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Deputy minister accuses Israel of exploiting pandemic

NICOLA MILTZ

The deputy minister of the department of international relations and cooperation, Alvin Botes, this week accused Israel of “exploiting” the COVID-19 pandemic by escalating and accelerating settlement expansion in the West Bank.

Botes said that with the international community focusing on mitigating the severe effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, “Israel is exploiting the situation to escalate its violation in accelerating its settlement colonisation and annexation schemes”.

Botes was delivering a keynote address to mark the United Nations (UN) International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People in Pretoria on 30 November at an event hosted by the Palestinian Embassy.

He also bemoaned the “radical shift” by Arab nations in recent months to normalise relations with Israel, which he alleged “had fragmented the Arab Peace Initiative”.

He said South Africa would use the little time it had left as an elected member of the UN Security Council to “intensify lobbying”. As chair of the African Union (AU), South Africa would also use its position to try to “ensure that Israel doesn’t acquire an observer seat in the AU”.

Botes told the gathering that South Africans were “unyielding in their solidarity” with Palestine, and he renewed South Africa’s commitment to a just and lasting solution to the “question of Palestine”.

He said the country would continue to work with “like-minded” countries to support international efforts aimed at the establishment of a viable Palestinian state existing side by side in peace with Israel.

The event was attended by a handful of ambassadors and members of the diplomatic corps, as well as Pro-Palestinian supporters and those opposed to Israel.

Botes claimed that Israel this year had “continued to demolish and confiscate Palestinian-owned structures and homes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem” thereby “further

entrenching its military occupation”.

He said new housing units were being built in the occupied West Bank, pointing out that “this marks 2020 as the year for the highest settlement expansion since 2012”.

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation, told the *SA Jewish Report* that Botes continued his “roadshow of international partisanship, siding with anti-democratic governments along the way while pursuing his tired and distorted anti-Israel worldview”.

“South Africa has a dubious

foreign policy record,” Polovin said, “supporting dictators and human-rights abusers, and instead of fixing it and gaining international support, Botes dilutes South Africa’s relevance in foreign affairs and against the changing landscape of the Middle East.”

Botes lamented the fact that the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Sudan had taken steps to normalise relations with Israel.

“The prevailing formula as outlined by the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative was that normalisation would be granted to Israel only in return for making

meaningful political compromises vis-à-vis the Palestinians,” he said.

“These accords replace the equation of ‘peace for land’ with the Netanyahu-coined ‘peace for peace’ approach, in which normalisation is given almost unconditionally,” he said.

“Most remarkable, these diplomatic gifts were lavished on Israel without negotiating anything tangible in return for the Palestinians,” Botes told the audience.

Polovin said South Africa’s “knee-jerk approach to anti-Israelism” and its “copy-paste support” for the Palestinians was at the expense of important matters on the African continent and the world stage.

“Our country should celebrate agreements such as Israel’s normalisation deal with Sudan that will benefit this continent’s people on the path towards democracy and economic growth. South Africa should be at the forefront of support for African states trying to improve their human-rights record and do so on the basis of improved economic ties, investment, bilateral relations, and joint projects. Pretoria should take side with Africans, and work towards the reduction of suffering of the people of Africa instead of using its international voice solely to bash Israel.”

Botes criticised Israel for continuing to violate UN Security Council resolutions and international law, while the Palestinian people continued to suffer.

“This denial of their most basic of rights should be an affront to the

Continued on page 5>>

Absa Jewish Achiever Award winners, Professors Barry Schoub and Mervyn Mer, celebrate after the virtual ceremony.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

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Gantz backs bill to dissolve Israeli parliament

Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz said on 1 December that his party would back a bill crafted by the opposition in parliament to dissolve the government, probably sending Israel to its fourth election in two years.

The votes from Gantz's Blue and White party would provide the needed votes for the measure to pass in the Knesset.

Gantz and Benjamin Netanyahu, the prime minister, formed a unity government earlier this



Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz

Photo: David Cohen/Flash90

year by agreeing to rotate the premiership after 18 months, but the two have been at odds from the outset of the partnership. Their latest logjam involves a two-year national budget that both said they would finance in their coalition agreement. But Netanyahu's Likud party has agreed to pass only a one-year budget; the two-year agreement would set in motion Gantz's transition to power next year.

Gantz blamed Netanyahu for the situation. "Netanyahu has decided to dissolve the government and drag Israel into an election" by refusing to pass the budget, Gantz said, according to *Haaretz*.

Gantz recently launched a commission to investigate a corruption scandal known as the "Submarine Affair", which involves several people close to Netanyahu, further eroding their relationship.

"All of this is happening for a single reason ... Netanyahu is working only to save himself from his trial," Gantz said on Tuesday, referring to the other scandals for which Netanyahu was indicted last year.

Gantz left open the possibility of passing the budget by its 23 December deadline and avoiding an election that would take place next year.

His powerful coalition of parties splintered when Gantz joined forces with Netanyahu. Recent polling projects 31 Knesset seats for Likud, 21 for Naftali Bennet's right-wing Yamina party, 17 for Yair Lapid's centrist Yesh Atid, 11 for the predominantly Arab Joint List group of parties, and nine for Blue and White.



'Homeland' creators set sights on Englander series

Showtime hopes it has found its next *Homeland* in the form of a Nathan Englander adaptation.

The network has *Homeland* co-creators Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa producing Englander's 2017 novel *Dinner at the Center of the Earth* into a series, *Deadline* reports.

The book centres on a Prisoner Z, who is being held at a secret prison site in Israel's Negev Desert. He is an Israeli spy who betrayed his native country to atone for actions that led to the death of innocent individuals, and perhaps break the cycle of violence in the region.

Gordon and Gansa have worked together on numerous shows, including *24*, and converted the hit Israeli series *Prisoners of War* into *Homeland* for American audiences. That show earned the pair two Emmys, including for best drama series.

Englander, who grew up Orthodox and usually writes on Jewish themes (he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency last year that everything down to "the weather" in his books is Jewish), has published five acclaimed books. His latest, *Kaddish.com*, involves a haredi Orthodox man who leaves his religious community and then returns to it.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

Israel Philharmonic streaming Hans Zimmer Channukah

The Israel Philharmonic Foundation is streaming a pre-Channukah concert featuring music by Hans Zimmer, one of Hollywood's most prolific score composers.

The free event, which streams on 6 December, will feature discussions with Zimmer, who is Jewish, and the Israeli orchestra's director, Lahav Shani. The group will perform music from *The Prince of Egypt*, *The Lion King*, and the thriller *Inception*, just a few of the more than 150 films Zimmer has worked on, most of them blockbusters.

Zimmer, 63, received an award from the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra in 2014, and is described in the event's news release as a "close friend of the orchestra".

He didn't publicly discuss his Jewish identity until an appearance at the 1999 Berlin Film Festival. His mother, who used to visit Israel every year, escaped Germany in 1939. But as he said in 2014, "Quite honestly, I think my parents were always wary of me telling the neighbours."

