 14 July 2020, the organisation's treasurer, Ellen Ettinger, writes, "At the beginning of 2019, we discovered that the will of the late Mr Bayer had been lodged with the Master of the High Court Grahamstown. It was a handwritten will that the attorneys who had all Mr Bayer's previous wills had no knowledge of until after his death, when Rabbi Galperin brought it to them." Ettinger claims that the signature appeared to differ with his previous wills, and the ELCK didn't believe it to be Bayer's signature.

"In Mr Bayer's last will dated 18 October 2017, his estate was to be paid out with Chevrah Kadisha Johannesburg, Arcadia Children's Home, and the ELCK each receiving one third of his total estate. However, in the handwritten will, the ELCK was replaced by Rabbi Galperin as the one beneficiary," writes Ettinger in her letter.

The Beth Din judgement says, "It was the respondent [rabbi] who actually convinced the deceased to include the ELCK as a beneficiary of his estate ... something that did not feature in previous wills. This was confirmed by lawyer Ingrid Gaertner."

Both sides submitted copies of the will to forensic experts, who came back with differing opinions as to whether the handwriting was legitimate or not. Because of this, the Beth Din judgement found neither handwriting analysis report to be conclusive.

Bayer's two caregivers signed as witnesses to the will in question, but

later one of the witnesses, Dorothy Manuel, wrote an affidavit saying that they had not been in the same room as Bayer when the will was signed.

She and fellow carer, Kholiwe Fekani, later signed new affidavits saying they had, in fact, been in the same room as Bayer. Manuel also told the Beth Din that her original affidavit had been signed under duress, and that "she had been promised to be compensated for her time". The ELCK says this is untrue, and the new affidavits were drawn up only ten days before the Beth Din hearing.

Bayer resided at Kennersley Park Leisure Home for Senior Citizens from 2 June 2017 to about 28 August 2017. The rabbi says he then moved him to a smaller facility, The Residence. He resided there until about 30 January 2018, after which the rabbi says he moved him to a flat with a garden and paid two carers to look after him full time.

In her letter and the notice of motion, Ettinger alleges that she and other community members tried to visit Bayer, but the rabbi wouldn't give them Bayer's address. The rabbi says Bayer left his previous facility because he couldn't get kosher food and wasn't being treated well, and he didn't hide him from the community.

The rabbi says he had power of attorney (POA) to "sort out some of the issues. This was on the advice of the estate attorney so that Mr Bayer's affairs could be properly handled". Ettinger writes, "We discovered that the rabbi had taken complete control of the financial matters regarding Mr Bayer using a POA

Continued on page 6>>

### Gearing up for Rosh Hashanah



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Hilary and Mervin Ringo shopping for Rosh Hashanah

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# Malawi may be first African country to open embassy in Jerusalem

TALI FEINBERG

The president of Malawi has said that his country would open an embassy in Jerusalem, making it the first African country to take this step, either for a diplomatic office or an embassy. Local analysts say this is a significant move and may have been influenced by the recent ‘Abraham Accords’ between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Malawian President Dr Lazarus Chakwera made the announcement on Saturday. “The reforms will also include a review of our diplomatic presence, including our resolve to have new diplomatic missions in Lagos, Nigeria, and Jerusalem, Israel. I will be sharing more details about this in the near future,” he said as he addressed his country’s parliament. He became president in June 2020. Although he spoke of a diplomatic mission, experts believe he is referring to an embassy.

Chakwera was in Israel in November 2019 and visited Jerusalem, including the Old City and the Western Wall. Malawi is a mostly Christian country with 19.2 million inhabitants. Israel’s non-resident ambassador to Malawi, Oded Joseph, is based in Nairobi, Kenya.

On Sunday, chief Palestinian peace negotiator Saeb Erekat announced that the Palestinian Authority would sever relations with any country that opens an embassy in Jerusalem. Within Malawi, a group of concerned citizens voiced their opposition to the plan, according to the *Nyasa Times*. “We object to having a Malawi embassy in Jerusalem. If Malawi is to open an embassy in Israel, let it be approved by parliament, and the mission should be in Tel Aviv,” said a member of the group, Mussa Ibrahim.

The head of the African Governance and Diplomacy Programme at the South African Institute of International Affairs, Steven Gruzd, says: “The announcement could be connected to the positive momentum generated by the UAE deal.

“Remember, Chakwera is a newly-elected president in a court-ordered rerun election in Malawi,” says Gruzd. “He is setting out his governing agenda. Although both countries have maintained relations since 1964, neither has had an embassy in the other country.”

Gruzd says the announcement is significant. “If a small and resource-strapped country like Malawi sees opening an embassy in Jerusalem as strategic for



its interests, it may encourage others to move their embassies from Tel Aviv. It may also be a move to draw closer to the Trump administration. Once it is opening an embassy, it does not make sense to open in Tel Aviv and then have to move.”

He believes the move may encourage other countries to think about opening embassies in Jerusalem. “It may well have a demonstration effect. In the last five years, Prime Minister Netanyahu has put considerable effort into wooing African states and breaking the anti-support Israel wholeheartedly hence going for an embassy in Jerusalem, but the opprobrium that has faced the United States for the move has held it back,” she says. “The UAE deal makes it less risky. I think the fact that it is going to Jerusalem signals that Malawi wants a completely normal relationship with Israel – no-holds-barred. The intention is a good, solid relationship.”

Looking at how this may impact Israel’s relationships with other African countries and if they will also think about opening embassies in Jerusalem, she says: “I think they might, on the basis that in diplomacy there are usually other countries who want to make the same move but they need just one country to make the first move. I think this is particularly so with the majority of Christian countries who are tired of having to show support to the Palestinians and hatred against Israel just because they belong to the block of what were once ‘non-aligned states’.”

Regarding the global community’s response if Malawi went ahead with this, Gon says she “suspects it will be more muted than previously, except of course from the Palestinian Authority, Hamas, Iran, Hezbollah, etcetera”.

She continues: “The problem is they have nothing to offer Malawi, so they’ll be ignored. Obviously, Malawi is desperately poor and not particularly influential, and it needs what Israel can offer it, but it is a start.”

“The South African Zionist Federation warmly welcomes Malawi’s decision to establish an embassy in Jerusalem as the recognised capital of Israel,” says its national chairperson Rowan Polovin. “This news is part of a momentous tide of improved relations between Israel, the Middle East, and Africa. We encourage the South African government to participate in this momentum of improved relations that Israel is achieving across the world, and share in the benefits that it will bring.”

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
17:41	18:31	Johannesburg
18:18	19:10	Cape Town
17:29	18:20	Durban
17:48	18:39	Bloemfontein
17:49	18:41	Port Elizabeth
17:40	18:32	East London


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Jewish Report

The source of quality content, news and insights

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# TikTok suicide video shocks community into action

NICOLA MILTZ

A highly disturbing livestreamed video of a man committing suicide on social media has shocked members of the community, with warnings to parents of tweens and teens to safeguard their children from seeing it.

The Hatzolah Crisis Response Unit on Tuesday night urgently alerted the community about the distressing video, and put out its emotional support helpline number in case anyone had seen the images and needed help.

The popular social media app, TikTok, this week warned parents about the suicide video doing the rounds. In the video, a man (believed to be American) is seen taking his own life. Reports suggest the video was livestreamed on Facebook and was then uploaded to the Chinese video-sharing social network service.

Worryingly, the video’s initial spread on TikTok has led to versions saved from the app spreading to other messaging services, including WhatsApp.

A number of schools in the community on Wednesday urged parents to be extra vigilant on all social media platforms, cautioning children to avoid TikTok for the time being while it dealt with the crisis.

Yeshiva College urged parents to check with their children whether they had seen the video. “Please be cautious and check that your children have not been exposed to this content. It puts your sons and daughters’ mental, physical and emotional health and safety at risk. We implore you to check your children’s phone, apps, and messages on a regular basis,” the letter said.

Meanwhile, according to *The Guardian*, TikTok has been battling to remove the graphic video after the footage was uploaded to the service on Sunday night from Facebook, where it was initially broadcast.

Although the footage was rapidly taken down from TikTok, users reportedly spent time earlier this

week re-uploading it, initially unchanged, but later incorporated into so-called bait-and-switch videos, which are designed to shock and upset unsuspecting users.

Sarah Hoffman of Klikd SA, a social media training company for parents of teens and tweens told the *SA Jewish Report* this was “highly disturbing on so many levels and very scary for parents”.

“Among all the happy dances, fun pranks, and life hacks, TikTok allowed video footage of this live suicide to slip through the cracks. The graphic video shows a bearded man shooting himself with a gun. Although TikTok is scrambling to take it offline, and banning any

taking down the footage as it finds it. “On Sunday night, clips of a suicide that had originally been livestreamed on Facebook circulated on other platforms, including TikTok,” a spokesperson told *The Guardian*.

“Our systems, together with our moderation teams, have been detecting and blocking these clips for violating our policies against content that displays, praises, glorifies, or promotes suicide,” the spokesperson said. “We are banning accounts that repeatedly try to upload clips, and we appreciate our community members who’ve reported content and warned others against watching, engaging or sharing such videos on any platform



“We want to empower kids to reach out for emotional support when they need it,” says Hanson. “If children find it difficult to talk to their parents, which is quite normal, they need to know that there is confidential, anonymous help that they can

prompted the organisation to put out details of its emotional support line.

“When we heard about this video, we felt it was better to be pre-emptive rather than reactive.”

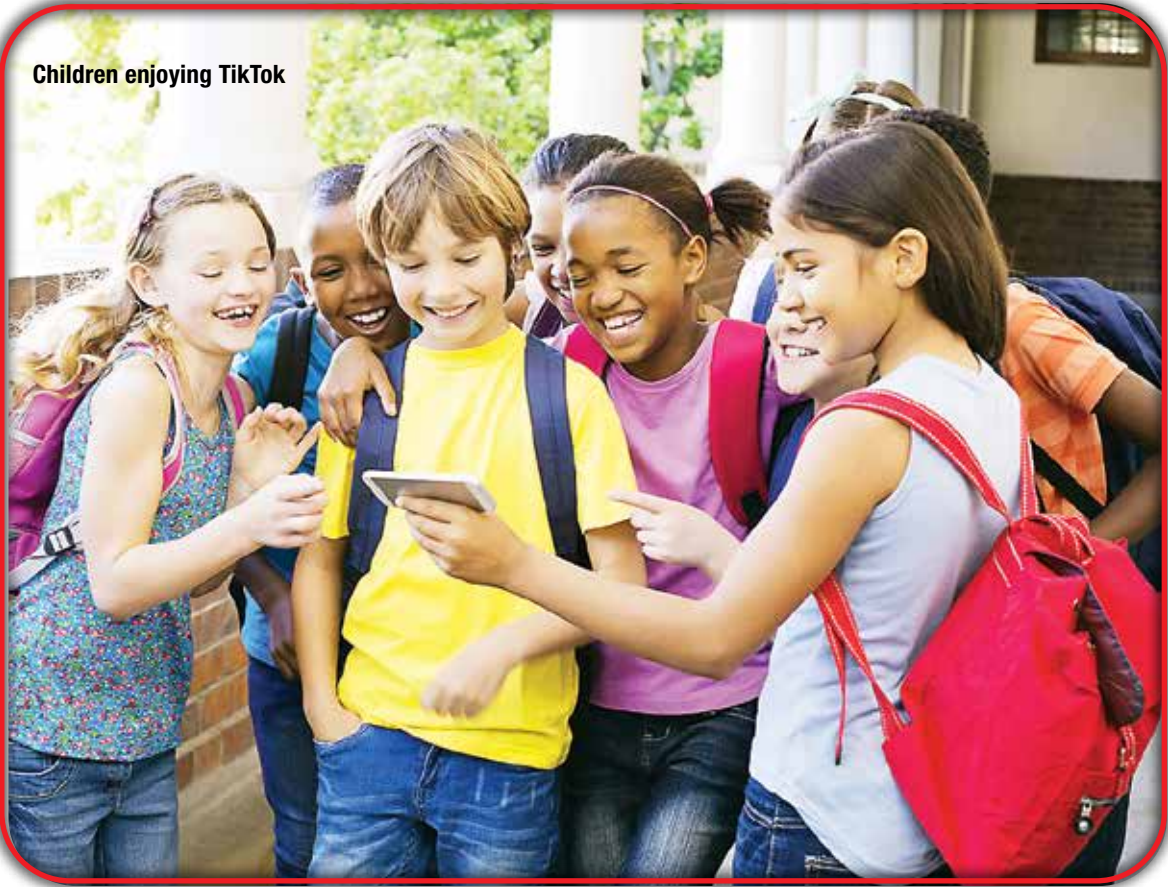
Hoffman said that although TikTok has robust systems in place for detecting and flagging disturbing clips, user-generated content can slip through the cracks.

User-generated content is content that individual social media users create and then upload immediately onto a public platform. The material is neither screened nor edited.

“My advice right now is to encourage anyone with kids using TikTok to stay off the platform for a few days, and also to engage in conversations with your children around this content. We have to address these things with our teens and tweens,” said Hoffman.

“There is a lot of suicide-related content on social media, some content even glamorises suicide making it seem like a viable option for people who are in a dark place and it preys on vulnerable teens and tweens,” she said.

“As parents, we have to take an active role in our kids’ social media use and make sure their chances of exposure are minimised, but also if they are exposed that they are having the right, healthy conversations around what this means. It is scary because 15 years ago the average 11-year-old didn’t know what suicide meant, and now it’s become a reality largely because of the proliferation of social media.”



Children enjoying TikTok

users who post this, many of our kids may have been exposed to the clip on their ‘for you’ page, which pops any bits of any bobs onto their screen.”

Hoffman says the video has also been spliced into videos of popular TikTok influencers, or embedded into more innocuous-looking TikTok videos.

TikTok confirmed that it is

out of respect for the person and their family.”

Meanwhile social worker Sheri Hanson who works on Hatzolah’s Crisis Response Unit told the *SA Jewish Report* that it was vital for children to know they can reach out for help when needed. “Adults can’t make sense of disturbing content like this; we can’t expect kids to be able to.

access,” she said.

“We are a well-resourced community and there is help available for young people and parents if needed. It is important to model for kids that it is acceptable to reach out for help,” she said.

She said when Hatzolah read the distressing media reports about the suicide video, it

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# Community faces tough choices in post-COVID-19 world

TALI FEINBERG

Facing the challenges and choices of the Jewish community and greater South Africa is vital, so we can put them into perspective in a

post-COVID-19 world. For this reason, the Cape SA Jewish Board of Deputies conference gathered economic, religious, and community experts for a panel discussion at its conference on Sunday.

“The thing about ‘black swan’ events – unexpected, catastrophic events – is that before they happen, we speculate about them, anticipate them, even plan for them. But as the COVID-19 crisis has proven, when a true, once-in-a-century black swan hits, it catches us all by surprise,” said Professor Adam Mendelsohn, director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town.

Rabbi Gideon Pogrud led the discussion with Professor Joshua Margolis from Harvard Business School; SABC economics editor Thandeka Gqubule; Bishop Paul Verryn; Gordon Institute of Business Science dean Dr Morris Mthombeni; and Mendelsohn.

“Such events put our previous worries in perspective,” said Mendelsohn. “In truth, over the last five years, the Jewish community has worried a lot, which has kept a nagging question alive: What sort of future is there for Jews in South Africa? We now know that nationally the Jewish population is substantially less than half the size that it was in the early 1970s. Demographic decline is not news to the Jewish community in South Africa. To the credit of the Cape Town community, it has taken steps to plan for this. We’ve had our worries well in hand: We’ve built a sustainable and well-resourced community that offers an extraordinarily broad range of services and possesses a strong sense of coherence and solidarity.

“But COVID-19 has blindsided us all, and upset even our best-laid plans. For obvious reasons, the crisis has exacerbated our worries: Can the centre hold – politically, economically, socially – under tremendous new strains? Are we heading toward short- or long-term calamity? Here our worries as Jews and South Africans merge,” said Mendelsohn.

“Are we potentially facing a crisis of the kind that hobbled Argentina in the late 1990s, led to a surge of Jewish emigration, and then a cascade of crises within the Jewish community forced to downsize under duress?” he asked rhetorically.

Mendelsohn pointed out: “Even without a surge of emigration, the Jewish community is vulnerable in particular ways — not because I fear antisemitism as a factor in South African life, but because South African Jews are now paying the price for our economic profile. The Jewish community in South Africa, and particularly in Cape Town, is unusually exposed to the economic impact of COVID-19 because of very high rates of self-employment. Twenty-six percent of all adult Jewish South Africans are self-employed. Given the nature of our local economy in Cape Town, a good share is exposed



to precisely the industries hit hardest: tourism, leisure, and entertainment. We’ll soon see if this impinges on the institutional life of a self-funded Jewish community.”

Despite this bleak assessment, he noted: “Black swan events are also moments of potential opportunity. A profound crisis upends business as usual. We may have bumbled along in the past, but we can no longer afford to do so now. Tough decisions are more difficult to defer. We have already begun to see signs of exactly this in the Jewish community. These decisions are often not popular, and may not even be the right ones, but there is new urgency. External pressures of the kind created by COVID-19 are particularly important in a Jewish community that largely operates through consensus, and is led by a cadre of lay leaders who are all volunteers.

whether to direct its limited resources inwards or outwards. “While these choices are not new, COVID-19 has exacerbated them”, he said.

These points were echoed by Professor Joshua Margolis of Harvard Business School, joining the conference online from Boston, Massachusetts. Exploring the phrase attributed to Hassidic rabbi Nachman of Breslov: “The whole entire world is a very narrow bridge and the main thing is to have no fear at all”, Margolis noted that it is vital to acknowledge that times of transition as temporary in essence: “A bridge is not permanent and to mistake it for permanence may mean we respond inappropriately.”

He said COVID-19 has upended our world because it has undermined the very basis of trust between human beings, and also attacked our most vulnerable. Also, at the very moment we need strong leaders that bring people together; we have demagogues who highlight hatred and superstition.

However, he said there are already positive trends emerging from this time of flux, such as the acceleration of digital transformation and discussions around equality becoming priorities in the corporate world. He suggested that communities not be paralysed by fear but make use of this moment to work across generations and interest groups in order to create something new and better on the other side.

Mthombeni and Gqubule spoke to the economic challenges facing South Africa, with the latter saying that official estimates show three million people may have lost their jobs during COVID-19 in South Africa, and the country may be edging towards 50% unemployment.

Bishop Verryn described the worrying levels of poverty, gender-based violence, and xenophobia in the country, and together with the other experts, urged the Jewish community to play a role in rebuilding what will be a very broken society in a post-COVID-19 world.

**...COVID-19 has blindsided us all, and upset even our best-laid plans.**

“This leadership model makes it difficult to make unpopular decisions – why risk alienating or dividing the community? – but COVID-19 leaves little choice. We’re at one of those moments when long-deferred decisions will likely need to be made in a rush. The institutional structure of the Jewish community may look very different in a decade from how it looks now.

“There is hope of the crisis providing direction [from government] where there has long been drift ... COVID-19 may reinforce a sense that we are all in this together, and may force us into new ways of thinking and acting.”

Mendelsohn described a delicate juggling act where the Jewish community will have to decide

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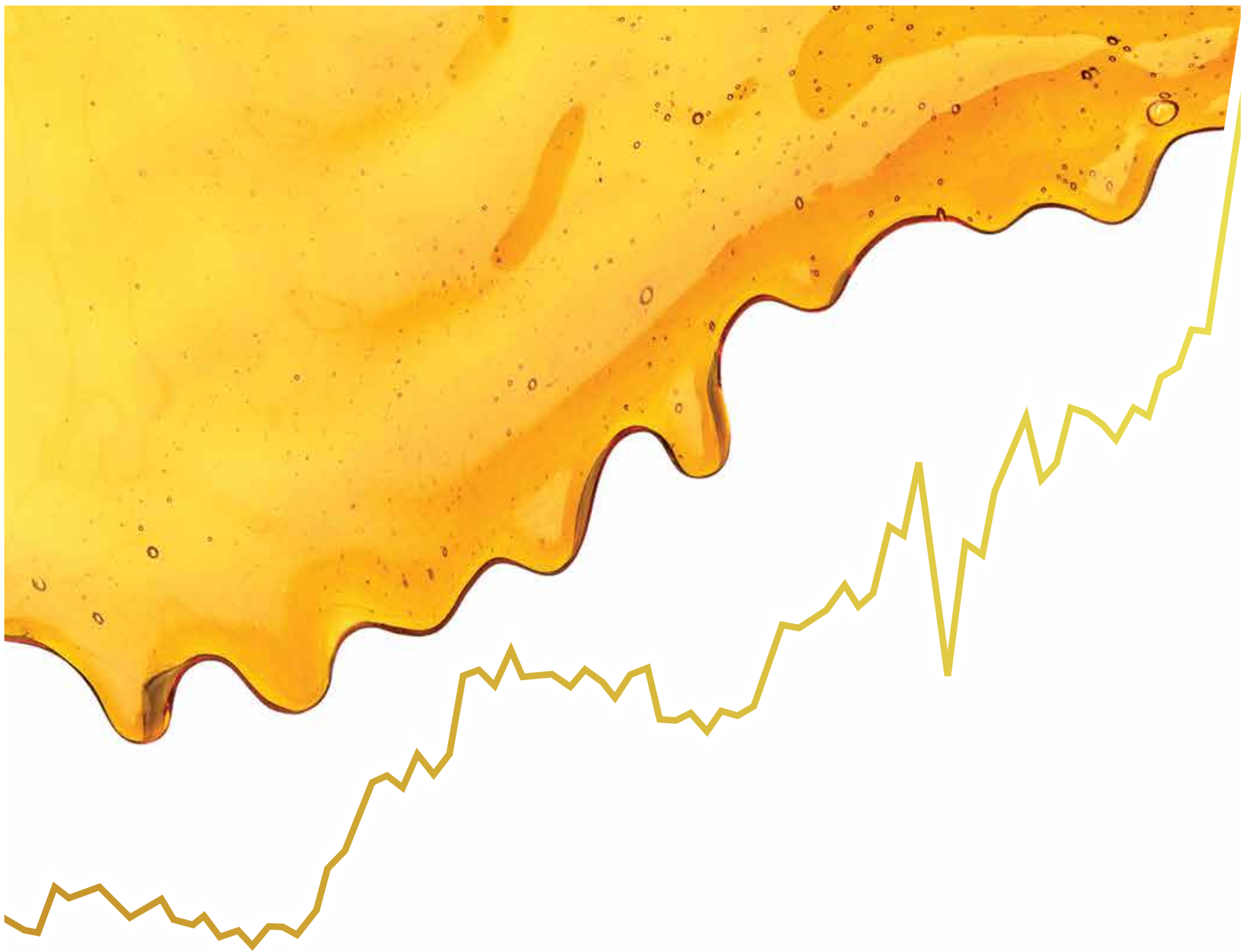
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## The real meaning of forgiveness

This is the time of year when we spend a great deal of time thinking about forgiveness. Asking for or giving forgiveness is only as easy as the deed or misdeed involved. If the deed is small and easy to forget and forgive, then it’s not really a mission at all.

However, on Rosh Hashanah we generally contemplate bigger concerns that have had an impact on our year and possibly our lives.

This has been a year in which small matters have been overtaken by huge ones, not least the life-threatening COVID-19 virus that has had an impact on everyone in some way.

It has forced us into lockdown at home for many months. That, on its own, has taken its toll on us. Then, there are life-changing decisions that have had an effect on all of us, like company owners who have been forced to lay off staff after desperately doing what they could to keep them employed. There are so many tragic stories inside and outside our community.

In a story on apologies and forgiveness in this special Rosh Hashanah edition of the *SA Jewish Report*, Rabbi Levi Avtzon (page 42) made a point that really hit home to me.

Forgiveness for big and sometimes heartbreaking deeds isn’t about saying that what the person who wronged you did was acceptable. Not at all. In fact, forgiveness doesn’t have to have anything to do with that other person – it’s all about you, the person wronged.

When you forgive someone, according to this wise rabbi, you let them go. You stop their hold on your mind and thoughts. You release them from your anger, and make space for positive and potentially happy thoughts that have nothing to do with that person.

Holding grudges, hurt, and anger against someone who has harmed you in any way takes up a great deal of your time and energy. It can keep you from getting on with your life, and finding beautiful things to replace the hurt and pain.

It can make you bitter and twisted. It seems crazy to give someone or a group of people who have hurt you the opportunity to turn you into someone who is bitter and twisted. The truth is, nobody can do that to you, other than yourself.

You can stop this happening to you by offering forgiveness. Forgiveness is letting go of the harm, anguish, anger, and pain done to you.

If you think about it, your anger or unforgiving bitterness doesn’t hurt anyone but you. It may also harm those who love you and have done you no harm. They are affected by your bitterness and anger that sometimes spills over onto those who don’t deserve it.

The person or people who have wronged you may well be oblivious of your feelings and, even if they are aware of how you feel, may not care. Their lives may well have gone on regardless, in spite of what they have done.

You, on the other hand, are hanging on to them for dear life just because you aren’t able to forgive them. It doesn’t make any sense, does it?

For me, this gives a whole new meaning to forgiveness, and it makes it so much easier to want to forgive people.

Don’t get me wrong, if someone has done something really bad, it doesn’t mean that I suggest we forget what they have done and put ourselves in the line of fire again. It simply means letting go, and trusting that we will replace negative feelings with positive, forward-looking emotions.

Our page-one story on the East London community and its former rabbi shows how bitterness and anger has had a negative impact on the whole community – a small group in a coastal town, where there is only one Orthodox congregation.

The relationship between the rabbi and much of this small congregation has broken down to such a degree, there is nothing but animosity.

Now, far be it for me to even contemplate who is right or wrong. That isn’t our role. There are enough lawyers and judges involved to sort that out. But it’s an important story to tell because it relays the ugly situation that led to what has become a long-term rift within the community.

This is extremely sad, and I do hope that there is some clear resolution to the problem that has created this rift, even if it means moving the rabbi out so that they community can reclaim its shul and congregation.

I believe that the issue of forgiveness is particularly relevant to this community. No matter what has been done in the past, the community needs to be able to move on.

To do this, it has to find forgiveness, and not allow whatever animosity and bitterness has built up to destroy this small but apparently close-knit community.

Let’s all look towards Rosh Hashanah, and do our best to tell it like it is, but not hold grudges that are ultimately going to harm us and our loved ones.

There’s still one more edition that comes out on the day of Rosh Hashanah, and so I will wait until then to wish you *shana tova* next week. However, right now, I hope this has inspired you to let go of grudges and forgive those who have done you harm. I’m going to do my best to do just that.

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



## Chief Rabbi and Rebbetzin’s lockdown lessons

OPINION CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN AND REBBETZIN GINA GOLDSTEIN



This year has been like no other, and it was therefore very difficult to write Rosh Hashanah messages like any other year. As Rosh Hashanah 5781 approaches, we (Gina and I) take this opportunity to reflect and share some of our lessons from lockdown with you. It is our hope that as the resilient and magnificent community South African Jewry is, we will all emerge from this stronger, more evolved, and more equipped than ever to approach 5781 with hope and optimism.

### Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein

Over these traumatic months, I have seen people deal with illness and bereavement with faith and fortitude. I have seen tenacious and bold entrepreneurs face and prevail over devastating odds. I have seen generous donors support them.