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
18:15	19:25	Johannesburg
19:15	20:25	Cape Town
18:15	19:23	Durban
18:15	19:40	Bloemfontein
18:15	19:57	Port Elizabeth
18:15	19:44	East London

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The giant menorah in Sandton

Giant menorah helps dispel pandemic darkness

As Channukah starts next Thursday, 10 December, Chabad House will be lighting its annual giant menorah each night of the festival from 18:30 outside the Rivonia entrance of Sandton City.

While the scope of the ceremony will be limited amid the ongoing coronavirus emergency, the community is welcome to join the lighting.

On the night, there will also be a hybrid live and virtual event featuring local and international speakers and entertainers. It will also be broadcast live via Zoom and Facebook.

"This year's lighting is done with the recognition of the crucial need for a message

of hope during what for many is a very difficult time," says Rabbi Ari Kievman of Chabad House. "Chabad is also distributing thousands of menorahs, candles, and Channukah-at-home kits to those celebrating at home.

"The menorah serves as a symbol of light and hope for us today amidst the darkness of the pandemic, as it did for generations before us," says Kievman, who organised the event.

"The flames of the menorah shine out into the night, reminding us that even when confronted with much darkness, a tiny light can dispel it all. Another act of goodness and kindness, another act of light, can make all the difference."

Torah Thought

Good versus evil

This week the dreaded encounter between Jacob and Esau finally materialises. After two decades, the twin brothers who are anything but identical square up. Jacob, who fled the wrath of Esau as a young man, is returning home with a large family and much wealth. Esau is fast approaching with 400 desperados armed to the teeth. Will it be all-out war, or will they make peace? Jacob prepares for all eventualities, and sends a message to his hostile brother.

"Im lavan garti. [I have sojourned with Lavan]." Rashi interprets the message of Jacob to mean that though he had lived with a notorious trickster for all this time, he had "not learned from his evil ways" and remained a righteous Jew committed to the G-dly way of life.

But wasn't this boastful of Jacob? The same man who will soon

be praying for deliverance and say *kotointi*, claiming that he has been humbled by all G-d's kindnesses to him, now seems to be pointing proudly to his piety, telling Esau how religious he has been?

The Chofetz Chaim offers a novel interpretation. He explains that Jacob's words shouldn't be understood as a boast but rather as a lament. "I sojourned with Lavan, but didn't learn from his evil ways" means that Jacob didn't learn from the way Lavan did evil. How did Lavan do evil? Enthusiastically! With vim and vigour! His wicked ways were undertaken with a passion and energy, and Jacob was bemoaning the fact that his own good deeds weren't performed as passionately as Lavan's evil deeds.

If the good guys were as incentivised as the bad guys, crime would be dramatically reduced. If the police and justice systems of the world operated with the same commitment and drive as the drug lords and hijacking syndicates, we would all be better off. The trouble is that the forces of evil are enthusiastic and motivated, while the forces of good depend on public servants who are overworked and underpaid.

Nikita Khrushchev was once addressing a large

public meeting in Russia during the anti-Stalinist period. He was blasting Stalin's cruel and unforgivable atrocities, when a voice in the crowd suddenly spoke up and asked, "If Stalin was such a villain, why didn't you do anything about it then?"

"Who said that?!" thundered Khrushchev. There was absolute silence in the hall. Not a sound, not a movement. People froze in fear.

"Now you understand why I didn't do anything," was Khrushchev's convincing answer.

This interesting interpretation of Jacob's lament reminds us that the voice of morality must be at least as loud as the voice of evil. Too often, the voice of justice is soft and still while the voice of corruption and degeneracy is loud and bombastic.

Who will amplify the sweet, silent sound of goodness?

Let's strive to become as passionate and assertive for the cause of goodness and G-dliness as the other side is for evil and injustice. The world will be better balanced, much nicer, and a lot safer.

Rabbi Yossy Goldman, Sydenham Shul



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Beth Din retracts ruling absolving East London rabbi



The present day East London Shul

TALI FEINBERG

Back in September 2019, the Beth Din found Rabbi Chanoch Galperin innocent of an allegation by the East London Chevrah Kadisha (ELCK) that he had forged the will of the late Israel Bayer to divert funds from Bayer's estate originally intended for charity.

The Beth Din has now formally withdrawn and set aside this ruling, and the rabbi has formally admitted that his wife wrote the will, which would disqualify him from benefitting from it unless he is permitted to by an order of court.

The East London community is in a state of limbo as the rabbi continues to occupy the rabbinical home and fight the case related to the disputed will in the Grahamstown High Court.

In a plea to the court dated 23 November 2020, Galperin said he denied that the handwriting on the will in question was his, and admitted that it was that of his spouse, Sara Galperin. He admitted that the Wills Act "disqualifies the spouse of a person who has written out a portion of a will in his or own handwriting", but asks that the court declare him competent to be the executor of the estate and to benefit from it.

The previous version of Bayer's will instructed that one third of his estate go to the ELCK, but a later handwritten will in the rabbi's possession allocates this same third of the estate to him. After a *Din Torah* (hearing) in September 2019, the Beth Din found the rabbi innocent.

According to the ELCK, during those proceedings, the rabbi refused to inform it who wrote the will when

questioned.

According to the Beth Din's judgement, the rabbi then privately informed the dayanim who had written the will. The Beth Din didn't reveal this information to the ELCK before it made its judgement.

"The respondent [rabbi] denies having written the handwritten portion of the third and final will ... The respondent informed the Beth Din privately who had written the will. This person was questioned on this matter, they confirmed that they did so, and provided the Beth Din with a sample of their handwriting," says the judgement.

In an affidavit deposed on 1 October 2020, ELCK co-president Louis Robinson said that this handwritten evidence was obtained outside of the formal proceedings. The ELCK was

benefitting although he was disqualified without a court order. However, the rabbi told the *SA Jewish Report* that "Halachically, it's perfectly fine for anyone to write a will for anyone."

The *SA Jewish Report* sent questions to Beth Din Dayanim Rabbi Gidon Fox and Rabbi Yoel Smith about this issue. Fox said, "It would be inappropriate and probably legally impermissible for the Beth Din to disclose information which is of a private and confidential nature and which was raised in arbitration before it. Furthermore, we are aware that these very issues have been brought before the high court and the Beth Din wouldn't want to compromise these proceedings by disclosing any private information which was brought to it before at the arbitration. The Beth Din hasn't received the permission of the



The East London Shul from 1923 to 1991

never made aware of the evidence nor asked to comment on it. The first the ELCK heard of it was in the Beth Din's final judgement.

Robinson alleged that the Beth Din's decision not to take the Wills Act into account may have resulted in the rabbi

parties to make any disclosures, and the Beth Din is accordingly obliged to regard this information as confidential and private."

But the advocate representing the ELCK, Stanley Pincus SC, said, "The Beth Din was asked to investigate all

DER EIBISHTER ZOL

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aspects of the will, including who wrote it, and failure to disclose the information given to it could have resulted in the rabbi benefitting from the will when he was automatically disqualified without having first obtained a court order to do so."

On 2 November 2020, the Beth Din's attorney, Steven Weinberg at Moss Cohen & Partners, stated that the Beth Din's instructions were that "the ruling which it issued in relation to the last will and testament of Mr Israel Bayer and which is the subject of the review proceedings has been recalled and set aside".