I have seen people lose their jobs but not their self-worth. I have seen schools transform themselves into online institutions within days. I have seen parents transform themselves into home-schooling experts and dig deep to keep their children stimulated, entertained and safe, while stuck at home for months.

I have seen rabbis and rebbetzins teach, comfort, and hold their congregants with love across digital platforms when it wasn’t possible to do so in person. I have seen the total commitment of our shul leaders to the safety and health of our community.

I have seen unwavering commitment to the *mitzvot* of *mikveh* and *brit mila*, even through so much complexity. I have seen barmitzvah boys, who prepared for so long to lein, accept with happiness the limitations of their situation.

I have seen young couples decide not to postpone their weddings, and rather celebrate now within the constraints of all the medical protocols.

I have seen people generously supporting their schools and shuls through this crisis. I have seen brave doctors and healthcare workers risk their lives to heal others.

I have seen managers of our old-aged homes across the country completely overhaul how they operate to prevent the spread of death. I have seen community organisations work together in unity and as a team for the sake of us all.

I have seen resilience, acceptance, courage, faith, innovation, adaptability, optimism, hope, and strength. I have seen that we are much stronger and more resilient than we can even imagine.

Where does this strength come from? From within. We are created, as the Torah teaches us, ‘in G-d’s image’, with

an awesome Divine soul, which has within it a reflection of His greatness. That is where our greatness comes from.

And throughout these months, I have seen G-d’s energy and light shining through us all. He has walked with us through this rollercoaster journey, giving us the courage and wisdom we need to get through it with strength and dignity. We go forward with Hashem into 5781, confident that with His blessings and our inner strength, we are ready for the New Year.

### Rebbetzin Gina Goldstein

My lessons from lockdown:  
Everything is (more or less) okay!  
Less on my ‘to do’ list; more on my ‘to be’ list.  
Less ambition; more self-acceptance.  
Less rushing and demands; more thoughtfulness and planning.  
Less socialising with friends; more family quality time.  
Limited shopping options; more gratitude and appreciation.

Less excitement and recreation; more creativity and innovation.  
Less noise; more silence.  
Less school educational hours; more fun and personal freedom.  
Less chatter and coffee dates; more reading and writing.  
Less live entertainment; more deep introspection.  
Less time-wasting; more Torah learning.  
Less mental stimulation; more mental hygiene.  
Fewer gym hours; more walks and talks.

Fewer office hours and less work; more garden and sunshine.  
No visitors for yom tov; joyful meals shared alone with our kids.  
Less complaining; more thankfulness.  
More uncertainty and fear; more courage and bravery.  
My world has shrunk; my heart and mind have expanded.  
Many harsh changes; more emotional flexibility.  
More illness and health risks; more davening and tehillim.  
More social isolation and depression; less self-centredness and judgement.  
Less income and fewer jobs; more kindness and charity.  
Less stretching our time; more balancing our priorities.  
Where there is loss and disappointment; new energy and strength swims in to fill the gaps. There is no vacuum, no void in life.  
Keep calm and carry on.

May Hashem bless our community, our country, and our world with health and healing, and a good and sweet New Year for us all.

Photo: Ian Ossendryver



## Battle over will breaks down East London community >> Continued from page 1

which was signed by Mr Bayer. We have been advised by our attorneys that this POA is fraudulent.”

Documents in the notice of motion show that Bax Kassel Russel, on behalf of the rabbi, wrote to Derek Puchert, a board member of Kennersley Park (where Bayer was residing at the time), advising that “we insist that as our client [the rabbi] has been specifically chosen to handle Mr Bayer’s financial affairs, that nobody be allowed to approach him [Bayer] or have anything signed or any payments approved without our client [the rabbi] being present”.

Puchert, an attorney, said that he had met Bayer, in which he is recorded as having “repeatedly informed me that he had no recollection whatsoever as having signed a general power of attorney, didn’t want to sign any such document, was most concerned as to why your client [the rabbi] was interested in his financial affairs or should have any control over them, didn’t want him or anyone to have any control over them, and even questioned the authenticity of your client being a rabbi.”

The Beth Din didn’t have access to this correspondence when making its judgement. In the notice of motion, a report by psychiatrist Dr S Mtshemla shows that Bayer was of sound mind at the time. It was the rabbi who took Bayer to be assessed.

In the later motion, it is described how ELCK co-presidents Louis Robinson and Bernie Aufrichtig as well as Ettinger went to the rabbi’s house to discuss the issue of the

will, but the meeting became heated, and the issue was left unresolved.

After further investigations revealed concerns, disciplinary proceedings were instituted. Documents submitted to the enquiry show 12 charges questioning the rabbi’s conduct. Gordon, the attorney presiding over the enquiry found the rabbi guilty of all 12, recommending summary dismissal. On this basis, the ELCK terminated Rabbi and Rebbetzin Galperin’s contract. They were asked to vacate the community’s property by 31 March 2020, which they haven’t yet done.

The Beth Din’s conclusion is, “The will was signed by the deceased in the presence of the two witnesses who signed on the will, and in view of the above, the charge that he forged the signature of the deceased and altered the will of his own accord in his favour, is rejected without merit.”

Fox says, “It should further be noted that in this matter, the Beth Din wasn’t only requested to adjudicate the question of the will – which is a legal matter. It was also requested to broker an agreement which would allow for the high holy days’ services to continue unaffected. Following a lengthy engagement with both the claimant and the respondent separately, this was achieved.”

However, services dwindled after the High Holy days last year, and with no official rabbi and the advent of COVID-19, they have essentially come to an end. This has had a sad and hopefully impermanent impact on what was once one of the hubs of Jewish life in South Africa.



# Israel-UAE deal brings hope of further normalisation

STEVEN GRUZD

Bahrain, Kuwait, Mauretania, Morocco, Oman, Saudi Arabia... will these be the next Arab or Muslim states to establish full diplomatic and economic ties with Israel?

They could be, if the seeds of moderation and normalisation sprout successfully in the wake of the Israel-United Arab Emirates (UAE) deal.

Unthinkable a decade ago, the new discourse in the Middle East is about peace and prosperity, rather than the Palestinians.

This message emerged from a Zoom webinar on Monday night, 'Israel/UAE Deal: Insights from behind the scenes', hosted by the South African Zionist Federation. Moderated by Mpho Tsedu, chief executive of the Institute of Foreign Affairs, the speakers were Dr Nir Boms, a research fellow at Tel Aviv University and member of the Israeli Council on Foreign Relations, and Haisam Hassanein from Egypt, an expert on commercial diplomacy in the Middle East, recently based in Abu Dhabi.

On 13 August, the UAE became the third Arab country to formally recognise Israel's right to exist, following Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. The telephone lines have been unblocked, and an El Al flight overflew Saudi airspace for the first time last week as it brought diplomats and businesspeople to Abu Dhabi. Embassies are set to open in both states soon.

Dubbed the 'Abraham Accord', this

deal did not emerge overnight. Relations were subterranean for decades. There was substantial interaction by entrepreneurs, academics, and civil society organisations before an elite peace deal was struck. Some 500 Israeli companies already operate in the UAE, according to Boms.

"It was the right time to bring these relations into the open, from under the table," Boms said. "It was a win-win-win formula for Israel, the United States (US) [which backed the deal] and the UAE. Their interests aligned."

The agreement supports Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's political approach. US President Donald Trump could do with a foreign policy win heading into the November elections, to show the world and his constituency that he can, in fact, make a deal. For the UAE, it promised closer collaboration with both countries, including for military hardware and Israel's high-tech knowhow.

"This agreement offers Israel the greatest chance to restore its image in the region," Hassanein said. "It has been seen through the prism of Arab nationalism since the 1950s, and was negatively portrayed. The peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan never resulted in



normalising people-to-people relations." The Arab countries punished their citizens for drawing closer to Israel, which had a chilling effect. Hassanein sees the Israel-UAE deal

differently. Both sets of leaders and businesspeople have given interviews on each other's TV stations and in newspapers. Intellectuals in both countries have supported the accords. Soon, Muslims from around the world may be praying at the Al Aqsa Mosque on the Temple Mount by travelling through Abu Dhabi. The geopolitical centre of the Arab world has shifted from Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad to the capital cities of the Persian Gulf.

Neither analyst was naïve enough to believe this rapprochement would be universally praised. As expected, there has been opposition for the UAE's enemies, including Iran, Qatar, and Turkey. Much of the Arab media has rubbished the deal. "But it has opened the door for more moderate voices to speak up for the first time, to speak about the advantages of peace," Hassanein said.

Boms said that the deal could break a stalemate. "Ten years ago, everything was seen through the lens of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Arab Spring changed that paradigm, but it ushered in an Islamist Winter ... the Gulf States are worried about Shi'a radicalism from Iran and Sunni radicalism from ISIS and the Muslim Brotherhood, and their interests

align with Israel's."

Hassanein noted that there is a difference between the older generation of Arab nationalists that blamed everything on Israel, and a younger generation that recognises the havoc Iran is causing. Boms agreed, noting that 70% of the Middle East's population is under the age of 30.

Boms said the UAE offers a positive third way, different from the Islamism of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, and the anti-normalisation and delegitimisation strategy of the Palestinian Authority. "The Palestinians have to realise that the train may leave without them," said Boms. "If this deal works, if it brings better medicines, technology and jobs, it's an alternative to old ideologies. It must therefore show tangible results and progress."

There are early signs that this normalisation can spread to the region and to Africa. Malawi is opening an embassy in Jerusalem and Serbia, and Kosovo and Mali are talking about moving their embassies from Tel Aviv. The UAE is the only place in the Arab world where the Jewish population is growing, and a kosher restaurant has opened in Abu Dhabi.

Boms said this new discourse and mindset made South Africa's support for the delegitimisation of Israel "obsolete".

Asked Hassanein, "Who should South Africa applaud and support? Those demonstrating peace, tolerance and acceptance, or those who destroy and have no vision?"

## Lithuanian citizenship - Questions and Answers



**DAINIUS AMBRAZAITIS**  
Advocate/Partner  
Head of the Citizenship Practice at  
IN JURE Law Firm, Vilnius, Lithuania

**Why is it matter whether my ancestor fled Lithuania prior or after 1918?**

The first Lithuanian law on citizenship was signed on 2 November 1918.

Hence, if a person lived in Lithuania and fled prior to 1918, he/she was not a citizen, because there was no Lithuanian state at that time. During 1795 - 1915 Lithuania was considered a part of the Russian Empire and people who lived in Lithuania during that time held red Russian passports. During 1915-1918 Lithuanian was occupied by Germany. Thus only people who still lived in Lithuania after 1918 became citizens of Lithuania and held green Lithuanian passports.

**What is the long lasting benefit of reinstating my Lithuanian citizenship by descent?**

Mainly that you can pass it on to your future generations. If you have children

after you already got your Lithuanian citizenship, your children would get Lithuanian citizenship by birth and will be able to pass it on to their children and grandchildren, etc. By obtaining Lithuanian citizenship now, you would be getting Lithuanian citizenship not only for yourself but for your future generations.

**What does it cost to reinstate my Lithuanian citizenship by descent?**

My legal assistance is based on the All Inclusive Success Fee basis. In other words, the client pays only after - and if - the application is approved. **Absolutely no upfront payment is required.** The fee is as originally stated in spite of any unexpected difficulties requiring



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A Curriculum Vitae and contact information of two referees should be emailed to luriek@sabje.co.za

**Closing date for applications: 21 September, 2020**

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*Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.*

# Durban paediatrician saved by Israeli medical team

JORDAN MOSHE

When Durban paediatrician Dr Thesi Reddy was diagnosed with a brain tumour earlier this year, he was given nine months to live. Unable to travel overseas for the necessary surgery because of COVID-19, his chances of survival were extremely remote.

Against all odds, the South African Friends of Sheba Medical Center achieved the impossible by getting him to Israel for the lifesaving procedure at Sheba Medical Center in Tel Hashomer in August.

Reddy is now recovering and making it his mission to strengthen the relationship between South Africa and the Jewish state.

“What Sheba did for me is beyond words,” Reddy told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “I had no idea that Israel was operating on such an advanced medical level. I did not go to Israel anticipating surgery at all, and yet they pulled it off. I’m still in awe.”

Reddy, a respected paediatrician at Kingsway Hospital in Durban with over 30 years of medical experience, was diagnosed three years ago with a malignant tumour in his stomach. Although he underwent surgery successfully in India, a glioblastoma was discovered in his brain this year. This required a delicate operation which could not be performed in South Africa.

“They did what they could for me here in Durban, but I soon realised that they wouldn’t be able to buy me much more time,” Reddy says. “I reached out to the doctors who had helped me in India, but because of COVID-19 travel restrictions, they weren’t able to help me this time.”

“However, they suggested that I try my luck in Israel, saying that the Israelis were very good with what I’d need.”

After conducting some research, Reddy learned of a unique medical helmet designed and manufactured in Israel which could potentially help him. Determined to source the technology, Reddy turned to Dr Maurice Goodman, a close friend and board member of the South African Friends of Sheba, who suggested he speak to the organisation’s executive director, Naomi Hadar.

“When Maurice told me about Reddy, I knew we had to make something happen,” Hadar told the *SA Jewish Report* this week. “I contacted Sheba Medical Center and spoke with Dr Zion Zivly, one of the medical centre’s most prominent neurosurgeons, to see what we could do for him despite all the COVID-19 limitations.”

Hadar took this on as a challenge. “I love missions which others say are impossible – they drive me to achieve them and make them possible,” she says. “This was an opportunity to perform *tikkun olam*, help the world, and promote Israel. I had to make it happen.”

Working closely with Sheba and high-ranking South African government officials, Hadar set out to arrange a flight which would take her and Reddy to Israel via Turkey. After much negotiation, she, Reddy and his son, Naim, departed from an eerily empty OR Tambo International Airport on 15 July 2020.

After a 30-hour layover in Turkey, the three landed in Israel shortly after midnight the next day, and arrived at the hospital at 01:00. Reddy went into isolation for two weeks, during which he underwent numerous medical tests which made it grimly clear that the tumour had grown.

“I set up a meeting to get the helmet, thinking I’d return to South Africa and then arrange surgery in another two months or so,” says Reddy. “I met Dr Zivly three times during the isolation, and he urged me to consider having the surgery immediately.

“I hadn’t even thought of it really at that point. What if I ended up in a poor condition and couldn’t get back to South Africa? However, Zivly and I sat together and spoke, one specialist to another,” Reddy says. “He gave me the impression that he could perform the surgery and do so



safely, so I said we should go ahead.”

Before undergoing the procedure, Reddy spent time touring Israel, visiting Jerusalem and the Dead Sea for the first time. On 7 August, he was readied for surgery, and went into theatre for the complicated tumour removal.

Hadar explains: “It was a five-hour procedure. I sat with his son and we waited together. Zivly had said that he estimated he could remove approximately 85% of the tumour, so we were hopeful but still nervous.”

When Reddy was wheeled out of surgery, it became clear that the procedure had not only been a smooth one, but had successfully resulted in the removal of the entire tumour, a fact confirmed by a subsequent MRI scan. Reddy recovered rapidly, and after a short stay in the hospital, was soon back on his feet and touring more of Israel.

“I was very surprised,” admits Reddy. “I’d never known such rapid discharge from hospital. The level of expertise, medical technology, and standard of care was incredible. This was a hospital of the highest order whose standards I cannot fault. Glioblastoma doesn’t have a high survival rate, and, because of Sheba, I have probably got further than most people with the condition. Those Israelis know what they’re doing.”

Beyond touring, Reddy underwent some post-surgery treatment and also collected the medical helmet before returning home a changed man.

Says Hadar: “I flew to Israel with a sick man and returned with a different person altogether. He couldn’t stop praising the medical team. His wife phoned and couldn’t express enough thanks, and we’ve had plenty of messages from people who know him thanking Sheba for helping him.

“For us Jews, it’s about applying heart and soul, not just ability and resources,” says Hadar. “Dr Reddy is not Jewish, nor is he connected to Israel at all. We helped because it’s in our DNA. He who saves a person, saves the world, whether that person is Jewish or not. I hope that he continues to recover, and pray he has a longer and better life.”

Reddy is looking for ways to connect South Africa with Israeli medical innovation, determined to help other South Africans benefit the way he has.

“We need to bring cutting-edge Israeli tech to South Africa,” he says. “I marvelled at the way they are handling COVID-19, and they have strategies we could benefit from here at home.

“We’ve lost our medical innovative edge in South Africa, and I feel that Israel can help us. The team at Sheba prove that medicine can be practised differently and [they] are doing things few others can do. Why should we not engage with them?”

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# September 11 indelibly imprinted in our minds

JORDAN MOSHE

Greg Baron will never forget 19 years ago looking up after being evacuated from his hotel room in the World Trade Center complex in New York and seeing people jumping from the North Tower.

“They kept telling us not to look up, but of course we did just that,” said this Sandton resident who survived the horrific 11 September 2001 terrorist attack. “We could see people jumping from the North Tower. We heard another noise and watched as the second plane hit the building. I knew we had to get out of there as fast as possible.”



Beatrice Carter and Edmund Glazer

So many years later, this memory is still indelibly imprinted on this Sandton resident’s memory because he and his sister Elise survived this terrible tragedy in which 2 977 people lost their lives.

Like so many others who lived to tell the story of the collapse of New York’s iconic World Trade Center, he still asks himself why he emerged from the disaster in which terrorists forced American pilots to fly into the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

This Friday marks the sombre anniversary of one of the greatest tragedies of the past two decades.

“I can still see that destruction, the plane hitting the building and solid structures disappearing in a few moments in front of my eyes,” says Baron. “I don’t think people actually comprehend the extent of what happened, the damage which was actually done and how lucky some of us are to still be here.”

Baron was visiting New York with his sister in September 2001, following their stay in Chicago where they had celebrated the wedding of their brother. The two flew to New York on 10 September, looking forward to spending a few days in the ‘Big Apple’ before returning to South Africa.

“A friend was working in the city and invited us to stay at the World Trade Center’s Marriott Hotel where he had accommodation. We took rooms on the 15th floor,” he says.

Baron and his sister spent the evening of 10 September out on the town, returning late to their hotel room. They were awoken the following morning by vibrations felt across the room and the sound of the hotel alarm system at 08:45.

“Initially, we were told to stay in our rooms,” Baron recalls. “We looked outside and noticed that the windows were cracking. I called reception, but they insisted we stay put. Suddenly, we were told to get out as fast as possible and evacuate the building. “We ran down those flights of stairs. When we arrived at the lobby, I

buildings.”

The two were soon blanketed in thick dust from the collapsed building, while overhead American fighter jets roared towards the scene. Unable to contact anyone, they boarded a ferry for Staten Island and managed to make for New Jersey before heading back to New York.

After a grim week in the city, they boarded the second international flight out of New York and travelled back home to South Africa, escorted by fighter jets until they were clear of American airspace.

“I didn’t often think about what happened until recently,” Baron says. “I compartmentalised the event in the back of my brain. I don’t know why I’m still here today.”

Tragically, others from our community lost their lives in the events of that day. One is Zambian-born Edmund Glazer, a graduate of King David Linksfield who had moved to America after completing his schooling. An accomplished accountant,

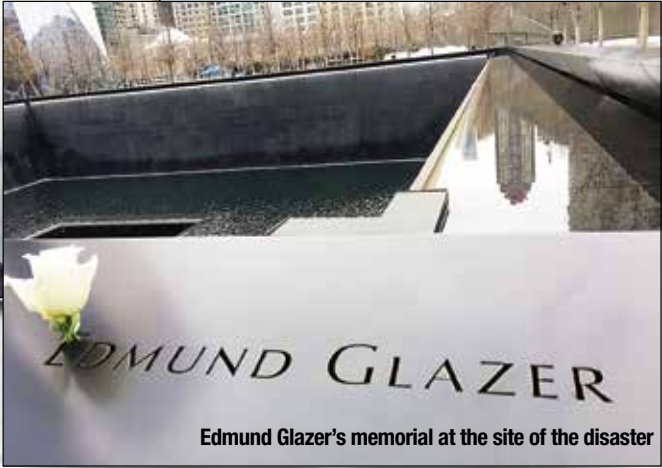
husband, and father, he lived in Boston with his family.

“Edmund was flying to Los Angeles on the day of 9/11,” recounts his sister, Beatrice Carter, from her home in North Carolina, USA. “He flew all over the world for his job. His wife insisted he not fly to Israel at the time because it was dangerous, but tragedy ended up happening in his own backyard. Nobody saw it coming.”

Glazer was aboard American Airlines flight 11 which was hijacked 15 minutes after take-off and flown into the North Tower at 08:46 local time. The flight manifest later showed that he was seated beside Daniel Levin, an American Israeli mathematician who was murdered when he tried to overcome the terrorists.

She continues: “Edmund always flew out on the first flight of the day, and always called me and his wife before take-off and after landing. That morning, he didn’t call me. I watched what was happening in New York, contacted his wife, and said I refused to believe it.

“As the day went on, I got the feeling that something had happened to him. Later, the



Edmund Glazer's memorial at the site of the disaster

remember a woman still in her nightgown and hair curlers saying that she’d seen a body bounce off her room window. We were stunned.”

The lobby was soon evacuated, and guests ushered quickly outdoors where dozens of police cars and fire engines were arriving.

Baron navigated to the nearby Battery Park, located at the southern tip of Manhattan about 1½ kilometres from the site of the disaster.

“We sat at the edge of the water, and I thought that if things got really bad, we could jump in and swim towards Ellis Island,” he says. “I could see the building from where we sat for a moment, but suddenly it just vanished behind other



The Twin Towers

FBI visited her home and confirmed that Edmund had died.”

It fell to Carter to notify her parents in Toronto, so she drove to their home and broke the difficult news in person. After spending time with them, she headed to Boston to be with her sister-in-law and four-year-old nephew. A memorial was arranged for Glazer and, although Carter anticipated a maximum of 50 people, some 500 attended the ceremony.

“He was so loved and respected within his industry,” she says. “Nobody called him an acquaintance – he was always a friend. My brother had a way of touching everyone he met, walking into a room and making an impression. He was a special soul.”

Only two bones were ever recovered of her brother’s remains, and these were flown to Toronto for burial, transported with full ceremonial honours. Carter recounts visiting his grave yearly on the anniversary of his death, sitting down to speak with him and enjoying their shared favourite, a tuna sandwich and coffee.

“I always feel his presence at this time of year,” she says. “I’m older, and we were connected from the day he was born. It never gets easier. You learn to cope, and life does go on, but I lost my closest friend that day. Over 2 000 people died that day but, to me, only Edmund died. I will always miss him.”

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# Going back to shuls in safety

OPINION PROFESSOR BARRY SCHOUB, DR RICHARD FRIEDLAND, AND PROFESSOR EFRAIM KRAMER

The reopening of shuls has been met with comments ranging from “delighted to be going back at last!” to “are you sure it is really safe to go back now?”

Five months ago, we took the decision to recommend that shuls be closed after very careful investigation and in-depth scientific evaluation of the risks to the community. With a rapidly expanding epidemic at that time, the danger to the community would have been far too great to have normal shul services.

It is evident, from studies of explosive outbreaks arising from houses of worship in many countries, that those congregate environments are particularly prone to promoting super-spreading events. In some cases, these outbreaks have affected hundreds of congregants, sometimes with several fatalities. Synagogues have been no exception, and Jewish populations have been ravaged by the pandemic, out of proportion to their numbers.

Today, fortuitously, with the rate of infection coming gratifyingly down, circumstances have dictated a re-evaluation of shul closure, and cautiously they are now being reopened.

Nevertheless, two important issues still remain to be taken into consideration. Firstly, while it is true that the numbers of new infections are coming down, the country still averages between 1 000 and 2 000 new cases per day. This indicates that there is still a sizeable mass of virus circulating in the population.

Secondly, the 640 000 or so known cases of the disease represent not much more than 1% of the population. Even doubling or tripling this figure to account for the silent asymptomatic infections, it still leaves the great majority of the population susceptible to the virus that has far from disappeared.

It goes without saying that it is imperative that great care must continue to be taken. This is simply because right now, the only protection against infection at our disposal are the safety precautions of avoiding social gatherings, physical distancing, wearing masks, and cleaning hands regularly.

To make the shuls as safe as possible, one of us, Professor Efraim Kramer, has gone to extraordinary lengths inspecting shuls throughout the country for safety, and drawing up detailed protocols to reduce the risk of virus transmission.

The shuls will be a relatively safe space, and members of the community can be reassured to return to shuls, provided the safety protocols are strictly and consistently adhered to.

In that regard, to hold private *minyanim* separate from the shuls, and without having been expertly inspected and evaluated for



safety and with no accredited protocols in place, puts not only those participants in danger, but also the community at large.

The virus is contagious, highly contagious, and participants in these unregulated *minyanim* could be irresponsibly threatening the community as a whole. What we certainly want to avoid is a resurgence of the epidemic launched from the Jewish community.

• Prof Barry Schoub, Dr Richard Friedland and Prof Efraim Kramer have been advising the Office of the Chief Rabbi on matters related to COVID-19 and shuls.

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THE HIGHLANDS HOUSE

Please note the official notice of meeting below. It is essential that you register early so that you have a chance to study the amendments, which have become necessary as a result of changes in the Tax Act, as well as to update the Constitution to reflect the current operations and governance of Highlands House.

SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING Highlands House also known as The Cape Jewish Home

Notice is hereby given that a SPECIAL GENERAL MEETING, in terms of Clause 10.2 of the Constitution, of members will be held via electronic video conferencing (ZOOM) on 30 September 2020 at 13h00 to approve and adopt a new constitution.

You are invited to register your intention to attend this Special General Meeting by contacting Highlands House at residents@highlandshouse.co.za. Once your membership has been verified, you will receive an electronic copy of the proposed revised Constitution together with the current Constitution for comparison, as well as the link to the meeting. Registration closes on Wednesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020.

PLEASE NOTE: In terms of Clause 5 of the Constitution, the following are entitled to vote: Honorary Life Members, resident members, being persons resident at the Home, ordinary members – any Jewish person over the age of eighteen (18) years who has contributed to the United Jewish Campaign (UJC) in Cape Town.

Michael Novos, President



# Acknowledging the suffering of the Jews in Mauritius

JORDAN MOSHE

The suffering of Jewish detainees who were deported to the island of Mauritius in 1940 by the British government has been officially acknowledged by the United Kingdom (UK) for the first time in almost 80 years.

The historic occasion was marked on 31 July with the issuing of a letter written by Lord Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for South Asia and the Commonwealth and the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict.

It was issued ahead of the online commemorative ceremony held on 12 August to mark the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the detainees from Mauritius and delivered to Owen Griffiths, president of the Island Hebrew Congregation and chairperson of the Beau Bassin Jewish Detainees Memorial and Information Centre.

Beyond recognising the suffering of European Jews who fled persecution in Nazi-occupied Europe, the letter also affirmed the British government's commitment to honouring the victims of Nazi persecution.

"The story of the 1 580 Jewish men, women, and children who fled Nazi-controlled Europe and were eventually deported to the British colony of Mauritius is the closest the events of the Holocaust came to South Africa," says director and founder of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC), Tali Nates.

"We were very encouraged to read the historic UK government's letter sent to the Detainees Memorial on the occasion of the commemoration."

She adds: "It was the first time in 80 years, since the deportation in 1940, where the government recognised the great importance of remembering the suffering endured by European Jews who fled persecution in Nazi-occupied Europe."

The JHGC has worked closely with the Beau Bassin Jewish Detainees Memorial and Information Centre since its opening in 2014, co-hosting last month the 75th commemoration of the liberation of the detainees from the island. Originally an old chapel, the memorial property was acquired through the efforts of the late Mervyn Smith, former president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the African Jewish Congress; Griffiths, Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, as well as partnerships and support from South Africa, Mauritius and beyond.

The memorial commemorates the 126 Jewish refugees who died in detention on the island and were buried there. Sadly, their story and those of their fellow detainees has been neglected for the past number of decades.

On 5 December 1940, 1 580 Jewish men, women and children who fled Europe for Palestine were forcefully taken from the Atlit detention centre near Haifa. They were deported to the colony of Mauritius by the British Mandatory Government of Palestine due to the 1939 British White Paper, a document that enforced a strict immigration quota for Jews entering Palestine.

"The Mauritius deportation is neglected because the detainees' experience does not form part of the master narrative of the European Holocaust," explains Dr Roni Mikel Arieli, a research fellow of the JHGC whose extensive research into the Mauritius episode led her to become involved with the project in January last year. "The Holocaust is Eurocentric, and Mauritius is not part of the Auschwitz or Warsaw Ghetto discussion.

"We often forget that the Holocaust and the conditions of persecution preceding it created an influx of refugees who arrived in many places around the world, and after being forced to leave their homes and travel into the unknown."

Arieli stresses that the actions of the British cannot be likened to those of the Nazis, and that while

British internment was painful, it is wholly unlike the concentration camp experience.

"We need to understand the situation in British Palestine at the time," she explains. "The British were dealing on the one hand with the Arab revolution, and on the other they were afraid that refugees from occupied countries in Europe were enemy agents. It was a time of war.

British High Commissioner to Mauritius H.E. Keith Allan (left) and Owen Griffiths with the letter issued by the British government

"It remains a troubling story, but we need to understand the circumstances that created the tragedy and the role played by the Nazis at the outset. Adolf Eichmann drove Jewish immigration out of Germany because the Nazis wanted the Reich clear of Jews, but by 1940, no one was able to leave.

"No matter the cause, we need to tell the human story of what happened to the refugees and study their testimonies to learn from them."

Griffiths agrees with Arieli.

"There is no comparison whatsoever," he says. "The Jewish detainees were prisoners and some of them did die, a tragic reality. However, those who perished were not victims of brutality or maltreatment

but often died of broken hearts, depression, malaria, and typhus. They were given access to food, resources, and Jewish items like sifrei torah.

"This is in no way comparable to what happened in Europe."

Griffiths explains that though some were initially disappointed by the UK government's letter, it's a major step towards addressing what occurred on the island.

"Some people were expecting an apology from the UK," he says. "Nates and Arieli have put things into perspective by reminding people that we should never have expected one. Rather, this is an expression of regret, a suggestion that things could have been better handled by the British government in 1940."

He adds: "This is a huge step towards proper recognition of suffering. The British High Commissioner to Mauritius mentioned the possibility of a letter to me earlier this year and he was true to his word. Such a thing has never been done and it's something to celebrate.

"We hope that this letter will ensure that the history of what happened in Mauritius will make the story more widely known, and draw more people to come here to understand exactly what happened."

Nates and Arieli agree.

"This is an excellent narrative that speaks of refugeeism, human rights and suffering," says Arieli. "It shows that the Holocaust is not just about Majdanek or Auschwitz, but a complex story whose side effects included statelessness. It has tremendous teaching potential.

"We need to confront the pleasant and less pleasant parts of the past, even if this means casting some negative light on the British."

Nates concludes: "We strongly believe in the need to remember and educate about this unknown historical episode in Mauritius, South Africa, the UK and beyond. For this reason, we include this story in our permanent exhibition in Johannesburg."



British High Commissioner to Mauritius H.E. Keith Allan (left) and Owen Griffiths with the letter issued by the British government

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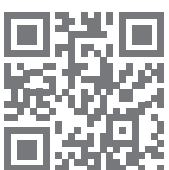


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# The Sephardi truth about Ashkenazi origins

JORDAN MOSHE

Think you're a pure blood Ashkenazi of Litvak origin? You may have to think again. Surprising though it sounds, a good portion of South Africa's Ashkenazi community are in fact descendants of Sephardi stock, their blood a blend of kreplach and kubbeh.

"A percentage of Ashkenazim who believe that they are 100% Ashkenazi actually have Sephardi roots," says Lucia Goy Mastromiechele. "People who think that their family is entirely Russian or Polish may find that their family is originally from Spain or Egypt.

"Just because your family comes from Poland doesn't mean that they were necessarily Polish to begin with."

A managing partner at the Spanish international legal firm Goy Gentile, Mastromiechele has a keen interest in immigration law, devoting much of her time to helping people from around the world secure passports to which they are entitled. Having dealt extensively with Jewish clients, she has learned much about the actual family origins of numerous Jewish families and helped trace family trees back across numerous generations.

"We're talking about more than 2 000 years of migration, a movement of communities across continents taking place very often," says Mastromiechele. "The communities not only interact with each other, but they marry into one another, settle together, and create new lines of blood in their family trees."

She says that if one were to trace a family name back far enough, it's not entirely unlikely that an evidently Ashkenazi sounding surname may once have been something particularly Sephardi sounding.

"It's possible that a surname varied over time," says Mastromiechele. "Because Jews were often

on the move, they may have adopted or changed a surname to reflect their movement. Jews often settled in places where they could practice their profession or find work, bringing about a mix of Ashkenazim and Sephardim from different locations in one place."

Changes to a family name could be caused not only through marriage, but also for ease of pronunciation in a new country. Some families were forced to adopt new names at the instruction of non-Jewish rulers, while others voluntarily adopted less Jewish sounding names in order to fit in. Depending on local customs, some families may not even have had a surname to begin with, later adopting one in order to become part of society in their new home.

"Names could evolve over time," says Mastromiechele. "One surname could have one pronunciation in a certain place, and be said differently somewhere else. Remember that people could also be illiterate, meaning they didn't have a standard spelling for their surname, pronounced it a certain way, but changed it when it was written down.

"Jewish people tended to change their names quite a lot, no matter where they came from."

Sephardim and Ashkenazim were often brought into the mix together, creating bloodlines that blended various countries and extractions.

Although their migration could often be voluntary, historical events such as the expulsion from Spain in 1492, the subsequent Portuguese expulsion, and similar events on the continent also caused considerable shifts amongst Jewish communities. This would in turn affect their family names.

"When Jews were expelled from Spain, many of them had professions that were beneficial to the Spanish crown," says Mastromiechele.

"A plague hit Spain after the expulsion, and the rulers asked Jews who were doctors to come back. They refused, and many of them actually changed their names as a sign of protest to show that they were never going back, adding 'no' onto their surnames."

Similar examples abound across the world, bringing together Ashkenazi and Sephardi bloodlines. A prominent Sephardic group from North Africa with the surname of Sarfati claims descent from the Ashkenazi sage, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki, (better known as Rashi) who was born in Troyes, France. This is because when Jews were expelled from France in the 13th century, many of his descendants relocated to Spain and North Africa where they soon became Sephardicised, taking on exclusively Sephardic customs.

Although she isn't Jewish herself, Mastromiechele finds the history and heritage of Jewish people fascinating.

"I work closely with our three in-house historians at the firm, all of whom are Jewish themselves," she says. "The history we uncover

when researching people's ancestry is incredible. "Jewish people have travelled around the globe for centuries, continuing their way of life in spite of the shifts in their lives and the changes they had to live with. Their backgrounds are often rich and diverse. Helping people to discover their real origins is always incredible."

Although Mastromiechele believes that the percentage of South African Ashkenazi Jews with Sephardi blood is relatively small, it certainly remains a possibility. As part of her work, she offers clients a service which traces their ancestry and helps them to determine whether they have a case for Sephardi ancestry or not.

"It depends on the size of the family," she says. "For every 10 family trees I review, at least two will have some Sephardi sounding surnames. However, seeing is not always believing in many of these cases. We often need to find further, concrete proof of family origin and surname. A Sephardi sounding surname doesn't always mean you have a solid case."

A family tree going back at least four generations is necessary to begin a preliminary investigation. Based on this, the team of in-house historians can undertake a basic study at no cost, determining the likelihood of Sephardi roots and a client's chance of success. It is then up to the client to decide whether they wish to apply formally to claim Sephardic ancestry and the potentially accompanying passport.

"We won't charge if your case isn't approved," says Mastromiechele. "This is a historic right people need to know about, and we want to make sure they don't lose the opportunity to claim passports to which they are entitled.

"If you aren't successful, at least you have the chance to know what your family's origins actually are, whether you are Ashkenazi, Sephardi, or both."



Albert Hachuel, a Sephardi Jew, with his wife Roma who was an Ashkenazi Jew

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*Dr Nechama Brodie, journalist, author, fact-checker, producer, and publisher, has just brought out a new book, “Femicide in South Africa”, based on her PhD thesis. We ask her some questions:*

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# Low number of COVID-19 cases in Africa

NICOLA MILTZ

South Africa appears to be over the COVID-19 surge, with death and infection rates mercifully lower than initially feared, however scientists and politicians caution that now is not the time to become complacent.

While experts predicted South Africa and the rest of the continent would be totally overwhelmed by the coronavirus, this has apparently not happened. And numbers were relatively low, as was the death rate, despite the poor health infrastructure across the continent.

The number of new daily confirmed cases overall has been dropping, although some countries are still seeing a rise in cases. At the time of going to press, South Africa had 640 441 confirmed cases and 15 086 deaths.

Hatzolah’s Lance Abramson told the *SA Jewish Report*: “Things have settled but the virus has not gone away. The number of cases are fewer but we are still seeing new infections and new patients signing up to our programme daily.”

Experts agree the surprisingly low death rate could be partly because of the comparatively young population in Africa, with COVID-19 being known to have a higher mortality rate for older age groups.

Africa has recorded more than a million confirmed cases, although the true extent of the pandemic in the continent is not known. “Testing rates are reported to be low, which could affect official numbers,” said Professor Lucille Blumberg, deputy director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases. “It is difficult to compare the numbers because the degree of testing is quite low in many parts of Africa, especially outside major cities.”

She said patients in rural areas presenting with respiratory illnesses and things like pneumonia were also not always tested for COVID-19 so it was difficult to know the exact numbers.

South Africa and Egypt have seen the largest recorded outbreaks so far, with South Africa one of only nine countries in the world to record more than 500 000 confirmed cases.

Initially, global authorities were highly concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in Africa.

“The first concern was that the virus would spread particularly rapidly and extensively in the African milieu. Urban conglomerates on the African continent are notorious for being overcrowded with poor sanitation and control measures, such as social distancing, would have been very difficult to implement,” said retired virologist Professor Barry Schoub, one of the medical experts advising the community.

“Secondly, the extent of underlying diseases, including tropical infectious diseases, tuberculosis, and HIV, as well as malnutrition, in much of the continent was an additional source

of worry.”

However, he said observations to date of the epidemic on the continent have been “surprisingly positive”.

“The extent and severity of COVID-19 appears to have been far less than anticipated and considerably less than the earlier epidemic in European countries and the Americas,” he said.

Why this has been so is still being studied extensively. Several factors could explain this much unexpected outcome.

“Firstly, the age spectrum of the population on the continent is skewed to a much younger age than in developed countries, and advanced age is known to be a major risk factor for severe disease. This will probably turn out to be the major reason.

“Secondly, the widespread presence of infections and tropical diseases may, in fact, turn out to have played a positive role through the theoretical possibility of ‘training’ the immune system to protect against infection or serious disease from the coronavirus more effectively. This is purely speculative and evidence remains to be forthcoming.”

Thirdly, he said, tests, although extensive in some countries, may have underestimated the extent of the disease in many other countries.

“There may well be a complexity of factors contributing to the lower burden of disease in the African continent. It does indeed make for interesting medical science and valuable public

health knowledge,” he added.

As at Wednesday, South Africa’s recovery rate was at 88%.

South Africa’s Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize said this week that the country had recently ranked fifth in the number of positive cases globally, but had since dropped to eighth and could drop further if the infection rate continued to drop. Despite this, he urged South Africans to remain cautious.

“We are at a point where our numbers are steadily coming down, hospitalisation numbers have reduced, and people in intensive care units are reducing. We must be very optimistic, but still very cautious. We are not seeing the end of the disease yet,” he said.



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# Can there be laughter after the Holocaust?

TALI FEINBERG

Most of us are viscerally offended at the thought of Holocaust jokes, but the reality is that such jokes, humour, and satire have existed during and since the events of the *Shoah*. Experts on the topic recently shared their thoughts on the reasoning behind this, in a lively debate and webinar hosted by the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHGC). From the outset, it was made clear that the centre and the panellists do not in any way support antisemitic Holocaust jokes, and acknowledged that there is a very tenuous boundary between a self-deprecating or satirical joke and an antisemitic one.

One of the panellists and an editor of the new book, *Laughter After: Humor and the Holocaust*, Dr David Sluki, said he became interested in the topic after watching *Curb your Enthusiasm*. “... where I kept noticing Holocaust and Nazi jokes. Then I couldn’t stop seeing them in sitcoms – practically all American sitcoms have Holocaust jokes – and realised these jokes are a part of the culture of remembrance, for better or worse.”

The book’s editors – Sluki, Gabriel N. Finder, and Avinoam Patt – invited various Holocaust experts to shed light on the issue. The result is a deep exploration that “takes us back to the Soviet Union and Yiddish songs, through to present day and jokes on social media and in film, cabaret, TV, and jokes told amongst

Jews. They all investigate central question: what function does humour play when we think about the Holocaust, and what are the boundaries?” explained Sluki.

Another panellist, historian Dr Jordy Silverstein, is the granddaughter of Holocaust survivors in Australia. She contributed a chapter to the book on the role humour plays in the experience of grandchildren of survivors, and researched this by listening to the conversations of those around her. She found that these jokes form part of belonging to the ‘third generation’ and, while some are in bad taste, they don’t mock survivors.



Dr Jordy Silverstein

She found that: “[These jokes] point to the way that the Holocaust is at the tip of our memories and is a constant presence. Laughter is often a reaction to something that can’t be ‘pinned down’ or encapsulated in words. Sometimes the jokes mirror that excessive trauma. It is a form of ‘post-memory’, and a relationship to the past that sometimes testifies to a deep feeling of loss.”

Dr Liat Steir-Livny, whose research focuses on the changing commemoration of the Holocaust in Israel, said: “I believe Israel is unique when it comes to Holocaust awareness, and we need to look at this humour in Israel in its cultural context. In Israel, children learn about the Holocaust from kindergarten onwards. In high school, thousands go to Poland to see the camps, and then they learn about the Holocaust during their army service. Therefore, the Holocaust isn’t just in the past – for Israelis, it is part of present day.” Combined with the constant anxiety about terrorism and fears of a ‘second Holocaust’, you have a “post-traumatic society where the Holocaust is a daily event”.

She said jokes about the Holocaust in Israel are often a reaction to this reality. “If someone jokes about Anne Frank, it’s like she becomes a friend, and the Holocaust becomes less frightening.” These jokes are also used to address divisions in Israeli society – for example, the religious explanations of the Holocaust, the politicisation of the Holocaust or even the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, there are some very antisemitic jokes online and “there is a very thin line between humour and being plain antisemitic, and we must differentiate,” she said.

Discussing this boundary, Silverstein says it is often about who is telling the joke, why they are telling it, who is the punchline and if it depends on accurate historical facts. “Is it a form of memory, or the erasure of memory, or denial of the Holocaust?” she asked rhetorically.

Steir-Livny said it is also about the language in which the joke is told. “If it is told in Hebrew, it is an inner dialogue of a post-traumatic society. Laughing about it in Hebrew is a support group, or a defence mechanism to build an emotional wall between oneself and the trauma. It’s not for everyone, but it helps some people.”

All three experts agreed on this point – that you may feel strongly that any Holocaust joke is unacceptable, and that’s okay. “We all have own boundaries. Some don’t find any funny and that’s perfectly legitimate,” said Sluki.

He reflected that in 1905, Freud found Jews to be the most self-deprecating group, and that such humour has always been part of Jewish culture. In the Oneg Shabbat archive hidden in the Warsaw ghetto, one can find jokes written by Jews about their situation and in the Displaced Persons camps after the war, Jews wrote a humorous book about their reality. In the Lodz ghetto, Oskar Rosenfeld wrote: “We look like three Jewish holidays: We eat like on Yom Kippur, we live in Sukkot, and we look like it’s Purim.”

Sluki also noted how the level of what is acceptable has changed – for example, when the play *The Producers* was first staged, the jokes about Nazism were seen as shocking, but today it is a hit Broadway show and the mockery is not seen as particularly outrageous.

Addressing the film *Life is Beautiful*, which brings this conversation to the



Dr David Sluki

fore, Sluki said: “It raises interesting questions on the limits of representing the Holocaust. If we compare the recent film *JoJo Rabbit*, I would say *JoJo Rabbit* was less bold, because *Life is Beautiful* takes you into a concentration camp. It’s an interesting piece of art that gets us thinking about these questions. In fact, this year is 20 years since *Life is Beautiful* was released, and it is a good time to take stock of what’s changed because of it. There are now different possibilities of how to represent Holocaust.”

JHGC director Tali Nates said: “Humour could be a form of resistance during the Holocaust”, and that it sometimes gave survivors a way of sharing their stories.

Audience member Cindy Moritz noted: “Humour can sometimes be incredibly sad. It’s not always the same as ‘telling a joke’.”

Silverstein responded that this speaks to “the broad functions of humour. If the Holocaust has a lasting impact on the way we operate, then it makes sense that humour becomes part of how we function and deal with this kind of lasting trauma. It is a tool in our storytelling toolkit, and can be useful and healing”.

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Securing *permanent residency* is also an option worth considering. The permanent residency programme on offer in Cyprus has been voted as the best in Europe because it automatically qualifies three generations in the same family line, including dependant children up to age 25 as well as both the parents and the parents-in-law of the main investor. Not only is the application process very quick – it takes just two months for residency to be approved – but the permanent residency status for the whole family is for life, the permit never expires nor needs to be renewed. Another benefit is that you do not need to live in Cyprus to retain your residency status. Cyprus permanent residents do have the right to apply for citizenship following their physical presence in the country for a number of years, so will in fact follow the naturalisation programme.

### THE LIFESTYLE

Another huge benefit of investing in Cyprus is the fabulous lifestyle on offer. Being an ex-British colony, there is no language barrier – everyone speaks English and all the documentation is in English. Cyprus has a relaxed, stress-free lifestyle offering an ideal family environment. Your children and grandchildren will benefit from excellent schools and tertiary education institutions (all Euro-accredited); and the healthcare facilities and medical care are world-class. Cyprus is very similar to South Africa. The golf courses are world-class, the countryside is breathtakingly beautiful, and Cyprus has 66 blue-flag status beaches, the cleanest seas in the Med and a mountain range where it snows for three months. This is a country for enjoying and exploring.



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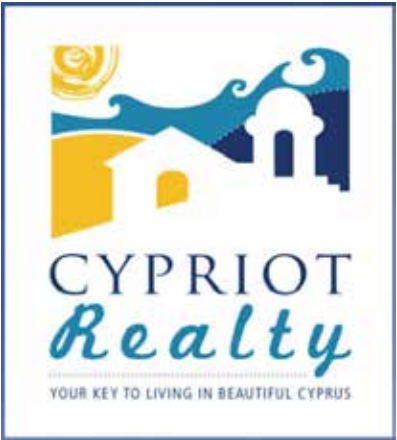
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# Forgiveness is taking back control

JORDAN MOSHE

“I’m sorry. Do you forgive me?” When you hear this with increasing frequency, you know Rosh Hashanah is around the corner.

Frequent though it may be, how many of us really mean it? What does it actually mean to say sorry or forgive someone who has wronged you?

Apologies, confessions, and forgiveness are synonymous with the Jewish New Year. While we don’t pray for atonement until Yom Kippur, the onset of Rosh Hashanah typically brings with it a barrage of WhatsApp messages and Facebook statuses from friends and relatives asking that we forgive them for some wrong.

As many of us know, forgiveness entails far more than a general request for pardon, and apologies are much more than saying sorry.

“Apology is about vulnerability,” explains Rabbi Gabi Bookatz of Waverley Shul. “It’s about exposing yourself fully to another person and they acknowledge it. Apologies are supposed to be a very personal experience.

“The person to whom you apologise needs to see your discomfort and understand that you feel your remorse, that you have taken responsibility for your actions. An apology is an acknowledgement of wrong which has to be expressed in order to be effective.”

An apology is a first step that must be taken in mending a relationship and achieving personal growth, Bookatz explains. It’s only after an apology is made that any thought of forgiveness can be entertained. This is a fundamental principle in the Jewish concept of *teshuva*, or repentance.

Bookatz says: “The Rambam says that the main expression of *teshuva* is confession. It sounds like a Catholic idea, but Rambam is saying that the core of repentance is the ability

to articulate your part in the wrongdoing. “It’s only after facing your mistake, that you can start to grow. Confession is the essence of *teshuva*. At its heart, it’s an apology.” Apologies are not just admissions of wrong, however. They are also supposed to provide a platform for communication between parties, establishing precisely how the offended person was hurt without making assumptions.



“Even if you’re apologising, you can’t assume you know what hurt the other person,” says Bookatz. “An apology is actually an opportunity for the hurt person to articulate exactly what went wrong and to make themselves heard. Listening is a crucial part of an apology, especially for the person apologising.

“An apology can’t be rushed. It may be extremely uncomfortable, but if the offended person wants to let rip when you apologise, you need to let them be heard. No ‘buts’ or ‘ifs’. It’s raw and sincere.”

Forgiveness is the next step, though it is more complex than we may think. The art of forgiveness demands true spiritual and emotional maturity, posing considerable

challenges for many of us who feel justly wronged. “There is an old expression that the Jewish woman forgives and forgets but never forgets what she forgave,” says Rabbi Levi Avtzon, associate rabbi at Linksfield Shul. “Forgiveness doesn’t mean that you forget or that you’re fully healed. “Forgiveness means that you have no control

over me and don’t consume my thoughts anymore. Forgiveness means ‘I’m releasing you as my menace.’”

Forgiveness can be the greatest revenge on someone who hurt you, especially if someone wronged you intentionally.

Says Avtzon: “Until you forgive someone, they absolutely own you. The moment you release them and forgive them, you are in charge and let them out of your universe. “Forgiveness is the ability to run your own life and not have other people in control of your decisions.”

According to Bookatz, forgiveness can be approached in either a realistic or idealistic fashion. “The realistic one takes a lot of maturity,” he says. “It means putting aside conditions for forgiveness and begins with a sincere apology. That’s the most basic level. The next rung is where you realise that in order to forgive, you have to feel that you’ve grown from the experience, that the relationship has been mended.”

This is not always straightforward, depending

on the severity of the wrongdoing and the damage done. Those who suffer trauma because of wrongs committed against them physically, emotionally, or psychologically are a case in point. How can healing be achieved?

Says Bookatz: “As difficult as it may be, we may find ourselves able to forgive if we realise that we are the better person because of what has been done to us, not despite it. You can look back and see that you’ve grown through your suffering.

“When someone is not forthcoming with an apology or attempts to justify their behaviour, you may actually find that forgiving them sets you on a trajectory of growth and development of self.”

The idealistic level demands even greater maturity but is perhaps even more psychologically and emotionally liberating – handing over your grievance to G-d.

Avtzon explains that if you believe Hashem exists and that all that happens in the world is because of Him, anything that happens to you comes from G-d.

Says Avtzon. “The fact that the person hurt you is done – Hashem will hold them accountable for that. But the fact that you were hurt was supposed to happen.

“To get angry means you believe that your life is out of control. We need to see that whatever happens is exactly as it must be. Forgiveness means I accept that life is not in the control of anybody else.”

Bookatz agrees, stressing that it’s not easily achieved.

“It’s easy to forgive a lady at Checkers who cuts in line but how can a person who suffers from trauma be expected to do it immediately? It’s a long, challenging journey,” he says.

“Forgiveness at its heart is about the capacity to heal yourself and the world around you knowing the world is filled with pain. Pain is part of life, as are mistakes, but we grow because of them.”

Avtzon concludes: “People walk around convincing themselves that they are victims. Yes, there are things that are done that are not okay, but you’re not a victim. You’re where you’re supposed to be, and you are strong enough to deal with it.”

## Seven tips for staying healthy during the Yom Kippur fast

DR TZVI DWOLATZKY – JTA

There is a marked difference between the intended feeling of being uncomfortable with not eating or drinking for 25 hours, and actually becoming ill as a result of not getting enough liquids and nutrients.

Yom Kippur not only requires emotional preparation, but physical as well. A person can take several important steps before the holiday in order to achieve the best physical condition possible to perform better on Yom Kippur, which this year falls on the evening of 27 September.

Here are seven tips to prepare you for an easy fast:

Ask your physician if your health allows you to fast

Many chronic medical conditions, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, or arthritis, don’t usually prevent you from fasting as long as your condition is stable. This is usually the case for pregnant and nursing mothers as well. Clearly an acute illness accompanied by fever, vomiting, or diarrhoea will prevent you from fasting. Before going any further, you should check with your doctor whether your health allows you to fast.

Prepare early

At least a week before the fast, you should cut down on your daily amount of coffee and caffeinated beverages. Also, take it easy with salty foods. Keep away from alcohol because it stimulates the loss of body water. The use of artificial sweeteners should also be kept to a minimum.

Drink a lot of liquids, but don't overdo it

It’s very important to be well hydrated before the fast. For at least two days before the fast, make sure

to drink adequate amounts of fluids. Remember that the healthiest thing to drink is water. Keep a bottle of water with you and note how much you drink – about half a gallon (1.8 litres) is generally sufficient. But don’t overdo it. Drinking too much can wash out essential salts from your body.

Eat regular meals before the fast

It’s important to get your body into a routine before the fast. Make sure to eat regular meals on the days before the fast. And don’t skip breakfast, which is probably the most important meal of the day. Keep away from rich and spicy foods. And eat in moderation.

Take it easy before and during the fast

On the day before the fast, refrain from strenuous physical exercise. Don’t run around too much doing chores – spoil yourself and take it easy. Keep out of the hot sun, and spend the day in cool surroundings as much as possible. This is certainly true on the day of the fast as well.

Have a light meal before the fast

When sitting down to the meal before the fast, a light meal is preferable. Eating extra amounts of food doesn’t help to keep you going for 24 hours. Rather eat small amounts of carbohydrates (bread, potato, rice, pasta), some protein (fish and chicken) and fruit (grapes and watermelon). Keep spices and salt to a minimum.

The break-fast meal

Well, you managed the fast very well, now it’s time to eat. Go slow! Eat some carbohydrates, and drink some fluids.