The letter said this was pending the finalisation of a new hearing in respect of new evidence that has arisen from both sides, and that high court applications in respect of the ruling "are misplaced and premature inasmuch as the ruling has been recalled".

It went on to say that the Beth Din would be pleased if a settlement could be reached, and it would be happy to assist with further mediation. If mediation and settlement couldn't be achieved, the Beth Din suggested "that all of the disputes in this matter be referred to an arbitration panel to be agreed upon between the parties for a final determination". The Beth Din offered to provide this arbitration panel, and to allow each side to "agree on the arbitrators and the rules".

"The ELCK was given the opportunity to appeal after the ruling, but it refused to come," Galperin told the *SA Jewish Report*. However, Pincus said that the ELCK "tendered to go back to the Beth Din if certain conditions were met [new dayanim and legal representation amongst other points], but the rabbi refused to do so because the issue relating to the disputed will had been

determined by the Beth Din as per their judgement". Pincus went on to say, "Only a court can order that the rabbi be qualified to benefit from the will, in light of the rabbi's admission that his wife wrote out the will. This issue and other issues relating to the disputed will cannot and should not be determined in arbitration proceedings."

The ELCK continues to fight the case in the Grahamstown High Court, "the main issues being whether the rabbi forged the deceased signature on the disputed will, whether the witnesses signed the disputed will in the presence of the deceased, and whether the court will order that the rabbi be allowed to benefit, notwithstanding that he is automatically disqualified in terms of the Wills Act," said Pincus.

With the relationship between the ELCK and the rabbi irreparably broken down, and the rabbi refusing to vacate the rabbinical home as per the terms of his dismissal, the community is no longer functioning.

The rabbi was dismissed from his position by the East London Hebrew Congregation after a disciplinary hearing in February this year.

"It has not had services for over a year. This has destroyed the community," says Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, the spiritual leader of the Small Jewish Communities Association, who has tried to help out where he can.

"People can't say kaddish, and they didn't have *yom tov* services. Before this dispute, this was a small but fully functioning community, which is why it had a rabbi. They would have Shabbat and shiurim – they were carrying on. But now there is no activity whatsoever." He hopes to help the community rebuild itself slowly as it moves forward.

JAWITZ

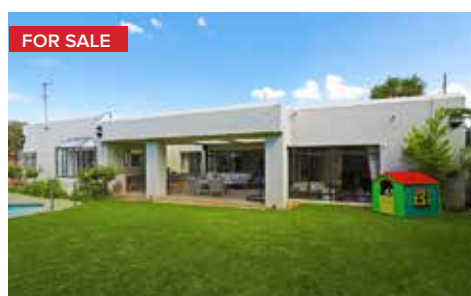
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Achiever Awards reimaged

JORDAN MOSHE

It's official: not even a pandemic can stop the South African Jewish community from paying tribute to the heroes in its midst.

Against a background of social distancing and sanitisation, thousands came together last Sunday for the most iconic iteration of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards in its 22-year history.

Instead of gathering in person at a decked-out venue, guests participated in an evening of glamour and fine dining from the comfort of their own home for the first ever online version of the annual awards ceremony.

Other than hundreds of paying and invited guests, between 30 000 and 60 000 people from around the world also watched the spectacular event on YouTube, Facebook, Vimeo, and Zoom.

No effort was spared to ensure that the evening was as enthralling online as it would in person. In the run-up to Sunday night, couriers shuttled staggering numbers of cocktail packs to each individual guest's home, making sure that the annual Achievers magic wasn't lost.

Gin, tonic, and prosecco flowed freely in homes across South Africa as participants prepared to watch a livestream of the awards ceremony, ready to raise a *l'chaim* as they cheered the winners.

As if this wasn't enough, many guests who would otherwise have reserved a table at the live event also had a lavish three-course gourmet kosher meal delivered to their doorstep. Arriving in a sleek cylindrical box, the spread included tantalising entrees, a mouth-watering main course, and even an array of sweet treats to accompany the evening's viewing.

The meals were catered by Maxi Kosher Discount Butchery and styled by Dolores Fouche under the strict supervision of the Johannesburg Beth Din. Added to the food, there were beautiful fabric placemats, napkins, face masks, and even the traditional Achiever *kippa* for participants. Each featured the artwork of renowned South African artist Kim Lieberman.

The evening began with an exclusive red-carpet event presented by Dina Diamond, with various nominees joining her virtually to chat before the ceremony got underway. Excitement mounted as the red carpet concluded at 18:00 when the Awards ceremony began.

"For the past 21 years, we have gathered in hotel boardrooms and convention centres to celebrate the remarkable and disproportionate contribution made by the Jewish community to the development of post-apartheid South Africa," said Howard Sackstein, chairperson of the *SA Jewish Report* and the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.

"When we started planning tonight's event more than a year ago, we

didn't expect to be playing hide and seek with a virus. We didn't predict that the world would be gripped in the vice of a worldwide pandemic that has so sadly claimed the lives of so many in our community.

"This year, we cannot just recognise nine winners. We as the board of the *SA Jewish Report* feel the need to pay tribute to

turned cheese aficionado Jody Scheckter, who received the Art, Science, Sports and Culture Award; as well as Wendy Fisher, acclaimed sculptor and philanthropic powerhouse, who took the Humanitarian Award in honour of the late Chief Rabbi, Cyril Harris.

Title sponsor Absa's award categories recognised the accomplishments of renowned lawyer Professor Michael Katz with the Absa Business Icon Award. Professor Mervyn Mer, the principal specialist and head of intensive-care at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital received the timely Absa Professional Excellence in the Time of Covid Award, and Discovery's Dr Jonathan Broomberg walked away with the Absa Business Leadership in the Time of Covid Award.

The Europcar Women in Leadership Award went to Pick n Pay group's Suzanne Ackerman-Berman, and Professor Barry Schoub, retired expert in vaccinology and virology, was recognised for his contribution to humanity with the Kia Community Service Award.

Ninety-eight-year-old Sir Sydney Kentridge, whose lifetime in service of the law is nothing short of legendary, received the Lifetime Achievement Award in honour of Helen Suzman for his decades of service. Even Sackstein received a surprise award – the Lawrence and Karen Abrahamson Family Award for his efforts to connect the Jewish community with an array of webinars during the lockdown period.

Not even the annual event's signature entertainment was dispensed with this year. Jewish comedian Gilli Apter kept guests giggling as compere, and the musical performances screened between each presentation were spectacular.

These included the melodies of singer Danielle Bitton and opera aficionado Yudi Cohen, whose performance of *The Prayer* shook the speakers in every home. They were joined by the toe-tapping *yiddishe* music of Caely-Jo, and even international

Jewish-music sensation the Maccabeats.

Completing the line-up of musical magic was Choni G and six-year-old Bibi Shapiro (whose *Avinu Malkeinu* previously took YouTube by storm), and Jonathan Roxmouth of *Phantom of the Opera* fame.

In true Achiever Awards style, this once-in-a-lifetime event delivered an evening that not only paid tribute to the heroic personalities among us, but also provided a much-needed dose of positivity and joy.



Dina Diamond



Behind the scenes in the editing room

literally hundreds of South Africans who have been an *ohr lagoyim* [a light unto the nations].