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# Shuls, rabbis, and corona congregations

OPINION

RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN



I was chatting to my son, Bentzy, who is in the United States, and he shared something fascinating with me. Did you know that since the coronavirus struck, there’s been a surge in downloads of apps that focus on meditation? Many millions of Americans are downloading apps called Calm, Headspace, Meditopia, and Relax: Master your destiny. How’s that for irony? Meditation is all about getting away from the big, noisy, mechanical, robotic world. And how do we achieve it? With a digital app! Then there’s the recent Pew Research Survey confirming that more than 50% of Americans confessed to having prayed for an end to the coronavirus. Clearly, of those 50%, many aren’t regular worshippers.

We, too, have been praying. To be able to pray – in shul! Thank G-d, we are returning to our shuls now, slowly and gradually, and hopefully will return to normal shul services sooner rather than later. But we’re still not there yet. Yes, rabbis and shuls have had to reinvent themselves. In business, they are calling it “pivoting” – to be able to turn around and innovate with creativity and originality. I know of a gin manufacturer now producing alcohol-based hand sanitisers, a jewellery merchant who is now selling digital thermometers, a rebbetzin who started selling her home-baked challah and other delicacies, and this newspaper has pivoted perfectly with its immensely popular webinar programmes.

Shuls, too, have had to pivot and innovate. Zoom “*minyanim*”, lectures, and shiurim were only the beginning. We’ve started new classes, some daily, some weekly. We’re doing new short, two-minute Torah messages over WhatsApp every morning. I’m reaching out to members who are observing *yahrtzeits* personally, and wishing them long life, something I never did before on any regular basis.

My colleague, Rabbi Yehuda Stern, is the driving force behind our shul’s Zoom programmes. Our Friday pre-Kabbalat Shabbat services with guest rabbis, chazonim, and singers, and our Monday evening Zoom events have been a huge success, attracting participants from way beyond our own shul membership, indeed, beyond Johannesburg, even beyond South Africa. We’ve aimed high, and have been able to host leading international personalities and talents from a wide circle.

Among our speakers, we’ve had the son of a Nazi who served in the Israel Defense Forces. And a Jewish daughter of Hamas who had to escape her house arrest while married to an Arab. That programme attracted many thousands of viewers from across the globe!

There’s a South African expat who today lives in Honolulu which is 12 hours behind us. He wakes up at 04:00 every Friday to watch our Kabbalat Shabbat service. And I’m deeply flattered to have South Africans living in the holy city of Tzfat who tune in to attend my weekly Ethics from Sinai shiur.

From within our own congregation, so many who never came to shul during the week are now attending our daily Zoom *minyanim* faithfully. People who never previously attended shiurim are now learning Torah regularly, some for the first time in their lives. And loving it!

So even now that we are back at shul, we are keeping up our Zoom *minyanim* for those still unable to come to shul. And I imagine that adult education will likely continue over Zoom for some time still. Maybe until we have a vaccine, who knows? It’s a new world. A changed world.

That’s why I worry about older people who don’t have easy access to digital connectivity. For more than five months, they’ve been completely out of the picture. I appeal to their children and grandchildren to find ways to get them connected, even now.

It’s been a strange experience working



Sydenham Shul

Photo: Ian Ossenheimer

from home, but having to “work smarter” than ever before. On the one hand, rabbis miss giving a live sermon to a live audience.

And getting a nice *yasher koach* (congratulations) afterwards is nice too. On the other hand, we’ve received a constant flow of emails and WhatsApp messages filled with appreciative comments and warm words of gratitude for all that we’ve been doing to keep our people busy, sane, and “connected”. And that has been deeply gratifying. Judaism has always faced the challenge of adapting to new circumstances and environments. Embracing new technology

while clinging steadfastly to our ancient values and principles is nothing new for rabbis. But I must say, the coronavirus has been more daunting than anything I can remember. Please G-d, we will all emerge intact and even stronger physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

• Rabbi Goldman is the rabbi at Sydenham Shul and president of the SA Rabbinical Association.

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Wishing our community a Shana Tova and a meaningful fast



# Rosh Hashanah schools’ creative writing competition

Who better to give us their creative thoughts than high school scholars? We called on the schools to send us their best articles or pieces of creative writing about Rosh Hashanah 2020. We selected these three, although it was a tough decision as all the work sent was excellent. – Editor

## STAYING APART TO SAVE LIVES

NATALIE COHEN

**M**a Nishtana HaRosh Hashanah Hazeh (What is different about this Rosh Hashanah)? Well, for starters, there are no more Rosh Hashanah family lunches with the grandparents, no more delicious *brachot* (blessings) at shul, and no more embracing as we wish one another a joyous, ‘Chag Sameach’.

Rosh Hashanah translates to ‘head of the year’. When researching the meaning of this *Chag*, I came across an idea which had a profound impact on me. This idea teaches that just as our head controls our thoughts, actions and movements, how we choose to observe Rosh Hashanah has a tremendous influence on our year to come.

When I first read this, my thoughts were: “Easier said than done.” The Hebrew year 5780 hasn’t exactly been a walk in the park for anyone, except maybe for the chief executive of Dettol. I don’t think anyone can say that being locked in their house, wearing an itchy mask 24/7, and sanitising their hands until they resemble a dried-up naartjie peel has been a great experience. Also, not being able to eat potato wedges and chicken burgers at kosher Nando’s while chatting with friends hasn’t been fun. And, as for spending much of our time pretending to concentrate on hour-long Zoom calls has also not been the greatest experience of our lives.

How on earth is anyone able to adopt an optimistic Rosh Hashanah mindset in the era of COVID-19?

For most of this year I have struggled. Not being able to see the warm, friendly faces of my friends and teachers at school, hug my grandparents, and visit Israel on a programme in July for the ‘time of my life’ has really taken its toll on me.

However, this Rosh Hashanah is about a new start, a shift in my own and others’ self-pitying mindsets.

When I read the SA *Jewish Report’s* article entitled ‘High death rate reflects an ageing community’, written by Tali Feinberg in the 13 August 2020 edition of the paper, I was truly devastated to the point where my tears could literally fill a bucket.

The article stated that around 106 South African Jews have died from COVID-19 and, to quote directly, “Jews, therefore, make up 1% of COVID-19 fatalities in South Africa, even though they are 0.09% of the population.”

COVID-19 attacks the elderly and, because our community’s average life expectancy is estimated to be 64.7 years, our grandparents and great-grandparents are the ones who suffer the most.

It’s difficult to mourn the loss of COVID-19 patients in our community when they are represented as nothing more than statistics.

One has to think of these ‘statistics’ as thinking-feeling people who have loving children and grandchildren; these people would give anything to be alive and witness their grandson getting married, their granddaughter graduating, or simply wake up to another sunrise.

We must choose to observe a ‘socially-distanced’ Rosh Hashanah in order to protect the most vulnerable members in our community. It’s tempting, especially as a teenager, just to discard one’s mask, party with one’s friends, and pretend the virus doesn’t exist. In fact, I often fantasise about doing so myself.

However, this Rosh Hashanah we have the choice to save lives, as we stand three metres apart in shul to hear the shofar, as we pick out the raisins in our round challah, and get annoyed with our immediate family, think about the *mitzvah*, *Pikuach Nefesh* (preservation of human life), that you are so graciously performing.

We are taught that Hashem rewards us for such *mitzvot* either in this world or in the world to come. I wholeheartedly believe that the reward we get for performing *Pikuach Nefesh* this Rosh Hashanah is that we get to see our grandparents’ empathetic smiles for at least another day, even if it is over a Zoom call.

I believe that each day we spend on this earth is a blessing from Hashem, so let us, as the South African Jewish community, give the elderly a few more blessings this Rosh Hashanah.

• Natalie Cohen is in Grade 10 at King David Victory Park.



## ‘This too is for the good’

JAYDA SACK

**I**t’s difficult to come to terms with the fact that around this time last year, Hashem carefully crafted the past Jewish year, the year that shook the world.

Sitting in shul last Rosh Hashanah, I don’t think anybody realised what the year 5780 would bring. Perhaps you davened for health, success in business, or, as any good Jew would, for a “perfect *shidduch* (love match)”. However, I do not think any of us asked the big man upstairs for a highly contagious and life-altering virus ... and, if you did, I think you need to do some serious *teshuva* (repentance).

However, this year as we sit down at the Rosh Hashanah table, surrounded by sanitiser rather than friends and family, how can we truly celebrate the conclusion of such a difficult year and, furthermore optimistically, hope for a sweet new one when we are still spooked by the last?

I think the answer to this question is to look for the positives in a seemingly disastrous year. Whether it is the fact that you managed to bond with family over lockdown, learnt a new skill, or rediscovered a forgotten talent, these are all achievements that may have been unattainable without our little fiend – COVID-19.

Now, I can guess what you are most probably thinking – it’s easier said than done, please believe me, I know. I have spent many days in the last



few months feeling frustrated and angry at the undesirable circumstances that we all find ourselves in. However, I came across a Hebrew quote that helped me channel these negative thoughts into the more positive ones that I voiced above.

“*Gam Zu L’Tova* – This too is for the good.”

At first I found the words unmoving as it is so difficult to understand how the coronavirus and the challenges that have accompanied it are for the good. But the more I started to think about the saying, the more I started to internalise the true meaning of the words. Pondering this brought me back to the beginning of this article – sitting in shul last year on Rosh Hashanah.

It brought me back to that point in time as it reminded me how little control we have over our lives. We may think that we control the reins that steer our future, but we don’t – Hashem does.

And so, on Rosh Hashanah when we daven to Hashem to inscribe us for a sweet new year, it reinstates our irrelevance, but also our power in determining our next 12 months.

We can believe that this year went sour because we didn’t daven with enough *kevana* (intention), or we can think that the year went fantastically for us because we did, but the truth is, we’ll never know. However, this uncertainty can be contrasted by certainty, and what is that certainty, you may ask? It’s “*Gam Zu L’Tova* — this too is for the good.”

If we believe that everything is for the good and that everything happens for a reason, it becomes a lot easier to have a positive mindset. We may not see a minor inconvenience in our day making a whole lot of difference in the greater scheme of things, but I truthfully think that it does.

We don’t know what Hashem’s plan is, and so if something minor like dropping your ice cream cone that you had been looking forward to all day onto the floor, or something greater such as living through a pandemic is part of Hashem’s plan, so be it. If you realise that it is for the good, you will manage to see the good that it unequivocally contains.

• Jayda Sack is in Grade 9 at Yeshiva College.



## A LETTER FROM MY SEAT IN SHUL

NOA NERWICH

**D**ear Noa

I have been so alone. I am your special seat, 12B, at the very back. The void that fills the shul instead of booming prayers and uplifting songs is eerie. The *siddurs* and Holy Book on the far-away shelves are collecting dust. The haunting quiet has replaced the infectious cheers and smiles of the little children running in and out. This has all made me feel so alone. It has been five long months of emptiness.

As Rosh Hashanah approaches, I truly miss you. I might see you, I might, but the uncertainty is unsettling and the thought of not seeing you is unimaginable. But if I don’t, I will miss you!

I will miss the passion in your *Kol Nidreh* (first

prayer sung in the Yom Kippur service). I will miss seeing you, your mom, and your gran, hand-in-hand, the three generations connected in *tefillah* (prayer). I will even miss seeing you signal to your friends, to meet you outside at your next break.

I love seeing the grateful smile on your face when your mom offers you a Special K bar in case you may get hungry each year. I will miss seeing your face as you absorb every word your rabbi says during his *Dvar Torah* (sermon). I will miss seeing the sensitivity you show every time you have to leave for *Yizkor* (memorial prayer for the dead). But most of all, I will miss seeing the way you hold your mom’s hand as you turn your head to the heavens as you listen to the shofar.

Slowly, some of the congregants are trickling in, but coming back with restrictions like social

distancing and the constant requirement to sanitise. As others begin to return, the anticipation builds up and my longing to see you is growing. However, I am grateful that some people have been able to return to their seats and connect to Hashem in ways that are impossible over Zoom.

Noa, there is always light at the end of a dark tunnel. As everything moved online those many months ago, other opportunities presented. Before the coronavirus you struggled to find the time to go to shul and learn. You now have had the opportunity to learn over Zoom, with rabbis, *madrichim* and friends.

You have attended challah bakes, *shiurim*, and many other incredible events through Zoom and weekly Microsoft Teams calls. While this pandemic



may be destructive in many ways, it has also opened up unexpected additional opportunities for you to learn, grow, and connect.

So, as Rosh Hashanah approaches, while you and your family may be at home this year, may your new year be filled with meaning and connection, and may you in the upcoming year continue to learn, grow, and build on the foundation you created during COVID-19.

And next year, your good old seat, 12B at the very back of the shul, will be waiting for you.

*Shana Tova umetuka!*  
Your shul seat, 12B

• Noa Nerwich is in Grade 8 at King David Linksfield.



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RABBI YOSSEI CHAIKIN

OPINION

# Rabbis have their work cut out for them

A young man walks into the rabbi's office and asks if he may speak to him for a few minutes. Apparently, he is considering a career in the clergy, but doesn't know exactly what it entails and his father has suggested that he chat with the family's spiritual leader.

"Rabbi," the boy says, "I know what you do on Shabbat when you are busy with services at shul, but what exactly do you do the whole week, from Sunday to Friday?"

"Young man," the rabbi says, "with questions like that, you're cut out to be the chairman of the shul's committee, not the rav of the community!"

So, what exactly have South Africa's rabbonim been doing since mid-March, when services in shuls ceased, first by choice, then by law? I can assure you that we have definitely not been on holiday for the past five months. In fact, we have most likely been working harder than ever. The doors to our sanctuaries may have been shut, but our shuls have most certainly been open and servicing their communities.

The past half year has afforded us all the opportunity to re-examine and re-assess many of our observances and activities. We concentrated on the essence rather than the optional extras in each case. Thus we had a pure seder, focused on reliving the exodus without the usual social aspect; we celebrated the giving of the Torah on Shavuot at home, without the huge dairy spreads at shul; we consecrated the union of two predestined souls under the chuppah, sans the traditional glamour of a wedding; a bris was about bringing the newborn into the covenant of Abraham, minus the lox and bagels.

Being a rabbi without a shul was absolutely awful. Many of us cried bitter tears during our last service before closure in mid-March. I personally visited the empty building frequently, but the pain of hearing my footsteps reverberate in an empty sanctuary pierced my heart over and over. I felt compelled to walk up to the holy Ark and apologise for our extended absence, while promising we would be back. In my imagination, I could hear the sound of sobbing, devastated Torahs behind the curtain, crying out in the pain of abandonment.

So, we rabbonim had to think about and re-examine the essential nature of our role. What are pure, unadulterated rabbinics?

It's to be the father and mother of a community. To look after congregants and care about their physical, emotional, and spiritual welfare. It's to cheer up the lonely, those without family in the country or without any family at all. It's to keep a sense of connection in a community.

Over the past difficult months, it was also about bringing cheer and a smile, to restore morale to a community suffering from severe stress and in many cases temporary and even permanent loss of income. It was to help the sick; to support those who had just tested positive and were living with fear, even if asymptomatic; to officiate at (far too many) funerals, comfort the bereaved, and conduct memorial services. All of this from a distance, for safety and legal reasons.

Services and shiurim also continued (and even increased) through technology. Even the most Zoom-challenged among us had to quickly master the video conferencing application. And also learn how to protect ourselves from so-called Zoom-bombing attacks that threatened to disrupt our online functions.

Thank G-d, our shuls are now reopening. But the new normal is nothing like what we have been used to. Legal restrictions on the maximum length of services and number of concurrent worshippers are challenging, particularly as we approach our peak attendance high holiday season. We are all having to think creatively to accommodate our communities accordingly.

Communal singing is apparently a huge risk, and choirs have been banned. Even the congregation raising its voice in loud prayer is dangerous and forbidden. Of course, we are going to be sitting physically distanced, our faces obscured by masks. (No talking in shul?!) What are we going to be left with? Pure, unadulterated, essential prayer. A huge paradigm shift for communities used to passive, vicarious prayer, sitting in the pews enjoying the chazzan and choir perform. We all have to become active

prayers. We need to learn to shift from mere lip service to engaging with our prayer books, siddur or *machzor*, to true *kavanah* when the meaning of the holy words resonate with our souls.

So, if we haven't been on holiday for the past half year, we rabbis definitely have our work cut out for us during the month of Tishrei ahead.

There were emotional tears of joy streaming



Sunny Road Shul, Johannesburg

down our faces on Rosh Chodesh Elul when shuls around the country cautiously resumed services. Behind the curtains of the Holy Ark, I'm certain our Torahs were softly crying with elation.

Wishing you *shana tova*. May the year ahead bring us revealed blessings in the form of health, safety, and prosperity.

• Rabbi Yossi Chaikin is the rabbi at Oxford Shul, and the president of the South African Rabbinical Association.

# The end is embedded in the beginning, and the beginning in the end

OPINION

REBBETZIN AIDEL KAZILSKY



For a long time now, the concept of Mashiach and the anticipation of his arrival has become more and more of a mainstream discussion. An ever-increasing number of people are debating this concept, and if there was ever a moment of anticipation this year, undoubtedly Pesach would have been that defining moment.

Alas, we still find ourselves in the *galut* (exile) and the final redemption is still not here. As the curtain comes down on 5780, and we ponder the year gone by, there seems to be only one topic – COVID-19, COVID-19, and more COVID-19. I can strongly advocate for how this invisible menace of a virus disrupted our lives, brought in its wake an existential crisis, and revolutionised this world in preparation for Mashiach. However, I think we may have missed some other earth-shattering acts on the world arena. Indulge me, and let me take you back a couple of thousand years ago to the stage of early history.

**Scene one:** Once upon a time in the year 1775 BCE, there lived a mighty king called Nimrod – effectively he ruled most of the civilised world. In this sophisticated setting, a consortium of like-minded fellows plan and devise to use their combined ingenuity to go to war against G-d Himself! Herewith blossoms the first globalist regime in history.

The people pool their resources, and build a tower as high as the sky. There, they will wage war and destroy G-d so that they will reign

forever after, happily.

Meantime “back at the ranch”, a little boy is born. Abraham is his name. From a very young age, he understands that this world isn't one of chaos and darkness, but one overseen and guided by a much greater force.

And so, young Abraham begins to seek out this G-d, and though life deals him hard blows and G-d tests him over and over again, he sacrifices his comforts in service of the principles of love, brotherhood, and truth, and succeeds beyond expectation.

At one point, Abraham confronts Nimrod and his cronies, and emerges from a fiery furnace unscathed and triumphant. And oh, the Tower of Babel? That comes tumbling down in a mysterious confusion of languages, and its goals get lost in the dust of the annals of history. Some much for globalism!

**Scene two:** Abraham has two sons – Yishmael and Isaac. G-d promises Abraham that he will be a leader of nations and through his descendants, the world will be blessed.

Though the boys are 14 years apart, Sarah senses the growing wickedness of Yishmael and asks Abraham to banish him from their home. “He shall be a wild man, his hand against everyone, and everyone's hand against him.” (Genesis 17:14) It's not until the twilight of Abraham's life that he gets *nachas* from this wayward son, as ultimately, Yishmael repents and returns home physically and

spiritually.

**Scene three:** Abraham's son, Isaac, has twin boys. One, Jacob, is a scholar and a dweller of the tents, and the other, Esau, a man of the field. In his formative years, Esau turns wicked, and G-d doesn't want Abraham to experience anguish.

Abraham dies five years prematurely so as not to experience the shame and heartache of a wayward grandson. Esau despises his brother after selling him his birthright and then, for most of his life, he seeks to kill Jacob. Jacob flees at the behest of his mother to avoid this wrath, until that fateful day when they meet again as Jacob makes his way back from Lavan to the promised land laden with family and wealth. “Let's go up together,” says Esau in a spirit of reconciliation. “No” replies Jacob, “my family is too young – go ahead, I'll meet you later.”

**Intermission – end of the first half. Drop the curtain.**

Fast forward 4 000 years. The descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob have wandered the globe, they have settled in almost every country on earth. They have set up shop wherever fate will have them dwell. In each place, they do their best to teach the truths their forefathers ascribed to – truth, peace, honesty, and belief in a higher creator.

Alas, brothers Yishmael and Esau give them no peace – they are continually persecuted, annihilated, and relocated. And until of late, the descendants of Yishmael and Esau make sure that Jewish lives

remain miserable, unstable, and unpredictable.

**Scene one:** Talk of globalism and a one-world economy is headline news again. Again, those in power are conspiring to build another great Tower of Babel. This time, it's clothed in the assertion that everything morally wrong is really alright, and who needs a moral compass anyway?

As time passes, the evil intentions of the world's leaders are coming to the fore, the ugliness of power, corruption, and dishonesty make their mark. And if you listen carefully and read between the lines, you will see and understand that this “Tower of Babel”, the dream of the globalists, is falling apart, and will soon be relegated to the history books once more.

“Back at the ranch” the tiny little nation of Abraham is becoming a start-up nation, spreading knowledge, kindness, and morality to the world. The faithfulness of Abraham is flourishing, and we have become a light unto the nations.

**Scene two:** The beginning is embedded in the end, and the end is embedded in the beginning. There comes a time when Esau makes amends, and reconciliation is the air. This ruddy man, who wields power and influence in the field, (Trump) befriends Israel, and assists his brother, Jacob, and family in reaffirming their home, that which was promised to Zayda Abraham so long ago.

Finally, Jerusalem is our capital

for all to see. The Golan Heights are ours. Esau helps fight the evil that threatens Abraham's people (remember Qasem Soleimani?).

**Scene three:** The similarity is uncanny. As the curtain comes down on 5780, brother Yishmael begins to make his way back home too. History is flipped upside down, and the unimaginable is becoming reality. Funny (or not?) they called it the Abraham Accords, hey?

**The finale:** What an extraordinary year! COVID-19, Esau, Yishmael ... just open your eyes, and you will see the redemption unfolding. Mashiach is knocking at our door.

While the world goes topsy turvy, let's draw strength from our timeless, divine Torah. Let's step up to the plate as the children of Abraham, and commit to making this world a better place.

This year, let's turn our eyes heavenward and beseech the almighty that the dawn of 5781 will bring the curtain down and we will see the finale of this incredible show. This will be the arrival of Mashiach, and the dawn of an age of peace, harmony, and health as promised way back to the father of all nations, Abraham.

*Shana tova u metukah!*

• Rebbeztzin Aidel Kazilsky is a radio and television host and an inspirational speaker who teaches the wisdom of Torah, and applies it to contemporary times.





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ADINA ROTH

OPINION

# In the birth of a new year

Never in our lifetimes have we longed for a different kind of year to be born! When we recited *Hayom Harat Olam* last year as 5780 dawned, we could not imagine the year that was being ushered in!

And yet, the Jewish annual cycle comes around again, promising us the certainty of change. As we move into 5781, we hope to move into a different spiral and create a new becoming. How can Rosh Hashanah help us bring in new potential?

If one looks at the Rosh Hashanah themes, we find two images of G-d: G-d as king, and G-d as birthing mother. *Malchuyot*, or kingship, is one of the three main themes in our Rosh Hashanah *tefillah*. This notion of kingship comes from the Talmud where we are told, ‘G-d said, Say before me on Rosh Hashanah Kingship, Remembrances, Shofar. Kingship so that you will put me over you as king’. At this time, we crown G-d as king over us.

Equally present, although slightly hidden in the prayers is the notion of G-d as birther, as Mother. ‘*Hayom Harat Olam*, Today is the birthing of the world’ we recite every time we listen to the blowing of the shofar. The word *harat* is profound and difficult to translate. We are given clues to its meaning in the first day Rosh Hashanah Torah and Haftarah readings. In the Torah portion, we are told about Sarah: ‘*vatahar veteled*’. After many years of infertility, Sarah conceived and gave birth. Analogously in the Haftarah we are told ‘*vatahar Chanah vateled*’, ‘and Chanah conceived and gave birth’. In both instances, ‘*vatahar*’ is ‘and she conceived’. In other words, *harat* implies that Rosh Hashanah is not the final act of birthing the world, rather it is the day our world is conceived.

In the Torah, conception is linked to longing. The women, Sarah and Hannah, did not become pregnant easily. They struggled terribly with

*akarat*, or the experience of being ‘barren’, and yet they never stopped longing for a child. In a difficult Midrash, the Rabbis ask why did our matriarchs struggle with infertility? The answer given is that Hashem desires the prayers of the barren woman. It is vexing to imagine that G-d engenders suffering in women because he longs for our prayers. Yet, perhaps the ‘barren’ woman speaks to all human beings who experience true lack, and therefore long for something. Surely the prayer driven by longing is the deepest prayer, supplication from the soul.

If Rosh Hashanah is a day of conception, we need to think of it as a time of longing, a day when we return to those things that we long for, and we need to meditate on them, hopefully bringing them into conception and reality. As we say ‘*hayom harat olam*’, let us dare to imagine, dream, and long for the world in which we want to live and the people we want to become.

During this time of COVID-19, humanity has

returned to longing. No longer able to rely on the materialistic distractions of our lives, we remember and long for the healing touch of a friend, the ease of interaction with grandparents, the ability to sing together in shul in unison, and dancing the Horah, one sweaty hand holding another, at a simcha. These, among many others, are losses brought about by this pandemic which we dare not forget. Longing is a panacea against forgetting.

A second idea linked to *harat* or conception, says Rabbi Sharon Cohen Anisfeld of Hebrew

College, is that of holding something in a dark womb-like space until it is ready for life. There is a rabbinic idea that Hashem conceived of the world in Tishrei and then contained the idea of the world, which was only born into full life and bloom in Nissan, the month of Pesach and spring. At this time in our world, we may have a while to go before the ease of social interaction that we once knew can return. If the word *harat* reminds

us to keep our longings alive, it also reminds us to have patience. New possibilities and new worlds require the capacity to wait. Never have TS Eliot’s words felt more true: “The faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.”

There is one aspect of *harat* that is realisable now. Rabbi Cohen Anisfeld writes that *harat* is always linked to relationship, for the conceived child is carried within its mother, just as the world is conceived within G-d’s matrix and care. In the words *Hayom harat Olam*, we are invited to consider that the conception of the world is inextricably linked to relationship.

While certain ways of human interaction are not available to us, the intimacy of deep conversation and vulnerability, the ability to stand in the presence of the other, albeit on Zoom or with two metres of distance, is utterly within our grasp. Even now, we are able to cry and mourn with each other, we are able to heal wounded friendships, we are able to remind people again that we love them. Perhaps more than ever, we need to cultivate relationship and step into vulnerable spaces, expressing our longing and love for each other. The planet is crying out for the embodiment of *harat* as ‘creation in relationship’.

Rosh Hashanah is deeply auspicious. It is the time of jasmine in our streets, and honey in our jars. It is the time of *harat*, the conception of life itself. Harat is about imagining the world we long for, developing the capacity to wait for its emergence, and practising empathy and relatedness now! These three practices, longing, waiting, and relating, will influence and help shape the new world, the new song, that is waiting to be born.

• *Adina Roth is a clinical psychologist in private practice, and a teacher of Jewish Studies.*



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# Healing our broken hearts

OPINION

RABBI GREG ALEXANDER



Back in March, when the full impact of coronavirus hit South Africa and President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the hard lockdown, the festival of Pesach was just around the corner. Who will ever forget Pesach 5780?

The Zoom seders, the closed shuls, the cancelled holiday plans. And now Rosh Hashanah is just days away, and we are still in lockdown with no clear path opening up in front of us just yet.

Every day through this month of Elul, we have been reminded that this is a year like no other. That this Rosh Hashanah will be one like no other. Due to this pandemic, we have had to face daily losses and heartbreaking sacrifices.

Some of us have lost work or our jobs, and many have had to confront changed financial realities. Some of us have suffered the death of loved ones at a time that even the comforts of sitting shiva with the community visiting us have been denied.

All of us have had to set aside carefully made plans and lean into the “new normal”. And now we can’t even look forward to the overflowing shuls and packed dinner tables of Rosh Hashanah to begin our New Year.

What tools does our tradition give us for dealing with all this brokenness? What can we say or do to give us strength and comfort for these most holy days ahead? Perhaps the very nature of the brokenness that we feel and see around us is the key to our spiritual readiness.

There is a tale told about the Baal Shem Tov, Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, the founder of Chasidism (1698-1760, Ukraine), that’s a good place to begin.

Once the Baal Shem Tov commanded one of his students, Rabbi Zev-Wolf Kitzes, to learn the secret meanings behind the blasts of the shofar because Rabbi Zev was to be his caller on Rosh Hashanah. So Rabbi Zev learned the secret meanings, and wrote them down on a slip of paper to look at during the service, and laid the slip of paper in his pocket. When the time came for the blowing of the ram’s horn, he began to search everywhere for the slip of paper, but it was gone, and he didn’t know where to concentrate. He was greatly saddened. Broken-hearted, he wept bitter tears, and called the blasts of the shofar without being able to concentrate on the secret meanings behind them.

Afterward, the Baal Shem Tov said to him, “In the palace of a king are to be found many rooms and apartments, and there are different keys for every lock, but the master key of all is the axe, with which it is possible to open all the locks on all the gates. So it is with the shofar: the secret meanings are the keys, every gate has another meaning, but the master key is the broken heart. When a person truthfully breaks their heart before G-d, they can enter into all the gates of the apartments of the King above all Kings, the Holy One of Blessing.” (Sefer Or Yesharim)

As we prepare for Rosh Hashanah, now is the time to embrace that broken heart. If we are feeling pain, if we acknowledge our loss, these are the master keys to opening the gates of *t’shuvah*, sacred return. The sound of the shofar is often compared to the sound of crying, weeping, and sobbing.

And there is much to cry over this year. For the loss of dear loved ones; the stark differences between poor and rich

in lockdown; for being separated when we long to be together; for changed realities and unchanged realities; for constrictions and limitations; for the fear and the unknowing.

Open your heart, and let it break. And then, slowly, we can begin the work of return and repair. For we aren’t meant to remain broken, but rather to seek healing for the brokenness within. And once again, we have a tool for that.

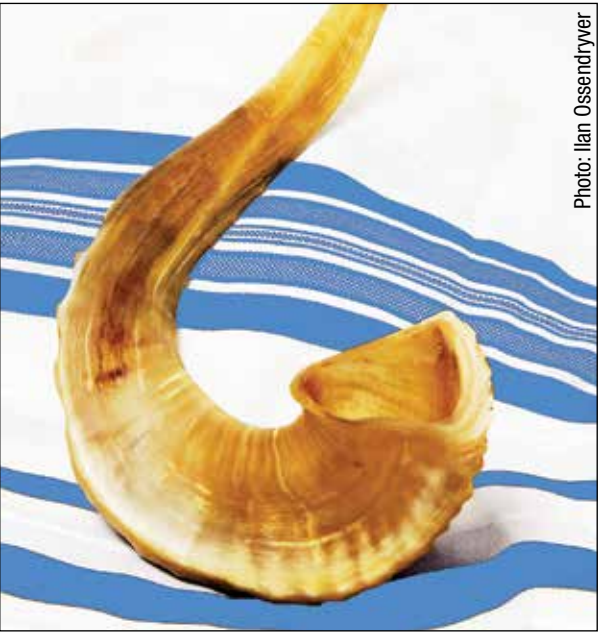


Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Wrapped around the blasts of the shofar are many precious prayers. Many. Whether we will be in shul or at home, we will have the chance over the *yamim noraim*, the awesome days, to pray and pray and pray.

Where do these prayers come from? You might say the *machzor* (prayerbook), and you wouldn’t be wrong, but that’s not the whole reality. The answer is that they really come from the heart. *Avodah she’b’lev* (the service of the heart). The aim of prayer is to connect our broken heart to the eternal healer of hearts and binder of wounds.

Why is Jewish prayer known as the service of the heart? Would it not be more accurate to call it *avodah shebisfatayim* (the service of the lips)? After all, it’s our lips that do the praying. But G-d desires the heart. Meaningless words don’t penetrate us. Words without heart are just words. Prayer must come from the heart. And a broken heart is the master key to open the doors of the palace.

The shofar breaks us down, but in that broken state, we begin to repair. Each prayer, each act of *t’shuvah*, every time we yearn to be better selves, every time we reach out to someone we have hurt, we begin the work of returning ourselves to wholeness.

Each time we say to someone we love, “Here I am, ready to work with you on making our relationship stronger. And let me begin with telling you how sorry I am for the hurt I have caused you,” then we add to the work of repair.

This is the work that we are doing right now. Building up the muscle of the understanding heart – heart gym – so that we can *shuv* (return) to who we truly are and heal.

Wishing you and your heart a good preparation, and a whole and sweet New Year.

Together with the dynamic rabbinic team of Temple Israel Cape Town, Rabbi Greg is working towards their first ever online high holy days. Find out how to join at [www.templeisrael.co.za](http://www.templeisrael.co.za), or find them on Facebook.

- Rabbi Greg Alexander is part of the rabbinic team at the Cape Town Progressive Jewish Congregation.

# In homage to the honey-makers

MIRAH LANGER

As Jewish people around the world mark the sweetness of a new year with apples dipped in honey, the SA Jewish Report delved behind the scenes to uncover the buzz about bees and their keepers who bring this Rosh Hashanah ritual to fruition.

“I used to be such a kugel! Now I smell of pine-needle smoke and I look like I don’t know what anymore!” says Cape Town Herzlia School alumnus, and now hive head honcho Susanne Hassenstein.

“From immaculate makeup, high heels, and oh-my-gosh everything, to a rough-and-ready beekeeper that’s up on the roof or in a cherry picker 10m up high – and I love it!” she says.

For fellow Capetonian apiarist André Lazarus, catching a swarm of bees is the highlight of his hobby. “It sounds crazy, but that sound they make, it’s like Beethoven’s ninth symphony to me!

“Look, we are a crazy bunch!” he chuckles. “You would actually physically have to put a suit on and go work with a beekeeper to understand what a fantastic little creature this is.”

Lazarus, now 65, had his first encounter with a bee while growing up on a smallholding. “I got stung at the age of six. I tried to save a honey bee from drowning.”

By the time he was 13, he had caught his own swarm. Since then, has never looked back, keeping hives, conducting removals, and making his own honey.

Hassenstein became intrigued many years ago after discovering a colony of bees outside her bedroom. A friend, who was a beekeeper, safely relocated them to a hive and then challenged her that she wouldn’t be able to maintain them.

“Don’t ever say to a woman that you can’t!” she asserts with a laugh explaining how she then embarked on course after course to hone her craft, becoming, of course, the queen bee she is today!

Both Hassenstein and Lazarus wax lyrical about the wonder of bees and the intricate workings of colonies.

“Bees are so deep. There is so much to them and to beekeeping. It feels like the more I know, the less I know. Bees are so intelligent,” says Hassenstein.

For example, she says, humans could learn a lot from the social structure of bees.

“Everybody thinks that the queen is in charge. She’s not; she keeps harmony in the hives with her pheromones. She makes no decisions whatsoever. The bees make the decisions.”

Instead of top-down governance, Hassenstein says bees offer a blueprint for true equity. “I wish we could have the same, because we would have much more peace and harmony in the world.”

Lazarus concurs that the wisdom of bees is vast. For example, the communication of the queen to the workers via pheromones, called giving “audience to her workers”, is a system that operates “faster than any computer that’s been designed today”.

Both Lazarus and Hassenstein refer to

how varied different bees’ roles are. Lazarus points out that bees even have “undertakers” who take the dead out of the hive to avoid invasion by ants. Hassenstein recalls how “teenagers” let loose after a long day of hive duty.

“At about three weeks old, in the afternoon, they will come out and fly in the shape of an eight, an orientation flight to take a geographic view of their hives,” she says.

Ultimately, bees aren’t just interesting, they are a core part of the earth’s survival.

“Really, what it comes down to is that without bees, the world would die of starvation,” says conservationist Ilana Stein.

At the core of Torah values is environmental care, as shown in Genesis 2:15, “When G-d places the human being in the Garden of Eden to work it and guard it: the idea of guarding meaning it’s something precious that can be lost,” she says.

Stein says that bees, as a metaphor, appear in Devarim 1:44, with Moshe describing Israel pursued by the Amorites like bee swarms.

There is also an allusion to them in the story of Devorah, the prophet, as her name is Hebrew for bees.

While there is no direct reference to the meaning behind her name, “we can draw out of it an explanation that a bee is a creature that is completely altruistic, only working for and protecting the hive”, muses Stein.

She also notes that in the Kuzari, an ancient text on Jewish philosophy dating back to 1140, bees are seen as a way to prove G-d’s existence. According to the text, “the proof that He is their Creator may be found in the circumstance already mentioned, that His wisdom and power observable in the creation of the ant and bee is not less than in that of the sun and its sphere. The traces of this providence and wisdom are finer and more wonderful in the ant and bee, because, in spite of their minuteness, He put faculties and organs into them.”

When it comes to honey, the sweet substance – although often a reference to date honey rather than that of bees – is “mentioned everywhere and often metaphorically”.

“Rabbenu Bechaya in his introduction to his commentary on the Torah states that all wisdom contains within it some impurities or mistakes,” Stein says. “The posuk in Shir Hashirim states that ‘sweetness drips from your lips, bride, but honey and milk lies under your tongue’. Rabbenu Bechaya explains that sweetness refers to all areas of wisdom, whereas the honey and milk refers to the Torah. The Torah is compared to honey and milk, for just as they are pure and unadulterated, so too is the Torah pure and without imperfections.”

Indeed, for Lazarus, there is nothing more miraculous than a substance that the very best of modern science has never been able to replicate. Until today, he feels the sacred nature of his hobby when out on the mountains where his hives are kept.

“In my little world of the honey bee, it’s so peaceful, you could be talking to G-d,” he says.



Susanne Hassenstein in apiary action



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# Childhood memories of Rosh Hashanah

Rosh Hashanah is going to be so different this year from anything we remember, what with the coronavirus-induced lockdown. The SA Jewish Report asked a few well-known people in our community to write about their New Year memories from days gone by.

Blossoms, blue china, and family love

DORIANNE WEIL



It's the blossoms! Three colours! The blossoms of the trees on the pavement. Pink, dark pink, and white. That means *yom tov*, and it means Rosh Hashanah!

The anticipation sparked by the blossoms starts to appear everywhere. My mother unlocks the secret cupboard, and the precious blue and white Meissen china comes out to show off. Trays of silver cutlery are carefully cleaned piece by piece, and crystal glasses that ping with a flick, mostly untouched for the whole year, shine in glory.

Our mom Elaine was pink, roses, lace, and silver, but a cook – she was not. So, we would await the arrival of Granny Rosa.

I've never seen such pendulous breasts that differentiate from the rest of her body simply by a belt. Her hair in a loose grey bun on top of her head, with strands framing her gentle, wrinkled face and soft double chin, which I liked to touch.

Her presence in our kitchen was marked by the indescribable mingling of smells. My sister Sue and I would guess how many types of herring there would be, how we would avoid the gefilte fish and go straight for the turkey, the brisket, and the best potatoes in the world! We would play hopscotch on the stone kitchen floor for hours while she cooked, hoping to lick the bowl for a pre-taste of her world-famous honey cake.

Then, the annual treat, the outing with our mom to go "shopping for *yom tov*". After all, it's the New Year, Rosh Hashanah, and every little girl deserves the prettiest of dresses!

For days before, my parents talk, and we listen – well mostly – about this year and the new one to come, and experience a feeling of possibility, excitement, and new beginnings.

My father prepares his tallit bag and the "leather book with gold-leaf pages" for Rosh Hashanah.

While he is at shul, we count the minutes until the doorbell rings, hoping it's one of the big cousins that comes first and engage with us before the grown-ups arrive.

As we collectively dip the apple into the honey, we understand the celebration of the moment, the connection of the family, and the significance of this New Year for the Jewish people.

I always say that my late husband, Les, was indeed a wonderful "package deal". His family and extended family have a strong *yiddishkeit*, which both defines and connects them. His brother-in-law, Melvyn Cohen, was the first president of the Sandton Shul. Rosh Hashanah at Eileen and Melvyn's was as much about learning as it was about celebration.

The conversation, usually spearheaded by Gertrude Harvey Cohen, was rich with questions posed to the children (and the adults) and symbolism and significance about everything. I listen in awe and am engrossed. Also aware of the gaps in my education – inhaling all. The pride that is instilled in being Jewish accompanies the learning, and is manifested now through my children.

It was around that table that unconditional love just was. The gentle teasing, the banter, the laughter, the memories, the anticipation, and most of all the power of the family tribe was deep and without question. There are no lessons to substitute that experience. It becomes woven into the fabric of being, and is instilled by example to the next generation.

An unquestioned Rosh Hashanah tradition for the past 40 years was first-day lunch, with well over 100 people in the garden at Geoff and Hazel Cohen's, and their family. There is no spread in the world that compares with the choice and deliciousness as everyone contributes their very best, eagerly-awaited dish to the fare. It was always wonderful seeing friends and people, often not encountered in the year. This year, it's with great sadness and overwhelming memory that Geoff is no longer with us. I see him in his white panama hat strutting his stuff with his bottle of tequila and huge smile.

Rosh Hashanah in my home encompasses the next generation. There is additional joy in witnessing the unbridled excitement and enthusiasm as the young cousins from both sides of the family are best friends and engage on everything. They now ask and answer questions, they share what they have learnt, and they ask for their best food treat.

We mostly are able to go to shul together, as our families from Israel and Australia usually visit at this time of year. We continually and deeply miss those who aren't with us, yet they live on in our hearts.

We know that this year, navigating a health pandemic is going to be different and a challenge, but as we do, we will celebrate Rosh Hashanah and mark its significance as we pray and commit to new beginnings and a *shana tova*.

• Dorianne Weil or Dr D is a recognised practicing clinical psychologist dealing with individuals, couples, and families.

Dressing to impress all part of the majesty

DINA DIAMOND



Growing up, Oxford Shul, located in Riviera, Johannesburg, was the place to see and be seen, especially around Rosh Hashanah and the high holy days. Oxford Shul was the largest synagogue in Africa, able to accommodate 1 600 congregants and an additional 1 000 with the overflow in the Simon Kuper Hall. The demand to be a member was so great, a member literally had to die in order for a seat to free up.

The shul itself was majestic, with rich deep-red carpets, gold tiles adorning the outside of the *ahron kodesh* (ark) with the pristine white *parochet* (curtain) covering it, and rows of gleaming wooden seats.

The men's section was on the bottom level, with the women's section above in a u-shape, allowing for a perfect view of the men and activities below.

The congregants themselves dressed to impress, aligned to their royal surroundings. The men wore their finest suits, some of them three-piece, with tasteful ties and perfectly polished shoes. This could only be outdone by the women, who all donned finely crafted hats, matching each perfectly tailored outfit, some with gloves, coupled with elegant high heels.

The *bimah* was located opposite the *ahron kodesh*, from which the chazan, full choir, and choir master would hold the congregation spellbound with their favourite familiar and perfectly timed tunes for the prayer services.

At the front of the *bimah* were the seats in which the three appointed leaders of the congregation would sit with their Homburg hats and pinstriped suits with tails.

Our family seats were in the front row overlooking the *bimah*, enabling an ideal view of my grandfather, father, and uncles sitting diagonally opposite us in the front row of their section below. They were perfectly placed right next to the rabbi, Rabbi Nachman Bernard, who had a special seat up the red-carpeted staircase in front of the *ahron kodesh*. They also had easy access to that area from which they were required to do *birchat kohanim* (say the priestly blessing). I can still hear the loud voices of my father, grandfather, and uncles, which were always clearly distinguishable from the other *kohanim* (priests).

The shul was also a kid's paradise, teaming with children of all ages, all excited to be wearing their new fancy outfits and to play with their friends. Adjacent to the shul was a nursery school run by the shul so when it came to Rosh Hashanah, kids had free rein over all the colourful jungle gyms, sand pits, and toys.

There were children's services on offer for every age group, which were always full owing to the exciting games that were played and delicious treats on offer, including cut-up apples dripping in honey served on massive metal trays.

The kids were encouraged to go into the main shul only for the mandatory shofar blasts for which the atmosphere was electric. Absolute silence prevailed over the entire congregation in anticipation of the haunting shofar blasts that seemed to fill the whole shul.

After the lengthy shul service was over, the entire congregation would flow out excitedly into the massive foyer in order to be able to socialise and catch up with friends, family, and anyone who may have some interesting news to share. The excitement and energy was palpable. This was a golden age when the community was flourishing, and life seemed simpler.

This year, there will be no mass shul gatherings, no children's services, no social gatherings, huge dinners, or opportunities to entertain. There will be no choir, no shofar blasts for the entire community, and no ability to show off any new clothes.

There will, however, be time to reflect and be grateful for what we do have in our lives, to appreciate the seemingly mundane activities that we often take for granted, and perhaps to heed the call of the shofar truly for the first time and consider what we really want for the year ahead.

• Dina Diamond is a mom, marketer, radio contributor, community activist, and banker who can't wait for the skies to open again so she can travel.



Oxford Shul

'Song of praise' ignites memories

GINA SHMUKLER



I'm not a writer as such. Words for me wait to find expression through song, voice – physical, or poetic form. However, it's interesting that when being asked to pen something, it focuses your thoughts in a different way to the embodied form.

As an actress and theatre maker, I work with my instinct. Always. Here I was, a very secular Jew, being asked to write a piece on Rosh Hashanah.

As I drove down Glenhove Road thinking about this, I immediately heard what I will refer to as the "prayer of praise" that was my dad's favourite – and then mine.

I was immediately filled with a quiet joy as I remembered the enormous pride I felt when I saw my dad standing on the *bimah*. He always sang in the choir.

I was flooded with memories of the old Linksfield Synagogue where Dr Yageel was a formidable presence, and Rabbi Isaac Goss and later Rabbi Avigdor Bokov presided.

This was the synagogue of my youth, and some of my adulthood. I started to cry as that melody hit me in the gut. My tears were of deep belonging, and longing for that belonging.

I saw myself as a young kid, in my new Rosh Hashanah clothes that were at times sewn by my mom, and later, when my parents could afford more, were bought from a boutique in Norwood. The name escapes me, but it was a Rosh Hashanah ritual to come to shul in our brand-new clothes for a grand new year.

The shul was always packed. You couldn't find a seat. My sisters and cousins played outside with our "shul friends", and then looked forward to a gathering large and loud at a relative's home. It was the mid-1980s. Before our vast family scattered across the globe.

In the late 1990s, I went to live in New York City. During my time there, I searched for the synagogue of my childhood. It was a long search. Sometimes it was easier to stay home on the high holy days, and not go to shul at all, as the feeling of dislocation, of not belonging, was so strong.

One year on Rosh Hashanah, my friend, Darrill, and I stumbled upon a shul on the Upper West Side. It had a similar feel to Linksfield even though it was conservative. You didn't have to pay to enter, which was welcoming too. It had a gorgeous choir led by a magnificent female chazan. We sat together – male and female – which felt a little strange yet comforting. And then they sang that "song of praise" with that same melody, and for a brief few moments, I belonged in a country that wasn't my home.

I now reside in Johannesburg. My parents and sisters live in America. I have spent many a Rosh Hashanah there, wanting to be with my immediate family, but also escaping the loss of the huge extended family that once lived here.

These times are triggers of longing for what once was, but also times of deep gratitude for what is.

My dad is in the winter of his life now. We have had many "last" Rosh Hashanahs with him. With COVID-19 and travel restrictions, this year we'll be celebrating on different continents.

I will hold my dad in my heart, and in my being, as I hear the "prayer of praise" which is actually the mourner's kaddish, but on Rosh Hashanah and at the end of the Ne'ilah service on Yom Kippur, it's sung with buoyancy, strength, and great optimism.

*Shana tova.*

• Gina Shmukler is an actress, director, and theatre maker.

Continued on page 35>>





Pomp, ceremony, and yearning for *yizkor*

REBBETZIN  
WENDY HENDLER

They say my *zaydeh* used to stamp on the grapes himself to make his wine. I never knew whether to believe them or not, but the vision is alive in my mind of my very short Yiddish-speaking *zaydeh* up to his knees in dark red juice.

He was the reverend and chazan of Brakpan Shul for 40 years. He had the Altshuler voice, which rang through the shul every *yom tov*.

However, my early memories of shul are of the Etz Chayim Shul, which my German grandfather, my oupa, helped to establish. He and a close friend brought a box of siddurim with them on the boat from Germany in 1936. They used these to establish the shul.

The *cheder* they started from their adjoining maisonettes in Doornfontein grew to become the beautiful Etz Chayim Shul in Barnato Park, which served the German Jews who fled the Holocaust.

And what a shul it was! Filled with pomp and ceremony, I remember feeling intimidated by the grandeur, the plush cream seats, the men in the box wearing their Homburg hats, and the chazan wrapped in a long black robe with his silken chazan's hat perched on his head.

And then the service began, exciting and uplifting at first, the Ashkenazi *nussach* unusual to my King David-Hebrew-trained ears.

Sitting next to my mom and attempting to follow in the Adler *machzor* would keep the younger me busy for a while. But not for all that long. Inevitably boredom set in.

The only thing to look forward to was *yizkor*, when we girls fled to the pink brides' room to hang out together and chill for a precious bit of time.

And then we had to go back to shul, to examine the ladies' pillbox hats with the netting dotted with fake pearls pulled down over the face, and to dissect their outfits.

And finally, home for a fancy and delicious *yom tov* meal, with the Noritake dinner service and crystal dessert bowls gracing the table. My mom's famous pickled brisket in sweet and sour sauce made all the waiting worthwhile. And for dessert, her triple layered cassata ice cream topped it off.

But what has stayed with me into my adult years, I ask myself? The stirring melodies, the rousing *Anim Zemiros*, the picture of the sea of *talleisim* while looking down from upstairs as each person stood before his maker, have left an indelible mark on my soul.

The decorum and dignity with which these *yekke* (German) Jews treated their synagogue taught me a way of relating to shul which has remained with me to this day. I have no doubt that I drew from all of this beauty when I decided to become religious as a young adult. It was these early memories of the power and grandeur of the Rosh Hashanah service and our family traditions that formed the bedrock of my chosen path and all that came with it.

I'm so deeply grateful.

• *Rebbetzin Wendy Hendler is co-founder and director of Koleinu, the helpline for victims of abuse in the South African Jewish community.*



Jacaranda season brings sweet memories

CHARISSE ZEIFERT

The Rosh Hashanah of my childhood started with a photograph. The family, including my grandparents, all freshly decked in our new clothes, stood in the garden of our house in Pretoria and posed for photos.

Then came the choosing of our *machzors*. We had a huge selection to choose from, passed down from previous generations. One was wood bound from Rukkishik, another, published in 1896, was written in Gothic script.

In the evening service, my mom and I would sit next to each other, and she would teach me to read it. We attended the shul at Carmel School. Shul was packed. Everyone knew everyone else (often for up to three generations).

Sitting in the female section, I would look down at my father, brothers, and grandfather. My brother had recently confirmed that, during the long services in the day, he would try and push my younger brother over or tie my father and grandfather's *talleisim* together to see what would happen next.

The next morning, the three Levitz kids – all 16 months apart in age – would walk to shul together. This was a highlight. Going as we did to a non-Jewish school, the knowledge that we had the day off, while my classmates were in school, was special.

One of my brothers would look at his watch, and say, "Nine-thirty am, I should be in maths." My other brother would respond, "I'm missing science." I would be most delighted. "I'm missing PT!"

We were avid listeners of 702 then, and I would, sneakily, throughout the day, turn on the radio just to make sure that John Berks, Stan Katz, and the other Jewish presenters had also taken the day off, and had a great sense of satisfaction that they were also not at work.

We'd choose to go past the Shingwedzi flats where our friends, the Silberman family, lived. Sometimes, we would meet up with them, and they would join us for the last stretch. But we had to tread carefully.

There was a "bad" man who lived in the flats next door to Shingwedzi. Rumour had it that he didn't like Jews, and would shout at the children walking to shul. Thankfully, we never met him, but it created an added anticipation to the day.

At shul, we would meet friends, many of whom we saw only once a year. Some had already left Pretoria, but would come back for the high holy days to be with their families.

It was also a time when the kids from Carmel and the Jewish kids from government schools could meet on neutral territory. We would then head home, via Harlequins Club, often with a friend in tow, and have a delicious *yom tov* meal.

In the afternoon, my grandparents would sit under the avocado tree in the garden and drink tea with my parents, while us youngsters would run around completely carefree.

My association with Rosh Hashanah is that of the warmth of spring, the beauty of the Jacaranda season, being with family, eating delicious food, and all the anticipation and excitement of a new year.

Some things change. Some stay the same. (Wishing you all a *shana tova u metuka*).

• *Charisse Zeifert is head of communications at the SA Jewish Board of Deputies.*



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# Holistic healing for the new year

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

Calmness, self-acceptance, renewed energy, positivity. All states many are craving in a year that's been defined by unprecedented change and anxiety. The SA Jewish Report looks at some alternative practices that may offer the healing you need to make a fresh start this Rosh Hashanah.

We often underestimate just how much everyday stresses affect us. "People misconceive what trauma is," says Jenny Porteous, an Advanced Trauma Release Exercise (TRE) provider. "We don't necessarily have to have gone through a loss or something huge; trauma can be daily stress. It's what we're all going through right now: we're in fight or flight mode. Even if you feel like COVID-19 is not affecting you that much; it's affecting the entire world."

By performing the trauma and stress-release exercises, one's ability to cope with life's challenges is improved. Whether you're stressed out by the coronavirus, facing physical or mental struggles, or looking to change unhealthy patterns, TRE could help. It offers a scientifically proven method of using the body's natural release mechanism to safely relieve deep muscle tension caused by stress, bringing people back to a state of calm, explains Porteous. With TRE, trauma is literally shaken off.

"It entails a set of six exercises, designed to induce our natural tremor mechanism," says Porteous. The exercises send a message, an electromagnetic impulse, to the brain and back which makes your body shake. This is known as a neurogenic tremor. "Tremors or shaking is the body's natural way of releasing trauma," she says. "If someone has an accident for example, they shake afterwards but then someone steps in to get sugar water or a blanket to stop the shaking."

Similarly, in any challenging situation, if you hold yourself together not allowing the trauma to release, a continuous trauma build-up begins which can result in physical, mental, or emotional problems. "TRE helps you release all trauma from inception to the present," says Porteous.

Hugely transformative, TRE also boosts resilience, confidence, and helps keep you centred.

"We engage with each other through our nervous systems and this is where TRE predominantly works, on your brain stem where your trauma is sitting," explains Porteous. "By breaking up neural pathways, TRE breaks thought patterns that are telling you that you're anxious, for example, and creates new, healthier ways of thinking. It causes a shift on every level."