"Tonight, we announce our roll of honour to recognise and pay tribute to the many South Africans who have sacrificed so much for a better South Africa during the pandemic of 2020."

That list was both extensive and illustrious. This year's winning personalities included seasoned entrepreneur Liran Assness, the chief executive of holding company Sekta and recipient of The Kirsh Family Entrepreneur Award; Ferrari icon

Drive-by shooting at home of witness to cop murder

TALI FEINBERG

The quiet of a suburban street in the greater Glenhazel area was broken when a rally of gunshots was fired at the home of a Jewish family at around 21:00 on Monday, 30 November.

"I heard the gunshots, but thankfully I and my family are safe," was all Bradley Goldblatt would say to the *SA Jewish Report* about the incident at his house, adding that he had been advised not to talk to the media at this stage.

Reporting on the incident, News24 journalist Jeff Wicks wrote that Goldblatt is "a key witness in the probe into the murder of Anti-Gang Unit cop Lieutenant Colonel Charl Kinnear".

MyBroadband reported that "Goldblatt is the person who alerted police that location-based services were used to track Kinnear's phone. Goldblatt, who is a former police officer, was an agent of the company ITRACK, which provides security, monitoring, tracking, and tracing services."

A friend of the family, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, "A vehicle shot three times into his driveway, damaging his bakkie, before driving off. It's believed that this was a warning to him, as the bail application of [Zane] Kilian [a suspect in Kinnear's killing] was set to proceed yesterday [Tuesday]. The scene was processed by SAPS [the South African Police Service], who took photographs and collected any evidence left on the scene.

Detectives and all key players were there."

Another friend, speaking on condition of anonymity, said he had arrived at the house five minutes after the shooting. "Family members were there too, and they said that all they saw was the car driving down the road and its tail lights as it went around the corner."

He said Goldblatt was also a private investigator. "He was worried something like this was going to happen, especially after a blog post published personal details about his family. He has had two armed guards stationed at his home for the last while."

Another News24 article on 25 November said Goldblatt was "living in fear".

"I have had vehicles stopping outside my house which bear false registration plates, and then speeding off when confronted by security guards. I have not left home since 20 October due to fear of attack, and I

have not been able to work as various clients have declined my services. I understood that my life was under threat," he said.

Addressing rumours that the shooting was "staged", Goldblatt said he didn't stage it, while an anonymous friend said, "To

believe that he would stage something like that at his own house is going a bit far."

Earlier on the day of the shooting, Goldblatt spoke to Chad Thomas on his *Confidential Brief* show on ChaiFM on the pinging of mobile phones. He said he had assisted with "50 to 60 high-profile arrests", including kidnappings and missing person cases.

A local rabbi who knows the family well



A Facebook profile photo from 2014, when Goldblatt was in the SAPS

said they were shaken by the incident. The family had been advised by the relevant authorities not to speak to the media for their own safety and to avoid compromising the case, and their privacy should be respected at this time.



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Rabbi Goldman passes on the baton at Sydenham Shul

JORDAN MOSHE

S ydenham Shul spiritual leader Rabbi Yossy Goldman will be stepping down from the pulpit after devotedly serving his community for 34 years.

The news was announced in letters from Goldman and the shul executive this week in which the congregation was informed that their beloved rabbi “has chosen to seek out new ventures and make way for a new leader to take Sydenham Shul into the next generation”.

Associate Rabbi Yehuda Stern will gradually assume the role, with Goldman slowly stepping back in a 16-month process which begins on Pesach 2021.

“This decision has taken us many months of thinking, deliberating, debating, and yes, agonising,” wrote Goldman. “In the end, we reached this conclusion for communal and personal reasons.

“I’m extremely excited at the opportunity for personal growth, to explore new horizons, and to be able to apply what I’ve learned with you over the years on a wider stage.”

As of Pesach next year, Goldman will be appointed rabbi emeritus for life of Sydenham Shul. While Stern will assume daily responsibilities from that time, Goldman will remain involved at the shul until Pesach 2022 to ensure a smooth transition.

The shul executive paid tribute to their long-time leader, saying that Goldman and his wife had devoted more than three decades of their lives to their community since joining the shul in September 1986. The couple were praised for bringing honour, dignity, and prestige to the congregation, which is admired and emulated by congregations across South Africa and around the world.

“Rabbi Goldman has been our beloved and esteemed spiritual leader for 34 years. He has married us, Barmitzva’ed us, taught us, inspired us, counselled and supported us, and has seen us through good times and bad.

“During his tenure and under his exceptional leadership, Sydenham Shul became, in the words of the recently lamented Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, ‘one of the great synagogues of the English-speaking world’.”

Goldman and the executive expressed the need for the shul to plan proactively for the future, which is the motivation behind this dramatic shift.

“While I have reinvented myself more than once over the years, a new



Rabbi Yossy Goldman

generation now looms,” Goldman wrote. “If we are to grow the shul and attract younger families, we will need new approaches, fresh ideas, and, indeed, new blood.”

The executive made similar points. “The shul executive and both rabbis have spent many hours in strategy meetings about the long-term way forward for the shul, not least of all in light of the changes in the world this year.

“We have a new generation with new styles, mores, likes, and dislikes. It’s a new world with new realities. We’re not quite sure yet where the new order will take us, but COVID-19 has definitely hastened the inevitable changes in our world.”

The change will also give Goldman more time to spend with his family and pursue other opportunities including overseas speaking engagements and time to write.

However, Goldman stressed that he wasn’t simply retiring to the coast to take up fishing. “I’m starting a new chapter but not closing the book,” he told the *SA Jewish Report*. “I don’t believe in retirement, and this is definitely a transition more than anything.

“I won’t be taking up golf, but will

still be an active rabbi, though I hope to broaden my horizons and reach a broader audience without losing touch with my own.”

In spite of several unknowns,

Goldman said that the change had the potential to bring about positive growth for the shul.

“I’m 70 years old, thank G-d, I’m healthy and I could easily carry on like this indefinitely,” he said. “However, I cannot simply go with the flow. I’ve seen too many shuls fail to plan their futures and watch as their congregations decline. I would hate to preside over a dying congregation.

“Right now, our shul is a dynamic hub of activity, and I want to keep it that way.”

Goldman expressed confidence in Stern’s abilities, saying that his taking over of daily responsibilities would free him up to do the things he’s often wanted to but never had the time for.

“I’m not emigrating or leaving the shul,” he stressed. “I look forward to being around and making myself available to people who want me present at their milestones, rites or who need advice. I’ll still be giving my shiurim, and will take the pulpit from time to time.

“I look forward to having a meaningful presence at the shul for some time yet.”

Stern praised Goldman’s dedication to the shul, saying he looked forward to perpetuating the senior rabbi’s vision.

“I’ve worked with Rav Goldman for 13 years and consider him a mentor who has taught me a lot in the world of rabbinic and communal affairs,” he said.

“He has inspired me.

“My wife, Estee, and I are excited to continue the work he has done in the community for the past 34 years.”

Chairman Stanley Seeff, who has served the shul for many years, credited Goldman for his invaluable contribution to the shul.