After six guided sessions, clients are taught to induce tremors themselves, enabling them to manage their own calming and healing process.

Another holistic approach that works on people's mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being, BodyTalk resynchronises the body's natural energy systems. Whether you're suffering from headaches, chronic pain, anxiety, and other ailments, BodyTalk can provide the relief you're seeking. "It locates the blocks within the body and releases them, hoping to bring about a better flow and balance within the system," explains Certified BodyTalk practitioner, Elana Sissison.

Emotions that have not been properly

processed become trapped in our systems causing symptoms or illness. BodyTalk locates and releases these blockages by targeting the story behind the illnesses or symptoms and, in so doing, enables healing to take place. "It gets to the emotional component that's affecting the physical component."

BodyTalk is rooted in the belief that the body is a self-healing organism. In a session, clients discuss their health status or personal issues, then lie fully clothed on the treatment table. The practitioner asks your body a series of silent questions. Yes/no answers are provided through your arm, through a process called neuromuscular biofeedback, explains Sissison. This indicates where the body needs to be balanced and when, thus reconnecting the lines of communication within your body.

The practitioner taps on the relevant energy points of the body to facilitate healing. "You tap the patient on the head, which tells the brain to resolve the issue, and on the heart area, which tells the body to store the energetic changes, and then on the stomach which allows the body to digest everything," explains Sissison. "Once you've highlighted what areas need to be realigned, the body works on balancing and healing these things on its own."

The content and number of sessions will differ for each individual. "Clients leave with a different energy, a visible new demeanour," says Sissison. "Increased optimism is something we see across the board."

A different healing practice that also provides a new lease on life is family constellations therapy, which is rooted in the belief that parental and ancestral traumatic life experiences pass down through many generations. "Unconsciously, we take on these traumas described by Rupert Sheldrake as the 'Morphogenetic Field'," explains transformational catalyst Janet Greenblatt who offers this and other therapies to help people tap into their highest potential.



session, clients seek to address an issue they're facing. They're placed in a room with a group of strangers, and from here they choose individuals to represent specific family members. The client places these people in the room in particular positions. In an unexplained phenomenon, emotions start to come towards these representatives and they give feedback on how they're feeling in their positions. They then move until they feel comfortable. Once the representative moves into the "right" place, there are sentences the facilitator will give the representative to say. For example, the "child" says to the "parent", "I give you everything to hold." It's a very freeing process as you're no longer holding your parent's baggage.

"By emotionally and spiritually changing a narrative that doesn't belong and is no longer serving us, we're able to take on new ways of looking at ourselves and the world," says Goldblatt. "This shift connects us to our core, and will help us to understand our purpose and uniqueness."

## Finding the sweet spot

GILLIAN KLAWANSKY

This year has catapulted us out of our comfort zones, leaving many feeling anxious and emotionally depleted. Yet there are also those who have actively sought and shared positivity. As we approach Rosh Hashanah, their stories of finding new projects and giving back inspire us to find our sweet spots.

Ariel Poyurs has always been innately optimistic. Yet even he was hard-pressed to find the silver lining when his plans for 2020 imploded. Headhunted for a job in Australia, he was all set to start his new adventure when his visas were delayed. Then COVID-19 struck, and the job was no more. "My whole life trajectory had just been thrown out before me," he says. "I felt empty and lost." Yet he knew brighter days were ahead.

An educator at heart who's taught primary school kids and barmitzvah boys, Poyurs also holds a psychology degree. During lockdown, he wanted a chance to connect with the youth and make a positive impact. Having always enjoyed writing, Poyurs decided to start Theoptimismblog. Here he shares his life experiences and learnings, aiming to share hope and create a community of care. "It's so important to be optimistic in times like these – it's really the only option," he says.

In starting his blog, Poyurs was inspired by the example of actor John Krasinski who during lockdown started a web series called Some Good News (SGN). He also looked to the teachings of renowned motivational speaker Simon Sinek. "Sinek did a video on the idea of optimism. He said it's not just about being happy-clappy, it's acknowledging things are bad, but still believing in a better future. That resonated with me so deeply because even though I was feeling down, all my thoughts just naturally had this optimistic side."

While being vulnerable on a public forum slightly terrified him, Poyurs challenged himself and took the plunge in April. "Writing about optimism every week really speaks to me and is something I naturally felt I wanted to do. It's helped me engage with life more effectively and made me more conscious of finding ways to shed light on dark situations."

Through his blog, he's attracted a loyal following, with his widest viewed post so far reaching over 1 500 people globally. He's also connected with many of his very different readers including a fascinating

American rabbi and a woman from Saudi Arabia. "I love that I'm breaking barriers and getting to know people in different cultures and spaces," he says. Poyurs has recently returned to working for the Division of Informal Jewish Education (DIJE) and is exploring other new opportunities, proving that optimism reaps rewards.

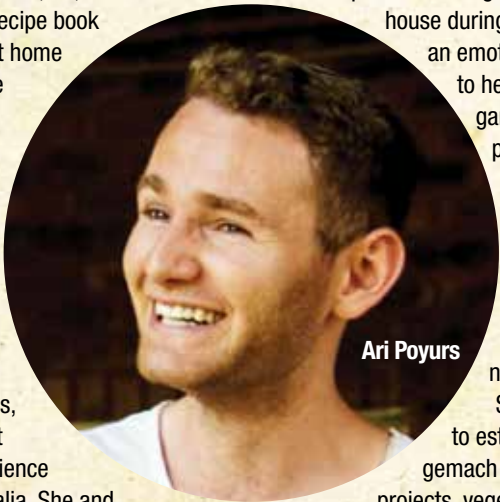
Mother-and-daughter team Robyn and Natalia Blumenthal used the early stages of lockdown to collaborate on a special lockdown recipe book called Unmasked. Combining recipes and lockdown stories from a global pool of contributors, the book also boasts beautiful food and lockdown photography.

Passionate about food and inspired by her beloved late grandmother's culinary prowess, social media strategist and content creator Natalia, 25, had always dreamed of compiling a recipe book in her honour. "We were sitting at home one day, discussing how because of lockdown, everybody was now in the kitchen cooking and baking," recalls Robyn, a speech therapist working in remedial education. "Natalia said somebody should document it." The two decided to take the project on themselves.

"I thought that together with their new recipes or old favourites, everybody would have a different story about their lockdown experience and coping strategies," says Natalia. She and her mother gathered close to 100 recipes and stories through a network of friends, and friends of friends from Johannesburg to Cape Town, Israel, Australia and beyond.

The Blumenthals are also using their book project to feed others, and all proceeds will be donated to small feeding schemes, helping those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing the professional struggles so many faced, the two used the services of smaller, newer players in creative industries in exchange for them getting free publicity. Friends dropped meals at the Blumenthals' gate, and a photographer took artfully arranged food photos in their driveway.

The project helped keep Robyn and Natalia inspired and motivated during hard lockdown. "We had to stay in touch with people, and we became very aware of community," says Robyn.



"It gave us a positive goal on which to focus," adds Natalia. "We knew that lockdown would eventually end, and we would have used this time to create something special. It was a light at the end of the tunnel for us because despite the terrible things that have happened with the pandemic, we've been able to capture the good in this book, which we call our treasure chest. There's a certain magic to being able to pause and rethink, and we hope people remember that when they stop to use this book."

For lawyer and entrepreneur Brenda Stern, gardening has always been the activity she turns to when facing struggles. "I've suffered from depression and I'm a breast cancer survivor, and gardening has often been my saviour. It's very therapeutic." Having moved into a new house during lockdown, Stern found an emotional outlet in tending to her new, but neglected, garden. Together with her partner in gardening, her beloved dog Archie, Stern also decided to start a pavement vegetable garden, encouraging passer's by to take what they needed.

Stern was then inspired to establish a gardening gemach to create free planting projects, vegetable gardens, and gardens for people who can benefit from the power of plants and share the catharsis that comes with gardening. She took to the Joburg Jewish Mommies Facebook group, and invited people to donate their unused plants, pots, and time to help others in the community for whom plants may be a luxury. She also offered to help people contribute to the wider community, by planting pavement vegetable gardens. "The huge response was overwhelmingly humbling."

"Caring for even one plant gives people a sense of purpose and that's what this project is about. It's about evoking that sense of creation in each one of us that comes with planting and looking after another living thing. Lockdown has also taught me that we have to learn to share our resources and our privilege ... The greatest legacy you can leave is to plant a tree under whose shade you do not expect to sit."





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# Rosh Hashanah silenced, but music plays on in our mind

JORDAN MOSHE

Love them or loathe them, shul choirs are to Rosh Hashanah what matzah is to Pesach. Raising their voices from either the *bimah* or the choir loft, the choir has defined the *yom tov* memories of South African Jews, young and old, for decades. For the first time in living memory, however, choral performances won't be held around the country this year, having been silenced by COVID-19.

While some of us may still be attending a *minyán* of some kind, we won't be hearing any of the traditional tunes which define the festival experience.

What exactly does this loss mean to us, and is there any way we could possibly experience the musical components of Rosh Hashanah this year?

"Music connects many of us to the *chaggim*," says Adam Golding, the conductor at Great Park Shul. "Without it, there's no *chag* for me. It creates the feeling of the day, whether celebrative or serious. Music creates moments, and connects us with what the *chag* is about."

The silencing of choirs this year is unprecedented, Golding says.

"I don't think that once during the 20th century, South African shuls were ever without choirs over this time," he says. "This is the first time in the past 120 years. Great Park had an established choir by the end of the 19th century, making it an unprecedented first that there's no choir this year."

"For a majority of the big, traditional shuls, most congregants come for services on these days only. In a large shul, 100 people is a big crowd for a Friday night. The fact is, they can typically accommodate hundreds more, and you really see this only over the high holy days when people are exposed to choral music."

It makes choirs a defining part of *chag* for most people, says Golding.

"The music allows them to relate to the service they come to once a year. The tunes they hear are usually traditional and novel, blending their memories with the anticipation of something new to look forward to. While some people will still be going to a shul this year, they won't be taking part in the way they usually do. It's going to be strange and difficult in some cases."

For Joel Sacher, the choirmaster at Waverley Shul,



music represents a powerful personal connection with Hashem.

"It's a central part of our shul experience," he says. "I'm deeply invested in writing and arranging it. When the prospect of high holidays without shul services – or with compromised services as things stand – first dawned on me a few months ago, it seemed unthinkable."

"It's still difficult to digest, but six months of shabbos and *chaggim* under COVID-19 restrictions have forced us to experience these days differently."

Sacher and Golding have devised ways to ensure that the congregants at their *shuls* can continue to connect with the musicality of the *chag*.

Sacher says that a number of shul choirs

(including Waverley Shul) are producing music videos featuring *yom tov* tunes to nourish us in the days leading up to *chag*. Golding has endeavoured to do the same.

"We've tried to find ways to help people find that musical connection," says Golding. "At Great Park, we've embarked on a project to record key pieces from the services for upload to YouTube. People are sharing recordings made at home. We're hoping they

give them a way to connect."

In addition, Great Park will host two pre-*chag* services online, the first of which is due to air next Thursday. The service will include music, shofar blowing, inspirational ideas, and other elements of the *chag* aimed at setting the tone for *yamim noraim*.

"It won't be in the traditional service format, nor is it intended to replicate it," Golding says. "We're hoping to give people something they can take into *yom tov* with them in terms of music and the shul experience."

"In any situation, it's our job to find the positives for ourselves. It's personal, and there isn't a universal silver lining. I'm hoping that the recordings we've

shared can help people find their own connection with the *chag* that they can enjoy in their own way."

Integral though choirs may be, Sacher stresses that we can't forget they are a means to an end, namely connecting us with the divine.

"We're speaking to, praising, beseeching the creator of the universe," he says. "Music in davening gives added meaning to the text, stirs our emotions, and allows us to feel things in a different way, a deeper way than we otherwise would, and it's integral for us."

"This year, though, I believe that Hashem has challenged each of us to explore new avenues and find our connection on *yom tov* itself – without music. Maybe this is an opportunity to imbue our future *chaggim* with greater depth and appreciation once we do return to shul."

Sacher believes that this year we can possibly go beyond our standard *yom tov* experience, enhancing it with added dimensions of significance we possibly overlook. This could involve something as simple as reading insights into the text of the *yom tov* davening, filling this year's void by gaining a better understanding of the prayers we hear sung yearly.

"We love the joyful melodies that celebrate Hashem's Kingship and the heart-rending, solemn melodies which capture the introspective elements," says Sacher. "Those themes are still there. If we can't sing about them, why not spend some time reading up on them and experience them like that? In the week of *yom tov*, this publication always carries excellent articles by our inspiring rabbis. These, too, could go some way to filling the void."

"There are definitely ways for us to make *yom tov* special and meaningful without the usual trimmings. So, let's be positive, plan our *chag*, and devise ways to fill the void. It's up to each one of us."

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# Shuls think out of the box over Rosh Hashanah

SHIRA HANAU – JTA

In Montreal, the boxes will include apple or honey cake mix. In New Hampshire, they’ll include bird seed. And many synagogues will distribute apples and honey, the snack that symbolises a sweet new year.

The packages are among many that will start to land soon on the front steps of Jewish homes: deliveries of prayer books, art supplies, and gifts meant to make a high holiday season at home a little less lonely and a little more spiritually fulfilling.

“What we’ve learned over these months is that to create an online programme isn’t just to take an in-person programme and put it online, it’s a new field of engagement,” said Rabba Rachel Kohl Finegold of Congregation Shaar Hashomayim in Montreal. “You need something tangible.”

The high holiday boxes reflect a dawning awareness that with most synagogues closed or at least curtailed, homes are now the centre of the Jewish experience. Just as people the world over have begun baking sourdough bread during the pandemic, many Jews have started baking their own challah. Now, as the coronavirus pandemic extends into the second half of its first year, synagogues and other Jewish organisations are taking new steps to make home practice easier to access.

To some, the shift in focus from synagogues to homes as the centre of Jewish life is a healthy recalibration for a culture in which synagogues had become too central.

“We’ve sharply differentiated home from synagogue ... and we’ve put all our energy into the synagogue,” said Rabbi Lawrence Hoffman, a professor at Hebrew Union College who researches synagogues, liturgy, and ritual. “Instead of two separate entities, we now have the opportunity to share from one home to another.”

Hoffman himself has found that the pandemic has changed the way he observes Shabbat. When the pandemic first started, he started singing Shabbat songs on Friday afternoon with his children and grandchildren over Zoom. Eventually the gatherings became a weekly ritual and incorporated songs, candle lighting, and a full Shabbat dinner conducted over Zoom.

“We worry about synagogues ... but at the same time we have a strong home ceremony that keeps us going, and it’s partially the secret of our success,” Hoffman said. “It’s kind of an exciting moment in time when we’re experimenting with open scripted rituals in our homes that could become anything.”

Kohl Finegold and others in her position are traversing uncharted territory, according to Vanessa Ochs, a professor of Jewish studies at the University of Virginia. She said this year’s Passover had effectively been a “Jewish boot camp”, as people who might normally attend a family or communal seder had to figure out how to make one themselves, and



Preschool-age children participate in a morning gratitude session with Rabba Rachel Kohl Finegold at home

Photo: courtesy of Rabba Rachel Kohl Finegold

now the lessons are being applied to the high holidays.

“How do you do Rosh Hashanah on your own? Our community hasn’t invented that yet,” she said.

That invention is underway. A website that sells Passover haggadahs and allows users to compile resources to create their own has launched HighHolidays@Home, which invites users to “download a simple Rosh Hashanah seder & Yom Kippur guidebook or mix & match to create your own holiday gathering”.

Rabbi Yael Buechler, a school rabbi and the founder of Midrash Manicures, a company that sells Jewish-themed manicure kits, said she noticed Rosh Hashanah cards becoming less popular over the years but thought this year would be the perfect opportunity to bring them back. She collaborated with a New Yorker cartoonist to create Rosh Hashanah cards that feature an apple and honey separated by a Zoom screen.

“This is a really unique opportunity for young people to use cards – hand-written notes are really powerful – to reach out to family and friends they haven’t seen for months,” Beuchler said.

Support is also coming from the synagogues that congregants this year cannot enter. In addition to making sure they have easy-to-access Zoom setups and prayer books to follow along with at home, many congregations are distributing supplies aimed at enriching the holiday experience.

At Temple Beth Jacob in Concord, New Hampshire, Rabbi Robin Nafshi is planning to send congregants a package of materials for *tashlich*, the ritual in which Jews throw bread crumbs into water to symbolise the casting away of sins.

With the day when *tashlich* would be performed falling on an early-autumn Sunday this year, Nafshi was concerned about trying to assemble the congregation with proper social distancing at potentially crowded local bodies of water. So, congregants at the reform synagogue will get packets of bird seed in their holiday boxes, which volunteers will hand deliver throughout the region. (The synagogue has used bird seed in place of the traditional bread, which can be harmful to birds and fish, for years.)

“Like everyone, we’re trying to

figure out this online world where we’re trying to find ways to make this more personal,” said Nafshi. She hopes the packages will “remind

them that our clergy and board and staff are thinking of them”.

At Kohl Feingold’s synagogue, where she is director of education

## Must-know Rosh Hashanah words and phrases

MJL STAFF – JTA

Here are some important Hebrew words and terms you may encounter over the high holiday season, which starts with Rosh Hashanah on the evening of 18 September.

**Akedah:** pronounced ah-keh-DAH. Literally “binding”, the Akedah refers to the biblical story of the binding of Isaac, which is traditionally read on the second day of Rosh Hashanah.

**Chag sameach:** pronounced KHAG sah-MAY-akh. Literally “happy holiday”, a common greeting on Rosh Hashanah and other Jewish holidays.

**Elul:** pronounced el-OOL (oo as in food). The final month of the Jewish calendar, it’s designated as a time of reflection, introspection, and repentance.

**Het (also chet):** pronounced KHET (short e). Sin, or wrongdoing.

**L’shana tovah u’metukah:** pronounced l’shah-NAH toe-VAH ooh-meh-too-KAH. A Hebrew greeting for the high holiday season that means, “for a good and sweet year”.

**Mahzor (also machzor):** pronounced MAHKH-zohr. Literally “cycle”, the mahzor is the special prayer book for the high holidays containing all the special high holiday liturgy.

**Selichot (also selihot):** pronounced slee-KHOTE. Literally “forgivenesses”, selichot are prayers for forgiveness. Selichot refers to two related types of penitential prayers. The first are the prayers that are customarily recited daily at morning services during the month of Elul. This is also the name of the service that takes place late at night on the Saturday preceding Rosh Hashanah, and consists of a longer series of these penitential prayers.

**Shofar:** pronounced shoh-FAR or SHOH-far (rhymes with “so far”). The ram’s horn that’s sounded during the month of Elul, on Rosh Hashanah, and at the end of Yom Kippur. It’s mentioned numerous times in the Bible in reference to its ceremonial use in the Temple

and its function as a signal horn of war. **Tashlich (also tashlich):** pronounced TAHSH-likh. Literally “cast away”, tashlich is a ceremony observed on the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashanah in which sins are symbolically cast away into a natural body of water. The term and custom are derived from a verse in the Book of Micah (Micah 7:19).

**Teshuvah (also teshuva):** pronounced tih-SHOO-



Photo: Brianna Soukup/Portland Press Herald via Getty Images

Rosalee Lamm, right, shows her daughters how to toss their pieces of bread into the water for Tashlich alongside their father, Toby Rzepka

vuh. Literally “return”, teshuvah is often translated as “repentance”. It’s one of the central themes and spiritual components of the high holidays.

**Tishrei:** pronounced TISH-ray. The first month in the Hebrew calendar, during which Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot all occur.

**Tzom Kal:** pronounced TZOHM KAHL. This greeting for Yom Kippur (and other Jewish fast days) means “may you have any easy fast”.

**Unetaneh Tokef:** pronounced ooh-nuh-TAH-neh TOH-keff. Literally “we shall ascribe”, a religious poem recited during the Musaf (additional service) Amidah that is meant to strike fear in us.

**Yamim Noraim:** pronounced yah-MEEM nohr-ah-EEM. Literally “days of awe”, a term that refers to the high holiday season. Sometimes it’s used to refer to the 10 days from Rosh Hashanah to Yom Kippur which are also known as the aseret yimei teshuva, or the 10 days of repentance.

**Yom Tov:** pronounced YOHM TOHV or YON-tiff. This is a general term for the major Jewish festivals.





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# 28

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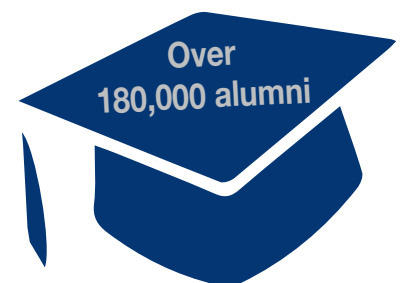
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# Time to leave the ark, and build a new world

OPINION

RABBI LEVI AVTZON



The year is coming to an end. As is customary in media all over the world, there must be at least one column in each newspaper that attempts to make sense of the past year.

Typically, the writer will offer their summary of trend changes, geopolitical dynamics, advances (or the lack thereof) in entertainment, technology, medicine; then bemoan the imperfections of the world relative to their theory of utopia; then wrap it all up beautifully in a literary box; and thus goes up the “closed” sign on the previous year.

I have been offered the distinguished task of doing so for this past year, 5780, in the Jewish calendar. I’m not sure whether I’m feeling distinguished or extinguished as I sit at my laptop trying to type the first word on this topic. Seriously, what does one even say of the most unpredictable, unusual, and, to be honest, unbelievable year in our lifetime?

Do I point out all the types of suffering which entered our world as an outcome of that one fella who decided that eating a bat was a good idea? Do I focus on the obvious and oft repeated lesson on the power of one person to influence change? Do I share my empathy and love with those who have suffered loss during or because of the pandemic?

I just did. And I mean it with all my heart.

As for my summation of this year, I choose to focus on its simplicity. Our lives have been simpler these past months than they have been in a long time – decades perhaps.

What does simple mean?

The Oxford dictionary defines the word “simple” as “plain, basic, or uncomplicated in form, nature, or design, without much decoration or ornamentation” – exactly what the physicality of our lives has looked like over this period.

Are you kidding? Uncomplicated? Rabbi, what are you blabbering about? This world is so complicated, and more confused than ever.



True. And not true. (Said like a rabbi.)

What is true is how many people are confused and their ideas more complicated than in the past.

What is also true is that in spite of the anxiety, stress, bad political ideas, and other social negatives that have been amplified by the pandemic, the world has also become simpler.

Less cars on the road. Less flights. Less eating out. Less holidays. Less partying. Less drinking (ok, maybe not). More family time (some might say too much time). More time to reflect (or binge watch Netflix). More down time. Integrating family and work life, and hopefully finding the balance.

Most importantly: more time to connect with ourselves and our faith. More Torah learning was accomplished in our community this year than over many years combined! The amount of content that has been shared and studied on platforms such as Zoom, YouTube, and Facebook Live is remarkable. Although our shuls have been closed until recently, and are now open under severe restrictions, communities have been more active than ever.

So many of my colleagues have shared how busy they have been over this period. In many ways, these past few months have been the most fulfilling of my rabbinic career. Most of my time was spent teaching and communicating with congregants, with much less logistics than usual. I spent my time learning, teaching, counselling, comforting mourners, running Zoom Barmitzvahs, and enjoying the blessing of family and community.

An analogy that comes to mind over this period is that these past six months have felt like being in Noah’s Ark. There is a storm outside. We locked ourselves into our ark-homes. There were jobs to do at home, just as Noah was occupied with feeding all the animals, but all in all, there was this safety of home which protected most of us from the pandemic.

And now, as I write these words, we are in level two of lockdown. Schools are open. Shuls are opening. Life is bringing many of us back outdoors.

And like Noah of old, we might feel trepidation about this new world we are cautiously entering. This new world is

unlike the pre-flood (pre-COVID-19) world, and unlike the ark (lockdown). It’s a new reality. A third reality. Noah was tasked with being the second Adam, and together with his family, rebuilding humanity from scratch. We are being called upon to create a new world.

I refer to more than the fact that this new world has masks on our faces, social distancing, no human touch other than our home-mates, and a quite different economic and social climate. I refer to the new world of our minds. We are a changed people. These six months have changed us, formed our character, and tested our resilience.

We are the new world. It is us who have changed, hopefully for the better. It is us who see reality with new eyes. Our perspectives have matured. Our hearts have broadened. Our priorities have been realigned.

“Leave the ark,” is what Hashem tells Noah. Did he really need convincing to leave that claustrophobic wooden lifeboat? Yes. Even an ark can start feeling like home after long enough. And, at moments like these we are called to embrace the new-new stage. After we’ve mostly adjusted to the new normal of lockdown, now we are called to the normal of “living-with-COVID-19”.

Did Noah have all the answers? Nope. He became overwhelmed by it all, and got drunk on wine. Let’s not repeat that mistake. Although alcohol is accessible again, please drink (or don’t drink) responsibly.

We don’t have the answers. In some cases, we don’t even know the questions. And we’ll be okay. We are that strong. Let’s take with us the lesson of simplicity that we’ve learned in these times, and a suitcase of experience, faith, and tenacity to help us through this new stage. Like Noah, we will build a beautiful new world.

• *Rabbi Levi Avtzon is the rabbi at Linksfield Shul.*

# Lockdown Rosh Hashanah can still be child’s play

OPINION

RABBI PINI PINK



Who would ever have thought when we went into lockdown on Pesach, we would still be reeling from the effects of COVID-19 at Rosh Hashanah?

My wife and I originate from the United Kingdom. The first year in our role as Chabad emissaries here in South Africa, we were very excited about Rosh Hashanah. As we started calling people to join us as guests for the meals over the *yom tov*, almost everyone gave the same response, “Thanks rabbi, but we are going to family.” It blew us away. While Rosh Hashanah is celebrated universally in the same way – by going to shul, hearing the shofar, apples dipped in honey, and the like – the family centred theme that Rosh Hashanah has here is a true testament of the unique closeness of the Jewish community in South Africa.

But where does that leave us this year? While in level two, family visits are allowed, many won’t be spending Rosh Hashanah with their families, and shuls won’t be having elaborate children’s programmes on the day. How will our children react to this? But more significantly, what sort of message can we give them to really appreciate the importance of the day?

One of the prayers we say at this time of the year is *Avinu Malkeinu* (Our Father, Our King). If we look at the wording of this prayer, it perfectly captures our relationship with G-d. If we relate to Him as a father, we

may think that our sins are easily forgiven, which might lead to negligence in fulfilling His commands. If we view G-d exclusively as an all-powerful king, we may not understand that He cares about us on a personal level. Our relationship with G-d is uniquely two-fold: we are his children, yet we are also his subjects. He loves us the way a father loves his children and forgives their transgressions. At the same time, like all monarchs, He sets rules for us that are meant to connect us to Him.

Parents always want the very best for their children, but like all humans, a parent is limited in their ability to resolve every challenge. G-d, on the other hand, is all-knowing and all-powerful. He can resolve any difficulty.

We may think, “I don’t have such a great track record, why would G-d want to help me if I’m not so connected to him?” Since G-d is both our father and our king, we can rest assured that he is able to resolve each and every issue we face.