“I’ve seen a number of rabbis over the years, but Rabbi Goldman is a unique individual,” he said. “I’ve worked really closely with him, and he has created a solid foundation on which the future of the shul can be built under Rabbi Stern.

“He has so much to offer the broader community and the world. He’s really a young 70.”

Messages of praise and support from rabbis and congregants have poured in since the announcement was made.

“You have set the bar for the rabbinate, not only for this country but for rabbonim worldwide,” Linksfield Shul’s Rabbi Levi Avtzon wrote to Goldman. “I’ll always appreciate the guidance you offered me, the opportunities at your shul, and your consistent support.”

A congregant wrote, “I have regarded you for so many years as a teacher, mentor, guide, and friend and I know I will miss your presence immensely. In my view [and I’m not alone], you have lifted Sydenham Shul to great heights, and you deserve all the plaudits you have received from so many quarters in no small measure.”

Deputy minister accuses Israel of exploiting pandemic

>>Continued from page 1

conscience of the world and a spur to action,” he said. He called on the nations of the world to engage in constructive acts of solidarity, saying, “It’s time for concrete measures to be enacted.”

He said as South Africa was nearing the end of its tenure on the security council, it wouldn’t miss the opportunity to intensify lobbying to “strengthen international law, pass critical resolutions, and craft new conversations around the Palestinian struggle”.

South Africa’s role in the AU was conceivably more crucial, Botes said, “as Israel is vociferously lobbying various African states to support its bid for observer status”.

“An emboldened South Africa in the AU is more important than ever to ensure that Israel doesn’t acquire an observer seat in the AU,” he said.

Botes said there was a “growing and justifiable sense” that certain African and Arab nations no longer saw the liberation of Palestine as a common objective.

“Israel with the support of America has driven a wedge between these countries,” he said. “If Israel continues

to score political victories while facing little resistance, it could also eventually dominate Africa.” He pointed out that the issue of solidarity with Palestine and “the pressing need to block Israeli scourges in Africa” were intrinsically linked.

He called for added pressure to be placed on Israel, calling for the creation of an Africa-wide solidarity network.

South Africa, he said, called on the newly-elected American leadership and the international community “to open the door to a different diplomacy approach” in resolving the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

Polovin said the days of pressuring Israel to negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organisation leadership, “who aren’t interested in dialogue and reject all peace efforts by Israel”, have been surpassed by events in the Middle East.

“We encourage South African government policy makers to update their focus towards the changing world, and implore Pretoria to play an active role in pursuing peace as opposed to hostility,” he said.

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Achieving miracles as a community

We have such a thirst for joy and a little glamour – now more than ever. This was evident in the vast number of people who tuned in to watch the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards (JAA) on Sunday night. A little bit of basking in the success of people within our community has been a wonderful tonic for us all.

I loved being swept away by the incredible achievements of people who have put the lives of others before their own this year.

What an astonishing way to manoeuvre ourselves along the last few exhausting steps down the year's path towards the holiday season! What an incredible feat to have successfully created an event like we did when it seemed an impossible task just months ago!

I can safely say this, because my contribution to the awards was mostly about the special Achiever magazine that you will find with this week's edition. The real work on the event was done by Howard Sackstein, Dina Diamond, Dr Dorianne Weil, Felicity Kantor, Jodi Kramer, Engela Schutte, Britt Landsman, Sandy Furman, and Dani Kedar, the inimitable JAA team.

However, I was there at the weekly meeting when the JAA committee pulled rabbits out of a hat and made things happen. Sometimes, I would sit there in awe, wondering if the spectacular ideas they had could actually come to fruition. And they did.

I watched as the Absa representative, JAA folk, and the *SA Jewish Report* team bonded. We all worked side by side, and never once did I hear anyone say, "That's impossible!" or "We can't do that!"

It's amazing how positive thinking and hard work creates miracles.

And, it's the perfect time of the year for such miracles as we are just one week away from the festival of miracles, Channukah, and our last edition of the *SA Jewish Report* for 2020.

Page through our special Absa Jewish Achiever Awards section and magazine to see for yourselves. There is nothing better than reflecting on others' achievements to inspire us to do better.

In that vein, I would like to pay tribute to Rabbi Yossy Goldman, who will be handing over his baton to Rabbi Yehuda Stern.

I have never been a member of his shul, but have had many an opportunity on this newspaper to deal with him, and he has been a consummately professional rabbi and spiritual leader. He is never afraid to voice his opinion and help out wherever possible. This week is a case in point. The person who was meant to write our *Torah Thought* (page 2) let us down at the last minute. So, we asked Rabbi Goldman if he could help. Within an hour or two, he delivered a perfect *Torah Thought*, which is in the newspaper. You have no idea how many times this has happened.

While his future is wide open, I am sure we – and others around the world – are going to continue to be inspired by his Torah and other musings for many years to come. See page 5.

As we move towards the end of the year, I wish I could say that there was a general sense of calm and peace around us in anticipation of a relaxing holiday season. Unfortunately, you just have to page through this newspaper to see that there is still a great deal happening – not all of it good either.

The deputy minister of international affairs and cooperation, Alvin Botes, has dug his boots into Israel in commemoration of the UN International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, with comments that I think are quite outrageous. See page 1. It always amazes me how people in office make pronouncement that aren't necessarily based in fact without any consequences. I guess he won't be the first.

Then, the situation in East London is just sad. What upsets me most is that a community is suffering and has all but fallen apart because of an ugly legal wrangle with a rabbi. See page 3.

Legal issues aside, everything in our power needs to be done to ensure that this community is rescued, and that it is given a new lease on life. Send a new rabbi, even if only temporarily, but do something to revive this small coastal community. We have so few thriving communities outside of Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, and we need to make sure that no Jew is forgotten.

Then, looking at the kosher meat situation, I must say I'm surprised that the butcheries and people concerned weren't more open about the situation. I know our journalist was very clear that this wasn't a story to trip people up or expose anyone.

All we wanted to do was explain where the costs came from. We fully understand that every company is about making a profit and surviving. We are certainly not against that, and expect that of everyone in business.

Our aim wasn't to make them feel or look bad, it was simply to try and understand the bottom line of how kosher meat becomes so expensive. See page 9.

We still don't have all the answers to our questions, and we would be open to people coming forward to help us get them. You see, we are all actually on the same side – the community's side – and each one of us is a part of this community.

As was so blatantly obvious at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards this Sunday evening, we are a community that punches far above our weight and we are a people who make things happen. We have every reason to stick together and work as a team. We do it so well, especially when we play to our strengths.

From the team of the *SA Jewish Report*, I would like to congratulate every winner, every person on the esteemed honours roll, and everyone who made the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards happen. *Kol Hakavod* to you!



Achieving in the year 2020

OPINION

HOWARD SACKSTEIN



In the days following the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, I feel like a heroin junkie, coming down after an orgasmic high, at least that's what I understand from watching the movie *Trainspotting* one time too many.

But as the high inevitably wanes, I keep reflecting on why the awards this year were such a massive success, with more than 30 000 people watching from around the globe, and why the *SA Jewish Report* webinars have been so successful, with nearly 700 000 people watching our 65 webinars to date.

I think the answer lies in one simple idea.

We didn't take the real world and move it online, we completely reinvented the way we looked at everything. In our world view, the *SA Jewish Report* wasn't a newspaper with a website, it was a community media company in a new multimedia, multi-channel world.

New media wasn't about one-way communication, it was about a two-way conversation, it was about relevance and engagement. Community wasn't something you found, but something you had to work to create.



Shaun Matisonn and Howard Sackstein in the editing room

We set about building a digital town square for our community to join people online and recreate the community in a different format but as strong and vibrant as before.

We didn't just take the newspaper online, we completely reinvented the way we engaged with our audience. We made people chat, contribute, and answer questions, and by doing these simple things, we created the most successful alternative TV channel in South Africa and the Jewish world.



We reinvented the concept of community at a time of crisis which forced us all into the digital era.

We cannot go back to the ways of February 2020, we need to continually reinvent ourselves, innovate, develop new channels, learn how to speak to our community in a meaningful and engaging fashion, and

make sure that everyone is invested in the outcome.

At the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, we democratised the process and involved thousands of people. More than 12 000 people voted



Felicity Kantor, Howard Sackstein and Dina Diamond

for 291 nominees, nominated by 594 members of the public. We gave our community a say and a stake in the outcome, and it supported the awards with exuberance and passion.

We took advantage of technology to reach across borders and oceans, to involve a wider audience, and to create a platform for a celebration that tugs at the heartstrings and makes you proud to be Jewish. We stitched together 71 videos, conducted 134 interviews, and showcased the most remarkable awards ceremony and variety show ever seen in South Africa, all free of charge to our community.

Therein lies the lesson for communal leadership for the post COVID-19 era.

I don't know how we will go back to normality when the vaccine is here and people are willing to emerge slowly from their dungeons. The world has changed profoundly, as have our expectations as a community and our view of leadership.

Over the past few months, we on the board of the *SA Jewish Report* have started the process of re-imagining. We believed that we, like all communal structures, would be judged by how we served our community during this impossibly difficult time.



As we start to shut the door on 2020 and hope for better times ahead, I put my hand on my heart and say – sometimes we won, sometimes we lost, but dammit, we wouldn't fail for lack of trying – and that's the great lesson for me of the pandemic of 2020.

Trying needs to become part of our DNA, a habit and in the immortal words from *Trainspotting*, "We called him Mother Superior on account of the length of his habit."

• Howard Sackstein is the chairperson of the *SA Jewish Report* and the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.



Benjy Porter, Shaun Matisonn, Howard Sackstein and Herschel Jawitz

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Jewish professionals elected to Wits alumni committee

JORDAN MOSHE

Jewish professionals Dr Jonathan Witt and Lesley-Anne Gatter have been elected to serve on the executive committee of convocation at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).

Their election was announced on Thursday, 26 November, along with two other successful candidates. Witt and Gatter scored the highest number of votes respectively (the former coming first in the election), and are now part of the official body which represents the Wits convocation, the voice of the university's alumni.

A total of 1 415 Wits graduates from around the world cast their ballots in this election.

Witt, a practitioner in the field of anaesthetics, has been on the convocation executive since 2014, and felt he could continue to add value for an additional term. He holds BA Honours and Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery degrees from Wits.

"I am a proud Witsie, and consider the impact the university has on our society to be vital," he told the *SA Jewish Report*. "Many top business, legal, and medical minds are taught and trained at Wits, whereafter they go on to make substantial contributions to the better of our country and the world."

He said any convocation member (which includes all Wits graduates) can stand for election when seats become available, or the terms of



Lesley-Anne Gatter



Dr Jonathan Witt

those on the committee come to an end. The process is as simple as submitting your name and a shortened resume.

"The role of the convocation executive is to provide a voice for alumni at the highest levels of the university," Witt said. "I consider this to be my mandate as Wits navigates a changing world in the tertiary education space and otherwise."

"I've previously been involved with alumni outreach, university operations, marketing, and crisis management. I look forward to continuing in whichever capacity is required."

Gatter joined Investec in 2006, and is today the head of people and organisation at the company. She holds a BA, honours and master's in psychology from Wits, and is also a member of the Gauteng Council of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD).

"I chose to run as I have a desire to give back and contribute to building South Africa," she said. "I believe that the university is a cornerstone of the depth, breadth, and epitome of all that's possible in South Africa."

"I have wondrous memories of my time at Wits, and experienced my own transformation over many years in the cradle of the institution," she says. "I have so much enthusiasm to contribute meaningfully to the university."

Gatter said that her background had enabled her to acquire skills and experience in the areas of personal mastery and leadership, as well as to apply these in the context of the goals of transformation, equality, and diversity.

"I believe this would enable me to make a meaningful contribution to the work of Wits in its ongoing commitment to achieving these goals."

Both Gatter and Witt believe

that the Jewish community has a lot to contribute to the executive committee.

"The Jewish community has an illustrious history with Wits and has contributed greatly to the university over more than a century," said Witt. "Equally, Wits has been an educational home for many of us, and maintaining the institution as a principled leader of knowledge in the global environment benefits us all."

Said Gatter, "I'm dedicated to diversity, the pursuit of inclusion, and the depth that that cognitive diversity gives all processes, problem solving, and decision making."

"Diversity comes in many forms, and I believe we bring that diversity, that people of various backgrounds generate perspectives, considerations, and a consciousness that is the

"Wits has been an educational home for many of us, and maintaining the institution as a principled leader of knowledge in the global environment benefits us all."

complexity we seek for bodies such as the convocation."

Benji Shulman, the director of public policy at the South African Zionist Federation, has previously worked closely with Gatter, and is

confident in her election.

"I've had the honour of working with Lesley-Anne on a number of community projects, and the way that she brings innovation and excellence to the table will stand her in very good stead for her position on the convocation," he said.

"She will be able to make a huge contribution in the interest of the alumni of the university and to the university as a whole."

"From the community perspective, Wits has four Nobel Prize winners, three of whom are Jews and one of whom is Nelson Mandela. Lesley-Anne is in great company representing great alumni that have come out of the university and will continue to emerge from the university with the kind of good work I'm sure she will do."

SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn commended Witt and Gatter, saying that it was heartwarming to see members of our community taking such an active role in such an important university in our country.

"It's important for us to take an interest in and commit to building these pivotal institutions to ensure that they continue to offer top-calibre education," she said.

"We know that Lesley-Anne and Jonathan will make an important contribution to Wits during their terms on the convocation. We congratulate them and applaud their willingness to give of their time towards building Wits."

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Will Trump leave Biden a war in the Middle East?

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

The simmering fear among Middle East watchers that President Donald Trump might attack Iran in the waning days of his presidency was inflamed on Friday when assassins shot to death the man believed to be responsible for Iran's nuclear weapons programme.

No one has claimed responsibility for killing Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh. Iran's foreign minister has blamed Israel, whose prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, said in 2018 about Fakhri-zadeh, "Remember that name." Israeli officials have declined to comment.

That leaves international observers assuming that Israel was behind the attack and wondering whether tension between Iran and the United States and Israel could blow up in the next few weeks.

"Any member of Congress should be concerned about a potential US or Israeli strike on Iran at this point," said a senior Democratic congressional staffer who asked for anonymity to speak frankly.