Having said that, for a lot of children, the themes behind Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur simply go straight over their heads. Many feel that these holidays of atonement are just for adults. However, children are never too young to learn the valuable lessons of forgiveness and transformation.

The best way to inspire children is through tangible experiences that will connect all of their senses to the traditions. Parents can show children that the high holy days aren’t only important, but fun.

Bring the traditions alive for them in whatever setting this Rosh Hashanah brings. Let them enjoy the honey dripping off the apple; let them show their excitement when hearing the shofar; but even better than just watching them enjoying the traditions of the day, let them see you, the parents, showing equal excitement. When they see how much the day means to you, and the joy that comes with it, it will affect them too. It won’t end up being just be another day off school or another meal.

As parents, we know how exasperating it is to watch a child struggle with issues that we can’t resolve for them. When our children are young, most of their problems can be fixed, but as they grow older, they face obstacles that may be beyond our capability to help with. It’s at this stage that our children begin to learn that they can no longer rely exclusively on their parents. If we have made their Judaism fun and enriching, we can hope that at this stage, they start to turn directly to their heavenly father and king.

Please G-d, before we even get to Rosh Hashanah this year, we will all be celebrating without masks, social distancing and worry, in Jerusalem with the coming of moshiach!

• *Rabbi Pini Pink is the rabbi at Chabad Greenstone.*





# Not in shul, how do we make Rosh Hashanah spiritual?

OPINION

HOWARD FELDMAN



I have no idea if I will be going to shul this Rosh Hashanah. I have no idea where I will hear the shofar, and even if I did go, I would have little sense of what the experience would look like.

What I do know is that no matter where I pray, it will be up to me to make the experience meaningful. I know further that if it isn't, the responsibility is purely mine.

This is why I thought to create loose guidelines ahead of time, that could assist on the day:

- Daven at the same time as the shul *minyan*. The schedules are easily available, and instead of ignoring it because we are not going, I suspect that it's a good idea to align with the community.
- If there are a number of people in a home who are not going to shul, it's a good idea to pray together as a family. If possible, and if the neighbours are kind or deaf, try to sing some of the songs from davening. Assuming the tunes are known.
- The advantage of staying home is that it provides the opportunity to go through the davening in more detail. The *ArtScroll machzorim* in particular has very interesting notes at the bottom at the bottom of each page. These can be extremely enlightening and provide a completely different perspective into the history and meaning of the prayer.

**There's no doubt that there's an increased responsibility on ourselves to make the festival meaningful and worthwhile. The time spent preparing will be well worth the result.**

- Dress the part. One of the lessons that we learned early in lockdown when remote working became the norm, was that, although it might have been exciting to spend all day working in pyjamas, it didn't take long for the novelty to fade, and for misery and depression to set in. Dress matters. And not only for work. In order to appreciate the significance of the day, it would be helpful to wear smarter clothes and shoes, and still treat the day as something special.
- For those who are able to, it's useful also to go through the Torah reading for the day. And to do this in its normal spot, which is between Shacharit and Mussaf. The Rosh Hashanah portion is particularly meaningful and speaks of the time when Abraham was asked to sacrifice his long-awaited and precious son, Isaac. It speaks of commitment to G-d and to the challenges that we each endure, in our own way. It contains some of the most moving and beautiful lines, and it would be a real pity to miss out on the opportunity.
- Prepare your own sermon. This has multiple benefits. Worst case, it's a fantastic opportunity to spend a few minutes daydreaming, and best it will



engage and inspire. There is so much available online or from the different shuls. It will be worth investing the time to have something to read.

- If you're not generally shabbat or *yom tov* observant, I would also encourage people to put away technology and cell phones. They're distracting at the best of times, and will undoubtedly reduce the

quality of the time spent in prayer.

No matter where we find ourselves over Rosh Hashanah, this year will not be the same as years gone by. There's no doubt that there's an increased responsibility on ourselves to make the festival meaningful and worthwhile. The time spent preparing will be well worth the result.



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# Real need for connection in a virtual world

OPINION

RABBI ARI SHISHLER



Facebook isn’t a place for a nice Jewish boy, let alone a rabbi. That’s rich coming from me, a rabbi with a significant social-media presence. I was excited to join Facebook shortly after it launched, was one of the first rabbis on Twitter, and opened an Instagram account pretty much as soon as it went live.

Back in the days when a Zoom *minyan* simply meant that the chazan was in a hurry, I engaged social media in line with the Chabad attitude that, although we’d never own a TV, we would use any tech opportunity to spread the word. Facebook was intriguing. It networked me with people from around the world (like in 2007, when I live-chatted with a Jewish student barricaded in his dorm room during the Virginia Tech shooting, and got a local rabbi to find him). It gave me an unprecedented teaching platform through adverts, posts, videos, and what has now become Facebook’s largest “Ask the Rabbi” group.

When I joined Twitter, I found a fellowship of tech-savvy rabbis who engage in cyberspace, and have become friends in real life (we even got to snap the largest rabbi-selfie in history in 2014). Then came WhatsApp and the most (invasive?) and effective means of messaging my community about just about anything.

One of the most crucial things they teach you in rabbi school is to know how to determine when something kosher turns non-kosher. We follow a simple principle: as long as a food emits flavour, it can’t absorb flavour. Get it? Yes, it’s a law about meat and milk (for details, ask your local Orthodox rabbi or check the “Ask the Rabbi” page on Facebook), but it’s a rule for life.

You stay kosher when you inspire your environment, rather than be inspired by it. That’s been my goal with social media (and why I deleted Tik Tok when I couldn’t find a way – or the time – to add value). Call me a hypocrite, but I’m the social-media rabbi who lectures loudly about why you shouldn’t be on social media.

We need real friends, not followers. We need face-to-face engagement not fleeting “likes” for things that we’ll never remember. We need uninterrupted conversation with actual people; conversations that aren’t punctuated by beeps and buzzes and, “Sorry, I just have to quickly reply to this.” Yes, I love the reach of my social-media presence, but I love social presence more.

Then COVID-19 arrived, and human interaction shut down. No more coffee convos or shul-time schmoozes. No guests at the Shabbos table. Our Pesach seder was family-only for the first time ever.

I had chosen to be an early adopter of social media. I was forced, because of an overseas trip, to be an early-quarantiner, right at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Just as I wound up my 14 days of isolation and prepared to resume

running Chabad Strathavon, South African shuls closed their doors. G-d does have a sense of humour.

I’d been following the trends in Israel and New York, and appreciated that we’d be in some form of social hiatus for the better part of 2020 (perhaps longer). I realised that many would feel adrift, and that it would take considerable creativity to retain a community in spite of the imposed social distance.

All of a sudden, that objectionable tech that had wedged people apart when we had been able to converse across a table would become the only means to keep us together. The very tool that had undermined social connection would now preserve it. Our sages teach that G-d always prepares the cure before he sends the disease. We haven’t yet unearthed His solution for the virus, but we can

now see how well He prepared us for the social challenges we’d face.

I tried Zoom pre-Shabbos drinks, and they flopped. I launched a short daily WhatsApp video inspiration, and it flew.

Our

gave way to a short shiur and tefillin get-together over Zoom.

Now that the *minyan* is back (kinda), those who are unable to attend still Zoom in to feel the shul energy. My weekly *shiurim*, which historically attracted a modest crowd around the table, now include participants from Israel, the United States, England, and the Netherlands.

I suspect that when we are able to resume in-person classes, we’ll have to retain the Zoom connection too, both for those abroad and for those who are happy to listen from bed.


All the tech is spectacular. It has allowed me to do things like speak in both Sydney and Atlanta on the

same day, and send daily WhatsApp inspiration to hundreds globally. It has brought our community together in an unprecedented fashion.

It has opened the experience of exploring Judaism to those who hadn’t previously, in the hubbub of urban living, paused to consider it. Yet, at the end of the day, what I’ve learned more than anything is how much people appreciate a 30-second personal phone call or a challah delivered to their home on a Friday.

Whatever technology may provide, it will never replace the warmth of a personal gesture. When the COVID-19 barriers come down, I sincerely hope that we will remember to prevent virtual communication from interfering with human connection.

• Rabbi Ari Shishler is the rabbi at Chabad of Strathavon.



# Booking peace of mind for Rosh Hashanah

OPINION

BATYA BRICKER



The phrase I have on repeat in my head is the line from the spine-chilling Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur prayer, *Unetana tokef*: “*Mi yanuach, and mi yanua?*” (Who will be at peace, and who will be restless?)

Alongside life and death, sickness and health, we pray for peace of mind, to be free of anxiety, depression, and negativity. We pray to be filled with a sense of purpose, stimulation, to feel exhilarated, and for our eyes to be open to be able to recognise wonder.

The books on the shelves at Exclusive Books confirm that everyone is looking for this shift. With the energy of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur upon us, (and no shul or long family lunches to fill the *yom tov* days), now is the perfect time to drink in some wisdom from today’s thinkers. In any one of these books topping the bestseller lists, perhaps you will find the perspective to make that shift, and find your piece of peace.

“We read to know that we are not alone,” said CS Lewis. And never is this truer than *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse*, by Charlie Mackesy.

This magical book of hope for uncertain times explores the universal thoughts and feelings that unite us all. There’s good reason *The Boy, the Mole, the Fox, and the Horse* has been shared millions of times online. Its characters have also been recreated by children in schools and hung on hospital walls. In it, we meet Charlie’s four friends (they’ll feel deeply familiar to you). We discover their story and learn life’s most important lessons together with a feast of exquisite illustrations. This is a modern classic, a life-changing fable with the same timelessness and poignancy of *Le Petit Prince* or *Hope for the Flowers* from many years ago.

This has been a Brené Brown year. Brené has spent the past two decades studying courage, vulnerability, shame, and empathy, and it’s no exaggeration that she has given voice to a whole generation of feelers and thinkers. Her *Gifts of Imperfection* is one of her original, foundational titles, and is finally available in South Africa.

Wholehearted living is a process that never

stops, it’s the opposite of a one-time choice. Courage, compassion, and connection are the gifts of imperfection. When you choose to be vulnerable with your shame and imperfection, you allow yourself to experience connection and the gifts of imperfection.

And in what is arguably our “season of sermons”, it seems fitting to talk about Iman Rappetti’s *Sermons of Soul*. This book brings you the best-loved opening segments from Rappetti’s award-winning radio show, *POWER Talk*.

With each daily sermon, Rappetti sought to give her listeners something special before the day’s tough subjects unfolded on the programme. She wanted to create a moment for them to feel appreciated, thought of, challenged, or cared for.

Some days, the sermon was a motivational letter, encouraging listeners to stay strong and confident, to have hope for themselves and the country. On other days it was different: a call to action, a socio-political critique, or a moving assessment of how we were doing as a society. These few minutes became one of the most-listened-to segments in radio, so popular that people frequently called in to comment on the impact of the messages, even praising the sermons as life-changing. The book has been a constant companion on my bedside table since its release.

Eleven months after he was liberated from the Nazi concentration camps, Viktor Frankl held a series of public lectures in Vienna. The psychiatrist, who would soon become world famous, explained his thoughts on meaning, resilience, and the importance of embracing life even in the face of great adversity.

Published here for the very first time in English, Frankl’s *Say Yes to Life: In Spite of Everything* resonates as strongly today as the world faces a coronavirus pandemic, social isolation, and great economic uncertainty as it did in 1946. He offers an insightful exploration of the maxim “Live as if you were living for the second time”, and unfolds his basic conviction that every crisis contains opportunity. In spite of the unspeakable horrors of the camps, Frankl learned from the strength of his fellow inmates that it is always possible to

“say yes to life”, a profound and timeless lesson for us all. This is the perfect companion to his seminal *Man’s Search for Meaning*.

Alongside this heavyweight is Edith Eger’s *The Gift: 12 Lessons to Save your Life*, the practical guide based on her award-winning bestseller, *The Choice*. Book content aside, Eger herself is an inspiration. At 92, she is now a clinical psychologist and healer to hundreds of people who have experienced all kinds of trauma, or who are simply searching for greater meaning. As a survivor of Auschwitz, she knows and understands this deeply, and draws on her experience to counsel others. It’s little exaggeration that her work has gone on to save lives and influence humans and humanity.

This new book is rich with perspective-altering lessons, but at the core of all her work is the echo of Viktor Frankl’s *Where there is a why, there is a how*.

She uses her mother’s advice as a springboard: “No one can take from you what you’ve put in your mind.” The same mind that can seek joy, embrace calm, and welcome groundedness, can also become a prison, and she shows how freedom becomes possible once we confront our suffering.

This sentiment also reverberates in the famous poem by Reb Nachman of Breslov, known simply as Rebbe Nachman, an 18th century kabbalist, religious teacher, and the founder of the Breslov Hasidic dynasty. Rebbe Nachman himself suffered from depression, making his words all the more poignant.

“*Kol ha-olam kulo, geshet tzar me-od*.” (The whole world is a very narrow bridge).

*Vehaikar lo yefached klal*. (But the main thing is not to be overwhelmed with fear).

But the English translation of these words don’t quite capture what Reb Nachman was saying. He doesn’t use the Hebrew word *lefached* (to be scared) but the reflexive form, *yefached* (to make yourself scared).

So, while the world may sometimes feel like a frighteningly narrow, rickety, and fragile bridge, the main thing isn’t to overwhelm yourself with fear, not to whip yourself up with dread, not to be the architect of your own prison of fear.

Because as Eger says, “The prison is in your mind. The key is in your pocket.”



• Word lover, avid reader, spiritual-seeker, Torah teacher, publisher-author, crazy crafter, mom of three – Batya Bricker also happens to be GM Books and Brand for Exclusive Books.



# L'shanah Tovah



Wishing all our Jewish  
customers a happy New Year  
and well over the fast.



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# Relying on food to get through this New Year

*Rosh Hashanah is usually a time of delicious food shared with precious loved ones and friends, but this year we need to rely on just the tasty treats to get us through this New Year. Sharon Lurie and Lauren Boolkin have given you some delectable foodie options.*

## LAUREN BOOLKIN

**Kreplach soup**  
Kreplach have been around since medieval times. They originated in Eastern Europe, and can be filled with meat, chicken, or cheese. They are traditionally eaten at the start of the Yom Kippur fast, on the seventh day of Sukkot, and on Purim.



Don't be nervous to make them. Start by making your dough thicker, and as you get better at them, roll your dough thinner and thinner. If you are lucky enough to access wonton wrappers, you'll have your kreplach done in a jiffy.

- Ingredients**
- 2 jumbo eggs
  - 1¼ cup flour
  - ¼ tsp salt
  - 100g mincemeat flavoured with 1½ tsp chopped onion, ¼ tsp salt, and a pinch of pepper

- Method**
- Place the sifted cake flour in a bowl, and add the salt. Stir in the lightly beaten eggs, and mix with a fork until a dough forms. Roll the dough into a ball, and rest it covered with plastic wrap for 30 minutes. Flour the board or countertop and your rolling pin well, and roll the dough out as thin as you can get it. Make sure the board is well floured underneath. Using a sharp knife, cut the dough into squares 7cm by 7cm.
  - Place a small blob of meat in the centre of each square. (Tip: don't put meat into all your squares until you have the hang of the folding.)
  - Form into triangles by bringing the two sides together, and then the bottom up. (Shape into half moons if this is going to put you off making the kreplach!)
  - Flash freeze these for an hour uncovered, and then put into a Ziploc ready to pop into the boiling soup. When you cook the kreplach, make sure your soup is boiling. They are ready when they float up to the top of the pot.

**Pavlova Grazing Board**  
This must be the most spectacular, simplest dessert ever invented. A special fellow foodie WhatsApped me a picture of a pavlova grazing board, and I'm now obsessed. The PGB went viral when Shalini Nestor posted a photo on her Swish Biscuits Instagram towards the end of last year. Feel free to put whatever your family loves on the board. I have included a pavlova recipe, but honestly, the bakeries in Joburg have gorgeous readymade ones. Similarly, Staffords makes a perfect bottled lemon curd which is kosher and parev.



- Mini pavlovas**
- 12 egg whites at room temperature
  - 660g castor sugar

- Method**
- Preheat your oven to 120 degrees.
  - Place the egg whites into a very clean bowl.
  - Beat until frothy, then gradually add the sugar.
  - Beat until the meringue is thick.
  - Using a spoon, plop the meringue onto a paper-lined baking sheet in rounds. It helps to draw the rounds with a pencil and teacup (the teacup for sizing), but make sure the leaded side is on the underside. Using a spatula, make peaks up the sides.
  - Bake for 1½ hours, and then switch off the oven and allow them to cool.

- Suggested ingredients**
- Lemon curd
  - Pomegranate seeds
  - Cherries
  - Blueberries
  - Strawberries
  - Granadilla pulp
  - Chocolates
  - Honeycomb
  - Lisianthas and roses to decorate

**Fenugreeked lamb shoulder**  
Fenugreek is one of the earliest traditional foods of Rosh Hashanah. It's a plant indigenous to Southeast Asia and the Middle East. I have included some carrots as these, too, are a symbolic food eaten on Rosh Hashanah. The baby potatoes are there because they are delicious! The lamb is best marinated the day before cooking. It freezes well, and can be made the day before, sliced, and warmed. Start early, as it cooks for a long time.



- Ingredients**
- 1 lamb shoulder
  - 2 lemons
  - 4 garlic cloves
  - 1 tbsp paprika
  - 1 tsp cumin seeds
  - ½ tsp fenugreek seeds
  - 1 pkt mint leaves
  - 1 pkt coriander
  - 4 tbsp olive oil
  - 4 carrots peeled and thickly sliced
  - 1 head of garlic cut in half horizontally (don't worry, you're wearing a mask)
  - Salt and pepper

- Method**
- In a dry pan, toast the fenugreek and cumin until fragrant. Grind in a pestle and mortar. Zest the lemons, and place them in a food processor with the ground spices. Squeeze the lemons, and add the juice to the processor with the olive oil, fresh herbs, garlic, salt, and pepper. Grind these all together to make a paste.
  - Massage the paste into your washed and dried meat making sure to get into all the crevices. I like to stab the meat a bit with a sharp knife before spicing! Marinate overnight.
  - Preheat your oven to 180 degrees, and place the lamb into the oven covered. Baste every hour. After two hours, add the carrots, garlic head, and potatoes, and reduce the temperature to 160 degrees. Continue cooking the meat for another two hours, uncovering your dish for the last half hour. If there is insufficient gravy to baste, add one beef cube dissolved in a cup of boiling water, but I rarely need to do this. Serve surrounded by the vegetables garnished with lemons and rosemary.

## SHARON LURIE

**Rookie sushi salad**  
I'm not embarrassed to admit that I battle to make sushi rice: mine always turns out sticky-gritty-mashed something or anything unassociated with the wonderful world of this Japanese cuisine. That was until my granddaughter said: "Bobba, use brown rice, it's just as good" and she was quite right. Her recipe included a layer of rice on the serving platter, topped with sections of smoked salmon/trout, chopped cucumber, coriander and radish, and sesame seeds. This recipe, however, gives you the opportunity to include other vegetables.



One thing we did agree on was that ready-fried onions (available at many kosher supermarkets) have to be piled, really high, on top of the salad.

- Ingredients**
- 3 cups ready-cooked brown short grain rice
  - 1 English cucumber, cut in half, pips removed, and chopped/julienned/sliced on the diagonal
  - 2-3 sticks of celery, finely sliced on the diagonal
  - 250g baby mealies, sliced/chopped (you can use two cups of corn, defrosted)
  - 250g sugar snap peas, sliced in thirds on the diagonal
  - 1 red pepper, deseeded and thinly sliced/chopped
  - 1 green pepper, deseeded and thinly sliced/chopped
  - 1 yellow pepper, deseeded and thinly sliced/chopped
  - 2 carrots, julienned/finely chopped
  - 8-10 sliced/chopped red radishes
  - ½ cup chopped spring onions
  - 100-200g smoked salmon/trout bits
  - 2 avocados – sliced/cubed when ready to serve
  - 100g salted cashew nuts
  - 1 packet dry crushed ramen noodles (optional, but different textures make a salad special!)
  - Handful of chopped fresh coriander for garnishing
  - Fried onion rings
  - ½ cup sesame seeds (dry-fried or baked to bring out the flavour and crisp up)

- Method**
- Cook rice as per instructions on the packet.
  - Allow to cool and place on a serving platter.
  - Place selected vegetables on top of the rice in rows so that you section off the vegetables. (sliced or chopped depending on how you want your salad to look – I prefer chopped.)
  - Pour over salad dressing just before serving and finally sprinkle generously with fried onions and sesame seeds.

- Dressing**
- ¼ cup soy sauce
  - ¼ cup lemon juice

- ¼ cup orange juice
- 2 tbsp honey
- 1 tbsp finely grated ginger
- ¼ cup rice vinegar
- ¼ cup sesame oil
- ½ cup sunflower oil
- 1-2 teaspoons chilli flakes (depending on how spicy you like your food)
- Plus sachet of powdered stock from noodles if you are using noodles.
- If not, add two teaspoons of powdered vegetable stock.

- Method**
- Shake up all dressing ingredients in a jar with a secure-fitting lid.
  - When ready to serve, pour the dressing over the salad and garnish with the coriander and cashew nuts, and crumble the optional noodles (crushed in your hand) over the top of the dressed salad.
  - Finally, sprinkle with fried onion rings.
- Serves 8–10*

**Sriracha and honey chicken**  
Although Sriracha sauce is quite spicy and one should symbolically eat sweeter dishes over Rosh Hashanah, the honey in this dish does that without making it too sweet.



The glaze on the chicken should be quite dark and sticky with a Thai-flavoured twist. Serve with jasmine rice and peas.

- Ingredients**
- 1 chicken braai pack cut into 10 pieces
  - Little oil for frying
  - 3 cloves garlic
  - ⅓ cup honey
  - ⅓ cup Sriracha chilli sauce
  - 2 tbsp soy sauce
  - 2 tsp rice vinegar or apple cider
  - 3 tbsp sesame oil
  - Fresh coriander and sesame seeds for decorating

- Method**
- Preheat oven to 170 degrees celcius.
  - Blend garlic, honey, Sriracha, soy sauce, vinegar, and sesame oil until smooth.
  - Fry or braai (BBQ) chicken pieces until golden brown.
  - Place chicken pieces side by side in a single layer in an ovenproof baking dish — not too large or the lovey glaze will evaporate too quickly. Cover with sauce and tinfoil.
  - Cook for 45 mins to one hour or until cooked through. Remember the chicken is cut into portions so it will cook a little quicker than a whole chicken.
  - Remove tinfoil and, if the glaze isn't a lightish brown, then allow the glaze to brown up a little.
  - Sprinkle with sesame seeds and fresh coriander.



# Rosh Hashanah, COVID-19, and the time for change

OPINION

DINA BLOOM



I’ve always loved the basic message of Rosh Hashanah. We aren’t perfect; we make mistakes but, importantly, we can change.

Rosh Hashanah forces us to carve out space in our busy chaotic lives to self-reflect; to stop, think of the year gone by; to acknowledge and repent for our wrongdoings; and to set goals on how to be better versions of ourselves in the year ahead.

We should apply this insightful message of Rosh Hashanah to all aspects of our lives. Take time out to be self-aware, reflect, acknowledge where you would like to do better, and commit to yourself to improve.

Now, it’s hard to have a conversation these days without bringing COVID-19 into it. As we all know, COVID-19 has forced us, collectively, to stop. Stop shaking hands, stop hugging your friends, stop going to work, stop going to parties, stop going to restaurants, stop attending school concerts, stop travelling. The world has never stopped the way it has stopped in 2020. So now that we’ve stopped, we have a rare opportunity, on an existential level, to reflect.

**It’s almost as if the world needed to be shaken to its core. To stop in its tracks. To reflect. To acknowledge that the way we’ve been doing things isn’t working.**

It’s not news to us that the planet is on a downward spiral and has a deadline: 10 years. Climate scientists tell us that if, over the next 10 years, we don’t reduce greenhouse gas emissions drastically and maintain carbon sinks (like forests), the results will be catastrophic and irreversible. The warnings have been there for some time but, for all intents and purposes, we’ve ignored them. And things have become worse.

It got very close to home over summer with the worst bushfires Australia has ever seen, and a government enquiry recently confirming they were “clearly” fuelled by climate change.

Ice caps are melting, sea levels are rising, approximately 24 species are becoming extinct every single day. It’s almost as if the world needed to be shaken to its core. To stop in its tracks. To reflect. To acknowledge that the way we’ve been doing things isn’t working. To be reminded that we are part of nature, not superior to it. To change.

Just as Rosh Hashanah encourages us to reflect on where we’ve fallen short and commit to doing better, so too has COVID-19 given us the opportunity to reflect on our unsustainable relationship with nature, and commit to improving it.

But where does one start? Reducing meat consumption is one of the easiest and most impactful ways to lessen your environmental footprint; perhaps eliminate one meat meal per week, or only eat meat on weekends.

Be aware of single use plastic: On average a single-use water bottle is used for only 10 minutes and can then take more than 500 years to break down. Take your own water bottle, shopping bags, coffee cup, and avoid pre-cut veggies packaged in single-use waste. Look into your super fund and understand where your money is being invested; coal and fossil fuels are very damaging to the environment, so if your super fund invests here then change funds.

Compost: Food waste that goes to landfill




Dina Bloom and her family

emits a gas called methane, which is a more powerful greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>. Composting reduces this impact, and it’s very simple to organise through your local council. Big and small, there are many things you as an individual can do to start repairing our broken relationship with nature.

Rosh Hashanah and COVID-19 are sending us a clear message. We aren’t perfect; we are human, we make mistakes, but we can

change and we must change. The world can’t wait any longer.


• *Dina Bloom is a lawyer and mother of three, based in Sydney, Australia. She is currently studying Sustainability and Climate Policy, and hopes to create positive change for the next generation. For more everyday ideas on how to live more sustainably, follow her on Instagram @sustainable.living. guide*



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# The tale of South Africa’s first Jewish school

TALI FEINBERG

United Herzlia Schools (UHS) is a formidable institution as it celebrates its 80th anniversary this year, but when community leaders came together in 1940 with a vision of founding a Jewish school, its future as the first Jewish school in South Africa was anything but clear.

“The most defining moment in the school’s history was the not-so-obvious decision to establish itself,” says Ronnie Gotkin, who has spent 54 years in the Herzlia system as a pupil, teacher and principal, and is the school’s current head of Hebrew.

“At the darkest time in our history, a group of brave pioneers came together in Cape Town and said, ‘Our people will survive – and not only will we survive, we will flourish and ensure that our children will be proud, knowledgeable Jews.’ And so, Herzlia was born.” Today, the school has over 2 000 pupils, and 5 000 graduates.

“As the first Jewish school in South Africa, the founders had to convince parents to enrol their children in the face of concerns about separatism and viability, and they had to find the money to finance a new school and build facilities,” explains Gotkin.

Solly Berger came to Herzlia in Hope Street in July 1942 at the age of five-and-a-half. “A little known fact is that the first classes in 1940 and 1941 were aborted,” he says. However, over the next few years, the school began to grow. “In 1946, teachers such as Issy Cohen brought a new standard of teaching. Sport was introduced, houses were established, and the badge of Herzlia was designed after a competition, and is basically the same badge that exists today.