Here's what you need to know about the tension, what's driving the three countries' leaders, and the scenarios that might unfold over the coming weeks.

What exactly is going on, anyway?

On Friday, according to Iranian media reports, the vehicle in which Fakhri-zadeh and his wife were travelling came under automatic fire, and a nearby truck exploded. Some reports said the attack was carried out by remote control.

The killing comes against mounting indications that Trump and Netanyahu are thinking about striking Iran's nuclear reactor at Natanz.

Just two weeks ago, Trump reportedly contemplated a strike on Iran's main nuclear site, and Axios is reporting that Israel is taking steps to be ready for such a strike. Meanwhile, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is leading the charge to intensify the application of sanctions on Iran that are designed to be difficult to undo for President-elect Joe Biden.

Last week, Netanyahu met in Saudi Arabia with Pompeo and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Mossad chief Yossi Cohen accompanied Netanyahu, leading some pundits to speculate that the Israelis were briefing the Saudis and the Americans ahead of the attack on Fakhri-zadeh.

Would Trump really want to attack Iran in the final weeks of his presidency?

Yes and no. On the one hand, Trump and his administration are reportedly trying to set so many diplomatic fires that Biden will have a hard time extinguishing all of them. And on Iran, the differences between the two men couldn't be clearer.

Both are concerned about Iran's accumulation of nuclear material. But Trump doesn't want Biden to return to the Iran nuclear deal for which Biden advocated as vice president under Barack Obama, who inked the 2015 agreement. The outgoing president is

taking steps to obstruct his successor, most notably with an intensified sanctions regime. The most potent way of scotching a return to the Iran deal would be to launch conflict with Iran.

The most consequential step Trump can take is to order a strike on Iran – the kind he reportedly contemplated two weeks ago on Natanz. His aides talked him out of it.

Trump wouldn't be serving his own goals by contemplating a strike, said Martin Indyk, a Council on Foreign Relations fellow who has served in senior diplomatic positions in Democratic administrations and has been a fierce critic of Trump.

"If you watch him carefully, he's more concerned about establishing his legacy, which is to bring the troops home," he said. "There is a contradiction between bringing the troops home and a war in the Middle East."

But Trump has been known to act impetuously in matters of international significance.

Wait, can he really do that?

If Trump changes his mind and orders a strike, there's likely little recourse for Congress to stop him. Presidents since 2001 have used the broadly written Authorization of the Use of Military Force passed by Congress following the 9/11 attacks to launch myriad attacks in the Middle East. Democrats in recent years have sought to limit that authorisation, but those efforts are stuck in the Republican-led Senate.

Trump would relay a strike order to his secretary of defence, who then would send it to the appropriate commanding officer. In September, Trump fired Mark Esper, a defence secretary who on occasions had resisted the commander-in-chief's orders, and replaced him with Christopher Miller, of whom little is known, as part of a broad push to install loyalists at the end of his term.

Neither Miller nor the commanding officer would have the standing to refuse to carry out a legal order. On the other hand, they are required to refuse an illegal order.

Would an order to strike Iran be illegal? International law requires a credible threat as a predicate for a strike, and has measures against hitting civilian targets. Iran says it has no nuclear weapons programme and that its nuclear sites are for civilian use.

Should someone in the US chain of command refuse to carry out the strike, its proponents would no doubt counter that Western intelligence agencies have assessed that Iran has sought nuclear weapons in the past, and that a nuclear-armed Iran poses a credible threat. Still, the ensuing back-and-forth could delay a strike until Biden assumed the presidency.

What does Biden think about this?

The president-elect's outlook on Iran is centred on a

pledge to return to the nuclear deal struck under the Obama administration, with improvements. As vice president, Biden was a leading salesman for the deal, which traded sanctions relief for rollbacks of Iran's nuclear programme.

Biden, who stands to inherit the blowback on top of the already vexing question of how to handle US relations with Iran, hasn't commented on the recent events. He "firmly believes in the principle that there must be only one president at a time guiding our country's foreign policy and national security, and is focused on preparing to govern, which is why we'll decline to comment at this time", Ned Price, a spokesman for the transition, said in an email response to a query about Biden's Iran policy.

But Biden insiders have been telling congressional

formidable foe could burnish his status among Israelis. Netanyahu also knows that any kind of military strike against Iran will be less likely under Biden, so he may be pressing for intervention now.

But Israel's security establishment has been wary for years of an open-ended, full-blown conflict with Iran. It stayed Netanyahu's hand in 2010 and 2011 when he contemplated a strike, and one of the naysayers, then-military Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, is now the foreign minister in Netanyahu's cabinet.

Trump has other options if he wants to strike Iran, including assassinations and cyberattacks of the kind that the Netanyahu and Obama governments worked together on in the early years of the Obama administration, and which, for a time, crippled Iran's uranium enrichment capabilities.

Netanyahu has the same options as Trump – a strike and deniable lower-intensity attacks such as assassinations and cyber warfare – and the same ostensible interest in pushing Iran into a defensive posture that would frustrate a return to the nuclear deal.

The Israeli has a further deterrent that Trump doesn't: Netanyahu not only needs to work with an incoming Biden administration, the prime minister would need Biden's unrestrained backing if whatever action he launches escalates into a war.

Biden might be less than willing to fully support Israel if Netanyahu is seen as triggering the war. Moreover, Trump's determined efforts to cripple an incoming Biden administration would likely hobble whatever effective action the US would take on Israel's behalf.

Bad blood with the incoming president would also damage Netanyahu's political standing at a precarious time for his leadership, said Indyk.

"He's thinking of another election," Indyk said of Netanyahu while noting that in spite of his flirtations with a strike on Iran a decade ago, Netanyahu has been among Israel's least trigger-happy prime ministers.

"He has always been cautious about the use of force," Indyk said. "He knows where it starts, and he also knows he doesn't know where it ends."

What happens next?

The next several days will be pivotal in revealing how far Trump and Netanyahu plan to go at this time and whether Iran will carry out retribution for Fakhri-zadeh's murder, which could force their hand. Iran is feeling the economic crunch of sanctions, and the government of President Hassan Rouhani has indicated that it is ready to return to the 2015 nuclear deal.

On the other hand, the assassination has exposed Iran's internal security apparatus as weak and vulnerable to penetration. Iranian hardliners may press the country's spiritual leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, to save face, however much it risks an escalation.



Iran judiciary chief Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi, centre, pays respects to the body of slain scientist Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh among his family in Tehran

staffers and foreign policy mavens to read closely two op-eds appearing in the weeks before the election to understand Biden's Iran intentions.

One, "There's a smarter way to be tough on Iran," appeared in September on CNN's website with Biden's byline. It argues that Iran deserves tough consequences, but that these backfire if the US fails to co-ordinate with European and Asian allies, as Trump has done. Biden also wants Iran to end its adventurism in the region, but also pledges to immediately pull back some sanctions, particularly those affecting coronavirus relief.

The other op-ed, "On Iran, the next administration must break with the past," was published in *Foreign Affairs* in August and co-authored by three people, including two Obama administration Iran policy alumni. One of its central arguments is that the next president should consult Israel and Sunni Arab allies while negotiating the deal – which Obama failed to do – and should run parallel talks on non-nuclear issues, including Iran's missile programme and its regional adventurism.