“Once the school had been established, the challenge became the location and purchase of a suitable site for a large school and for its construction,” says Gotkin. “The current campus was inaugurated in 1956, the same year that Herzlia graduated its very first matric class. Other defining moments were the incorporation of the primary school campuses, and the construction of a middle school. Facilities improved dramatically over the years.”

Herzlia’s first head boy, Jack Schneider, recalls how he joined the school in 1946, “There were around 140 kids in the school at the time, roughly 20 of us in a class, with one class per grade. I landed up being head prefect at Herzlia every year for six years. Our subject choice was small: English, Afrikaans, Hebrew, Bookkeeping, Science, History, and Geography. When I got to matric, there were only seven of us in the class and we were all boys.”

A Herzlia hostel was also established in 1940. Berger recalls: “Coming from the back woods of the northern suburbs of Cape Town, my father sent me to the hostel at the tender age of five. The hostel was primarily for children from country areas. Among the boarders were Louis and Solly Kreiner – future mayors of Cape Town.”

As the years went on, “We saw an explosion of numbers in our student body so much so that almost 80% of Cape Town’s Jewish children attended the school,” says past Herzlia principal Solly Kaplinski. “Herzlia thus became a true community school embracing all sectors of the community – from the Orthodox

to the Reform to the unaffiliated – as well as accommodating students from right across the academic spectrum, and opening our doors to students of colour.

“One lasting memory I have is of almost 800 high school students and staff having to evacuate the school as a result of a bomb threat. Students led this exodus with the Sifrei Torah proudly held high and carried them to safety,” he recalls.

David Ginsberg, current UHS director of finance and administration, says: “When I joined as bursar in 1988, I was only 32 years old and it was quite a big responsibility. I later learnt that the ladies in the office had a bet that I wouldn’t last more than six months!”

“The profession of school business management was in its infancy still, and we had to adapt systems used in commerce. We cut our own path and many schools followed in our footsteps. In those days we still had a Kalamazoo cash book, and one computer. Each term, the fees were invoiced by hand and posted to parents.

“The school is primarily a social enterprise dedicated to optimising each pupil’s potential, yet running on business principles. This of course is much like mixing oil and water,” he says. “The late Eliot Osrin founded the Herzlia Foundation Trust in 1972, and often advised us on fundraising matters. He is remembered saying: ‘It’s in the asking’, and ‘The more you ask, the more you get’, much like Gary Player’s famous saying that ‘the more you practise, the luckier you get’.”

Jim Goodacre was the principal of Herzlia Constantia from 1984 until 1998. “I joined as deputy principal in January 1979, in spite of warnings from Jewish parents at my previous school that I wouldn’t be able to tolerate the demanding parents and badly-behaved children. They were wrong. The parents and children were fine and I lasted for more than 19 years – although I once climbed out of my office window one Friday afternoon when I saw a particularly difficult parent coming through the front gate!

“In 1979, Herzlia Constantia was packed with over 500 children. In my 42 years of teaching in very good primary schools in England and Cape Town, it stood out. In 1984, I had the honour of becoming Herzlia’s first non-Jewish principal. In 1981, we twinned with Nomlinganiselo Primary School from New Crossroads. Over the years, this developed into a successful and mutually rewarding outreach programme.

“Herzlia Constantia was chosen to be the pilot school for the introduction of Jewish children with special needs into mainstream education,” recalls Goodacre. “Not everyone was in favour of adopting this policy. As it turned out, there were very few problems: the other children soon befriended their new classmates, and one of the girls was crowned Victrix Ludorum at our swimming gala. If I remember correctly, all the children in this first group finished high school.”

Herzlia went on to become a leader of inclusive education.

“Looking ahead, one of the biggest challenges the school faces is to ensure that a Herzlia education meets the challenges of the 21st century,” says Gotkin. “Within the constraints of an externally-prescribed curriculum, Herzlia has kept pace with these changes.

It recently established an Innovation Centre to ensure that a Herzlia education remains relevant, challenging, and meaningful. The school is also looking very carefully at ways in which it can benefit from the experience and learning acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic.”

**Prefects of 1956: Front: Issie Cohen, Libby Taibel, Meyer Katz (principal), Abirah Karabelnik, Deanna Blacher. 2nd row: Norman Marcus, Ivan Maron, Michael Lipschitz, Leizer Astrinksy. 3rd row: Michael Avin, Jack Schneider, Ivor Basker. 4th row: Leizer Choritz, Leon Stein, Archie Nahman. Back row: Hirsch Sadur, Leo van Gelder**



## From Herzlia, with love

TALI FEINBERG

For many Cape Town Jewish couples, United Herzlia Schools (UHS) was not only where they got their primary education, but the place they met their *bashert* (soulmate).

As Herzlia celebrates its 80th anniversary this year, it can look back on being the launchpad for many relationships that started as strong friendships, be it on the playground, in the hallways, or at the matric dance.

Most alumni who became couples were in the same year at school, and say that the time together at Herzlia has given their union an unshakeable foundation. Many now have children in the Herzlia system, so the school is an integral part of their story, from generation to generation.

Matthew Gruzd is chairperson of UHS – the culmination of a long history with the school for him and his wife, Carri (née Sennett), who is also a lay leader at the school.

Describing their relationship as one of “childhood sweethearts”, Gruzd says, “Carri and I met at the start of what was then Standard 6. It was my first year at Herzlia, having moved to Cape Town from Johannesburg. We were in the same year and matriculated in 1996, During our school years, we were the best and worst of friends – typical adolescents, with long nights on the phone. We briefly dated at school, and started dating seriously in our first year of university.

“In spite of our relationship becoming more formal at university, we had loved one another for a lot longer.” They got married in 2005, and live in Cape Town with their two children who are both at Herzlia Weizmann.

Going to school together gave their relationship a strong foundation because, “our friendship allowed us to develop a profound understanding of each other”.

Asked if he thinks the Jewish education they received at Herzlia has given him and his wife a similar outlook, he responds, “There’s no question [about this]. While at school, we had no idea how valuable our Jewish education would be in terms of how we live, where we live, and the life choices we make regarding our family.”

Many people feel Cape Town is too small to meet a Jewish partner, but Gruzd says, “You only need ‘the one’ – be vulnerable, and take a risk. Cape Town has great people. If you do find someone from outside, make sure to bring them back to Cape Town and grow our community.”

The Gruzds say that the most important values in a relationship are, “Always be honest, even when it’s hard, love fiercely, and be kind to each other, and never take today for granted – it’s a gift, and we don’t know what

tomorrow will bring.”

The couple emphasises that, “Herzlia has given us and our children so much. It’s a massive part of our community, and like a loved one, can make us laugh and cry. Herzlia wouldn’t be much without our community and conversely, our community wouldn’t be much without Herzlia.”

Abigail Smith says that she and her now-husband, Ryan Epstein, “Were best friends from the end of Standard 3. Ryan was at Herzlia Highlands, and I was at Herzlia Weizmann. We met on Clifton 4th beach. We connected immediately, and spent the rest of school as close friends.” They both matriculated in 1999.

It was only when they were students that the realised they were in love. “We started dating at university at the end of our second year. We spent so much time together at university and shared and enjoyed doing the same things. One day we realised that we were in love and wanted to be together,” recalls Smith. The couple got married in 2010, and live in Cape Town with their son who is at Herzlia Alon Ashel.

Asked if they feel that going to school together gave their relationship a strong foundation, Smith says, “Definitely. We still laugh until we cry about funny things that happened at school or at *machaneh* [camp]. We didn’t just go to school together – we were best friends at school. Sports tours, Judaica club, projects, school plays. Our childhood and teen years happened together, so we have shared memories and silly private jokes that are still going 20 years on. We both loved school, and loved our time at Herzlia. We took everything we could from our time at school.”

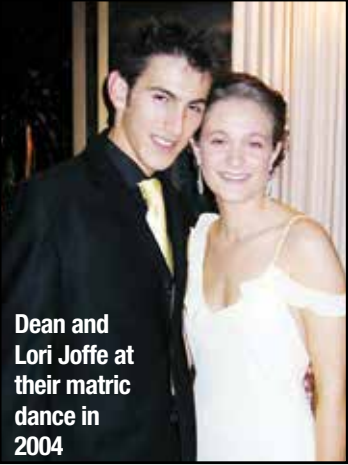
The couple are still close to many of their peers from their Herzlia days. “It’s amazing, we have a massive, beautiful group of friends from school. We are close, and so are our kids.”

Lori Joffe (née Berelowitz) clearly remembers meeting her now-husband, Dean, when they both arrived at Herzlia Middle School. They were friends from then on, and decided to go to their matric dance together in 2004. Just two weeks later, they began their relationship. “We’ve been inseparable ever since,” says Lori. “I would definitely say we were high-school sweethearts.” They were married in 2016, and live in Cape Town with their one-year-old son.

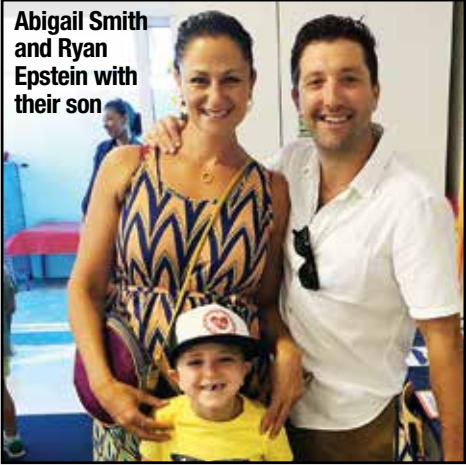
Going to school together “gives you a history of your partner that you might not otherwise have if you met later in life”, they say. They retain a large group of school friends, some of which they have been close to for more than 20 years, and who are g-dparents to their son.

Dean says his time at Herzlia was fundamental to where he is today. “Herzlia helped me to develop my career. The school gave me the ability to learn in my field of audiovisual technology, and invested in that. I wouldn’t be in the position I’m in today if it wasn’t for Herzlia.”

The couple say that to them, the most important values in a relationship are, “Communication, respect, trust, sharing responsibility, helping each other out, and showing gratitude.”



Dean and Lori Joffe at their matric dance in 2004



Abigail Smith and Ryan Epstein with their son



Matthew and Carri Gruzd with their children



# 5780 – a year of two halves

STEVEN GRUZD

Historians use the term BCE (Before the Common Era) for events preceding the birth of Jesus, and CE (the Common Era) for the last 2020 years. Looking back at the Jewish Year 5780, it too divides into BCE (Before the COVID-19 Epidemic) and CE (in the COVID-19 Epidemic).

To remember what happened since last Rosh Hashanah, I scrolled through the *SA Jewish Report's* online archives. It was like travelling in a time machine to a forgotten era. The headlines were dominated by rising online antisemitism, the second and third Israeli elections, and the indictment of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and the arrival of Lana Marks, the American Ambassador to South Africa (and designer of extremely expensive handbags). The newspaper celebrated the Springboks' Rugby World Cup triumph in Tokyo, the annual Shabbos Project (the world's newest Chag), and the failed attempt to get the University of Cape Town to cut ties with Israel. The only masks in sight were for Purim.

One silver lining was that the pandemic resulted in the hateful annual 'Israeli Apartheid Week' being cancelled.

We heard from ex-South Africans affected by the bushfires that devastated Australia. Other former-South Africans were worried about a possible win for Jeremy Corbin's Labour in the United Kingdom elections in December, but he was beaten by Boris Johnson's Conservatives. The South African Embassy in Israel remains operational, but has had no ambassador since May 2018. So it's a downgrade without a downgrade.

Jewish Members of Parliament weighed in on the high-profile resignations from the Democratic Alliance. Israel faced barrages of Hamas rockets, yet again, from Gaza. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions South Africa (BDS-SA) rebranded itself as 'Africa4Palestine' amid swirling rumours of scandals. In January, United States President Donald Trump's 'Deal of the Century' peace plan for the Middle East was unveiled. It was largely welcomed by the Jewish world, but roundly condemned by pro-Palestinian groups, including the South African government.

Then, slowly, stories about the novel coronavirus that began in Wuhan, China started appearing in the paper from mid-February. We read about the ordeals of Jewish South Africans on their travels, stranded in China and Italy. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies showed solidarity with the Chinese community that had been the subject of xenophobic words and deeds. Israel was one of the first countries to introduce lockdowns and quarantine, and was working on a vaccine.

South Africa registered its first COVID-19 case in early March, and the first infections in the Jewish community soon surfaced. Jewish schools closed their doors, first in Cape Town and then in Johannesburg, as did old aged homes. The painful decision to shut down shuls – probably for the first time ever in this country – was taken in mid-March. The country went into a five-week total lockdown. One silver lining was that the pandemic resulted in the hateful annual 'Israeli Apartheid Week' being cancelled.

The trickle of COVID-19 stories became a

tsunami. Families could not celebrate Pesach together, and Jewish health professionals were on the front line. Professor Barry Schoub and Dr Anton Meyberg became household names as they advised the community how to avoid infection. Communal commemoration of the *Yomim – Yom HaShoah, Yom HaZikaron, Yom Ha'Atzmaut, and Yom Yerushalayim* – went online. So did brisses, barmitzvahs, and weddings. We all had to learn to live with the 'new abnormal'.

The *SA Jewish Report* broadcast over 40 online events, from food and fashion to emigration and epidemics, with thousands tuning in from around the world. The paper tackled the pandemic from every angle

imaginable. It brought us many remarkable stories of Jewish organisations and individuals helping those around them in these torrid times. Funding became strained for Jewish communal bodies.

There were non-COVID-19 stories too, of course. The Jewish Community Survey of South Africa, released in April by the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town, showed that South Africa's Jewish population is just 52 300. It has declined 20% over the last 20 years.

Israel was finally able to cobble together a unity government in May, avoiding a fourth election. In June, ISIS-linked

rebels increased their violent attacks in Mozambique. In July, Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng was under attack for pro-Israel statements. In August, the United Arab Emirates became only the third Arab country to establish diplomatic relations with Israel. The first El Al flight to Abu Dhabi took off and landed safely (piloted by South African-born Tal Becker).

During the year, prominent Jewish figures who passed away included Sir Donald Gordon, Ben Turok, Denis Goldberg, and Sol Kerzner.

Let's hope 5781 is a better year for everyone, and that we can pass into ACE – After the COVID Era.

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# Elul goggles give us 2020 vision



## SCHOOL SAVY

Dani Sack

It's official – I'm finished my second set of prelims. I can now focus on preparing for arguably the most important exams of my life – finals. It's no coincidence that this preparation begins in the month of Elul.

Elul is centred on new beginnings as it is in this month that we prepare ourselves spiritually for the Jewish new year. We use Elul to introspect, change our negative habits, and better ourselves. For some, this is a physical change – doing more exercise, eating healthier – and for others, it's spiritual – reading a psalm of Tehillim each day or introducing Torah study into their schedule. Whichever way you choose to embrace it, the month of Elul is shrouded in heightened awareness of G-d.

This month, I find myself contemplating my actions more extensively, watching my language, and trying to strengthen my spiritual connection to G-d. I have learned many lessons from the lockdown, and it has brought deeper meaning to so many issues, that I feel as though this Elul, I'm putting on a very different set of 'Elul-vision goggles'.

I drew the correlation between my final examinations and Elul last Sunday. While on a family outing (because I can attend those now), I checked my emails to find I had been accepted into a seminary in Israel. As I notified my friends and family, the impact of this moment dawned on me. Here I was, during the grace period between prelims and finals, getting an email that would kickstart my reality beyond

high school, during the month that signifies new beginnings – Elul.

For most of my life, Elul has just been ... Elul. It's the lead-up to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and a brief holiday from school. This year, Elul is much more. Due to COVID-19, I'm unable to spend Rosh Hashanah with my family. I doubt I'll be able to attend shul on Yom Kippur. My school holiday isn't really a holiday, it's study leave. This year, everything is different.

The secular year 2020 has certainly been different. But 5780, the Jewish year, is coming to a close. I could reminisce about last year's Rosh Hashanah, when I stuffed my face with my mother's delicious food and *koched* with my cousins. I could wallow in the sadness that I won't be able to do that this year.

However, I'm choosing to put on my "upgraded" Elul goggles. At the beginning of lockdown, I could see Hashem's hand in all of this. As the months have gone by, that has faded. During this month and in the months to come, I'm going to try keep that Elul perspective and recognise Hashem in the madness.

Because even in the midst of a pandemic, I got an email saying that I had been accepted to live in Israel for a year and study Torah. Even in the midst of a pandemic, I will (please G-d) matriculate. Especially in the midst of a pandemic, we should all put on those upgraded goggles and count our blessings. Hashem has given us Elul so that we can better ourselves and seal our future in the Book of Life. So do that! And while you're at it, please pray for the class of 2020 – we're going to need it.

• *Dani Sack is a Grade 12 pupil at Yeshiva College.*

A column of Yad Aharon & Michael

## K'siva ve Chassima Tova!

In preparation for this year's Rosh Hashanah Appeal, the clarity with which I saw "Yad Hashem" (the Hand of Hashem) was indescribably awesome and humbling!

The Almighty created a world which has all the necessary resources to feed every mouth and, in His infinite wisdom, He set up a system whereby Agents of Change – in whose hands the poor man's portion has been deposited for safekeeping – are responsible to share with those who need. With well over 660 families relying on us to put food on their tables over the upcoming High Holy Days, Yad Aharon & Michael's pivotal role to alleviate hunger is undisputed.

Our renowned hampers overflow with all the traditional *yom tov* foods, with fresh produce; proteins and groceries in abundance – everything necessary to provide our families with festive meals for the entire duration of *yom tov*, and the sweetness of apples dipped in honey will set the tone for the year ahead.



Alice Friedman

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*This column is paid for by Yad Aharon & Michael Food Fund*

## Yeshiva's new primary school principal

Following a year-long search, Dinah Unterslak has been appointed as the permanent principal of the Yeshiva College Primary School. Unterslak is a speech therapist by training who has worked in both mainstream and remedial environments, and

was the launching director of Yeshiva's YES Centre. In January this year, she took over as acting principal. The school's directors wish her "much hatzlacha and brocha in this new position, and have every confidence she will take the school to new heights".

Dina Unterslak



Lisa Hack and Rabbi Julia Margolis

## Beit Luria celebrates first birthday

Johannesburg's youngest progressive shul, Beit Luria, celebrated its first birthday with Rabbi Julia Margolis and the congregation via Zoom on Sunday 6 September.

The shul's cantors, Tulla Eckhart and Brian Joffe, provided song while Rabbi Emma Gottlieb from Temple Israel Cape Town offered a blessing for the shul.

Rabbi Hillel Cohen, who brought the shul's Torah scroll from California last year, said a few words, along with SA Union for Progressive Judaism (SAUPJ) national chairperson, Greg Flash, long-time congregant, Madeleine Hicklin, and SAUPJ honorary life president Steven Lurie, after whom the shul is named.

## Letters

### RABBI BOMBACH'S APPROACH TO EDUCATION IS VISIONARY

*Kol hakavod* to Rabbi Menachem Bombach, whose visionary actions are highlighted in a recent edition of the *SA Jewish Report* (28 August 2020).

He grew up in Mea Shearim, but obviously, with great difficulty, extended his education beyond the narrow range he experienced in his Haredi environment.

He "made it his life's work to help other Hasidim get a more well-rounded education to benefit them and Israel as whole".

Coming at the end of South Africa's Women's Month, it was shocking to read that less than 7% of Haredi women have a "full secondary school matriculation certificate", whereas at his schools, boys and girls cover the entire official Israel matric syllabus.

Here is a rabbi who is working towards the coming of Mashiach, encouraging the development of "the moderate middle of each community to work together to preserve the community ... deepen our values and identity, while at the same time becoming a part of the world". – **Edna Freinkel, Johannesburg**

### LOOKING FOR LINKUVA JEWS

My name is Rolandas Pupinis and live in Linkuva town in Lithuania. I've made contact with some descendants of Linkuva Jewish families who emigrated to South Africa before the Second or even the First World War broke out.

Do you have any information about Linkuva Jews, especially those who "survived" or perished in Shoah? We are going to have a commemoration service on 23 September 2020 in Linkuva, and plan to read the names and stories of Linkuva Jews who once lived in the town.

If you have any information that would help us, I would be very grateful. Please contact me on [rolandas.pupinis@gmail.com](mailto:rolandas.pupinis@gmail.com). – **Rolandas Pupinis, Lithuania**

### JOURNALIST'S BIAS SHOWS IGNORANCE AND INDOCTRINATION

I don't know whether Suraya Dadoo's opinions are based on personal experience of Palestine/Israel. Her arguments make me suspect indoctrination. I worked in Israel from 1954 to 1958, and I'm well acquainted with its past and present. I worked within sight of Gaza City for about two and a half years. Our water supply was sabotaged, our transport attacked, we had to be armed at all times, and could travel south of Beer Sheba only in military convoy. Not far from where we worked, at a place appropriately called Maaleh Acrabim (Hill of Scorpions), a busload of Israeli civilians was ambushed and massacred.

Before coming to Israel, I lived in South Africa and witnessed the implementation of apartheid. Nothing remotely like it existed in Israel. There quite simply was no official colour discrimination either

at parliamentary level or at any other official institutions, be they hospitals, the judiciary, army, police, or elsewhere. I have visited Israel since on a number of occasions, and the sole evidence of discrimination I have seen has been forced on the country to protect it against terrorist attacks.

Allow me to provide some history, considering that Ms Dadoo refers to "occupied territories". Jews settled in Canaan about 3 300 years ago. In spite of many foreign defeats and population displacements, there was always a resident Jewish farming community for the simple reason that the occupying armies had to be fed. For more than 1 000 years, there were Jewish kingdoms with temples in Jerusalem, something that the present Palestinian administration denies. The Ottomans were in occupation for about four

hundred years.

During the Ottoman years, about 500 000 Arabs left their Middle Eastern countries of Syria, Egypt, and others, and settled in Palestine. This was confirmed by Arab historian Abd Al-Ghani on official Palestinian TV in 2017, saying that by 1917, there was no such thing as a Palestinian people.

Ms Dadoo quotes one Abu-Esneh, who describes the longing of millions of Palestinians to return to Palestine. Has it not crossed their minds that if they and five Arab states hadn't attacked their Jewish neighbours in 1948, they wouldn't be refugees today?

And who would want to see the return of such neighbours who, apart from their hostility, came down from their villages en masse to rob, mutilate, and murder the Israeli wounded? – **Don Krausz, Johannesburg**



Situated in Linksfield, King David Primary School is an Independent Jewish Day School, from Grade 4 to Grade 7

**The School invites applications for the following position, effective from January 2021.**

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- Be proficient in I.T.

**A Curriculum Vitae and contact information of two references should be emailed to [levinjo@sabje.co.za](mailto:levinjo@sabje.co.za)**

**Closing date for applications: 25 September, 2020**

**The school reserves the right not to make an appointment. Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted.**



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# Reframe our experience

Remember the time when we left Egypt because G-d saved us with all those plagues? Back then we weren't much of a nation, but after leaving in the middle of the night and getting to the Red Sea, it started to look pretty bad for our people.

The Egyptians were really upset about the whole situation and decided to punish us for leaving. They were angry and we could see that they were gaining fast. It was only because of a miracle when the sea in front of us split the way that it did, that we managed to get across to safety.

What followed was equally miraculous. The Ten Commandments were given in what could only be described as a spectacular event. In the meantime, there were clouds to protect us from the elements, water was provided, and food fell from the sky each day just when we needed it. Even if you don't consider where we had just come from, it was quite something.

And then, for whatever reason, we started to complain. We claimed that we were bored, and that the menu was repetitive. We remembered the "fleshpots" in Egypt, and we complained even more. We seemed to forget just how bad it was. We forgot the pain, the struggles, the cruelty, and just like that we forgot the miracles that had led us to where we were.

It was pretty embarrassing if you think about it.

Almost like it is today when we complain that the shul services over Rosh Hashanah won't be what we would like them to be. The rules are that they cannot be more than two hours, that we have to bring our own *siddurim* and everything else that we need. We cannot sing aloud (not always a bad

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



thing). and we will not be able to congregate.

We seem to forget that we are still in the middle of a global pandemic. It doesn't seem to be relevant that over Pesach, when this all began, there was no shul and no going out. We were not allowed to see family and there was no option at all about prayer services. Shavuot was pretty much the same, as has been every Shabbat and every day since March.

We seem to forget how many people our small community has lost to the disease, and we definitely are not remembering to be grateful. Truth is, it could have been so much worse. Honestly, we need to get a grip. We need to be grateful that shuls are going to be operating for Rosh Hashanah, and even though the situation is far from perfect, it is way better than where we were months ago when we had zero option of attending a shul service.

Instead of lamenting the fact that shul on Rosh Hashanah won't be as we would like it to be, let's rather try and focus on how wonderful it is that we have come this far. And that at least we have some options.

Not everyone will be able to attend services, which means that those who can should rejoice in the privilege of what it means to be part of the community in prayer.

We need to reframe the experience. Be grateful for the privilege. And quit complaining. Honestly. It's actually embarrassing.

## A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

### UAE represented at historic WJC forum



**ABOVE BOARD**  
Shaun Zagnoev

South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director Wendy Kahn participated in the World Jewish Congress (WJC) National Community Directors' Forum last Thursday, giving thanks to guest speaker Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis. Apart from the unavoidable fact that this year's event took place online, it was also unique in that a new country was represented on the WJC. That country, as you may have guessed, is the United Arab Emirates. It was an emotional moment when Ross Kriel, the leader of the small Jewish community in Dubai, addressed the gathering. The fact that he and his wife, Ellie, (who runs a successful kosher catering service in a city where Jews were not welcome for many years), as well as Rabbi Mirvis himself, are all products of our own community, made the occasion even more meaningful from a South African Jewish point of view.

#### Heritage Month

September is Heritage Month, when South Africans are encouraged to celebrate their culture and traditions while also celebrating what all South Africa's communities contribute to the national identity. One of the institutions established to safeguard and promote these values is the Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Commission. The SAJBD has had a strong connection with this body ever since its establishment, beginning with the appointment of our immediate past president, Marlene Bethlehem, as deputy chairperson when it was first constituted in 2003. In all, Marlene served on the commission as a representative of the Jewish community for two five-year terms.

At the end of August, Wendy Kahn and Gauteng

Council member Reeve Forman participated in a seminar with the commission on the roles and challenges faced by women in cultural, religious, and language sectors. Kahn made a speech on behalf of the Jewish community in which she emphasised how there had been significant change in terms of the leadership of women in South African Jewry over the past decade. It's encouraging to note that in both the recent Gauteng and Cape Council elections, 50% of the elected leadership is women.

Heritage Month is an opportune moment to reflect on our own history and culture. Over time, the SAJBD's core mission of representing the community and upholding Jewish civil rights has been expanded to incorporate various activities to preserve and promote this legacy, particularly in the local context. One of these is our journal, *Jewish Affairs*, which for nearly 80 years has served as the community's leading Jewish historical, cultural, and current affairs journal. The latest issue, the fifth to appear in the new online format, is now out and freely accessible, along with back issues going back to 2009, at <https://www.sajbd.org/jewish-affairs>. *Jewish Affairs* is currently housed on the SAJBD website, but a new standalone *Jewish Affairs* website is in an advanced stage of production. As a way of participating in Heritage Month you can, at no cost, sign on as a subscriber by sending your name and email to [david@sajbd.org](mailto:david@sajbd.org)

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

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

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