Does Netanyahu really want a war with Israel's most potent neighbour?

Again, yes and no. On the one hand, the prime minister is contending with low popularity – so low that he probably wouldn't retain power if elections were held today – and a successful attack against Israel's most

PJs, VPNs, and DDoS – how it all adds up

OPINION

MALI COHEN DENZINGER

When the COVID-19 pandemic began, there were many conversations about how people felt about being forced to work from home. Some missed office chats with colleagues, human interaction, and just dressing up and getting out of the house.

No one, it seems, missed the commute. Quarantine wardrobes (in other words, serious tops and casual pyjama bottoms) are today the norm rather than the exception, and one of the better outcomes of the forced work-from-home scenario. Adobe International's research found that pants sales dropped 13%, and jackets 33%, while online pyjama sales increased a whopping 143%.

The new reality has forced most of us to work with various video conferencing solutions. Zoom, for instance, reported last month a maximum of 10 million daily users.

Video conferencing and VPNs (virtual

private network – an internet programme that provides safer, encrypted connectivity) have become our lifelines. A great effort was made earlier this year to scale up these remote access services and support entire employee bases, as this was the only way to ensure business continuity.

This sudden overall dependency on VPNs has exposed many of its inherent vulnerabilities. The biggest challenge is security, specifically Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks.

To explain, DDoS is the cyber security nightmare for any connected enterprise. A DDoS attack makes it impossible for an internet service to be delivered. It brings down systems by attacking systems not from one, but from many points of entry. VPNs are easy targets, and multiple users accessing the network via VPNs dramatically increase the impact of these attacks.

As a result, DDoS attacks have increased 542% from the beginning of COVID-19, with more than 4.83 million attacks in the first half of this year.

The industries most hit include retail, telecoms, government, and financial/banking websites and infrastructure. In March 2020, the United States Department of Health and Human Services was hit by a DDoS attack just as the agency was scrambling to provide information and critical services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Shopping from home should have helped e-commerce. However, more than 929 000 DDoS attacks occurred in May, representing the single largest number of attacks ever seen in a month. In 2020, the percentage of DDoS attacks on the telecoms industry grew by 31%.

So what makes VPNs vulnerable? Before COVID19, companies didn't rely heavily

on VPNs, which would explain why many companies may not have bothered to validate that their DDoS mitigation (cyber) solutions were configured correctly to protect them. More importantly, there is no single default DDoS mitigation configuration setting that works for all VPNs. This means that companies need to validate their DDoS mitigation configurations against multiple possible DDoS attack "vectors" at a time when maintenance windows are hard to find.

It's also quite possible that enterprises rely on sophisticated DDoS mitigation and testing solutions to mitigate attacks. But these solutions are all essentially reactive, moving to action only after a DDoS attack has been launched. With vulnerable VPNs, scarce teams, and a full-on DDoS attack, how effective can mitigation solutions be? Research indicates that companies are often

left with a staggering 48% DDoS vulnerability level!

People are trying different options, but there is one possible solution that can challenge this, something called RADAR, which simulates DDoS attacks 24/7 without having an impact on operations.

It's an Israeli-made patented solution, and provides enterprises with real-time validation and remediation capabilities of their DDoS mitigation solutions. This way, vulnerable DDoS configuration mismatches can be continuously identified and resolved in real time and re-validated immediately through the RADAR™ platform.

• Mali Cohen Denzinger is vice-president of marketing at MazeBolt, an international cyber security company.



The mystery of (high) kosher meat prices

JORDAN MOSHE

The cost of kosher meat continues to rise, and in spite of assertions that they can't be compared with the non-kosher industry, butchers within the Johannesburg Jewish community won't account for their own costs and those charged to consumers.

Amidst the recent calls for greater clarity on kashrut from within the community, the subject of kosher meat prices was raised as a pressing issue that needs to be addressed.

The webinar held by the *SA Jewish Report* in October marked a turning point in kashrut transparency, with Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, the Union of Orthodox Synagogues, (UOS), and the kosher department responding to questions about kashrut in our community.

Among these was the high cost of kosher meat and chicken. It was disclosed that the UOS didn't make a profit from *shechita* (kosher slaughter), and that the annual revenue generated from kosher-food services such as butcheries and abattoirs is R7.7 million and the expenses R7.8 million.

Moreover, the costs incurred for the *shechita* process divided by the number of units slaughtered was said to be between R4.30 and R4.60 per kilogram depending on whether it was beef or chicken. The chief rabbi said that the *shechita* fee made up a small percentage of the overall cost, and the UOS had nothing further to do with the price.

"It's a free market, so prices are set by the butcheries," Goldstein said. "The price of meat and chicken isn't set by the UOS. If anyone feels they can bring prices down through the free market, it can certainly be done."

Against this background, the *SA Jewish Report* undertook to account for the cost of kosher meat and understand the factors which have, for years, driven the price up.

Starting at source, the aim was to engage with kosher butchers and determine what their costs were and how they were calculated into the price charged to consumers.

However, both Maxi Discount Kosher Butchery and Moishes (the only exclusively kosher butcheries in the community) declined numerous opportunities to engage on the subject. They wouldn't be drawn into accounting for the prices at which they buy their meat from abattoirs,

the costs they incur by operating within the kosher industry, and the prices they charge.

Inquiries among *mashgichim*, *shochtim* and other stakeholders proved equally fruitless, with people either unable or unwilling to share any information which could help the community better understand the price of kosher meat.

The *SA Jewish Report* then undertook a comparative exercise of its own, comparing prices of lean mince, brisket, lamb chops, and whole chicken across the three primary retail outlets of kosher meat: Maxi, Moishes, and Pick n Pay at Norwood Hypermarket.

Because a comparison with entry-level non-kosher meat would be impossible, the prices for non-kosher were taken from the regular Pick n Pay butchery (PnP), the closest equivalent available. Pick n Pay proved

The only retailer who commented and gave some degree of clarity was Pick n Pay.

"Our kosher customers can always expect the best quality and value from Pick n Pay," said a spokesperson. "The price of kosher meat will always reflect the cost price of the product, which includes the cost of kosher slaughter, the kashering process, processing, packaging, and other costs required."

Although they could not speak directly to the prices, the UOS kashrut department also provided some input regarding kosher meat prices in general.

"As mentioned during the *SA Jewish Report* webinar, the costs incurred due to the *shechita* process are approximately R4.50 per kilogram for beef and chicken," said Rav Dovi Goldstein, who heads up the kosher desk at the UOS.

	Pnp non-kosher	PnP kosher	Moishes	Maxis
Lean Mince	99.99	114.99	125.00	158.00
Chicken (whole)	54.99 (fresh)	82.99 (fresh)	89.95 (frozen) 105.00 (fresh)	106.00
Lamb Chops	194.99	192.99	245.00	298.00
Brisket	94.99	134.99	195.00	360.00

Prices in Rand per kilo

consistently cheaper than the two kosher butcheries in all of its kosher prices, and the mark-ups at Moishes and Maxis were sizeable.

A non-kosher chicken (fresh and whole) sells at R54.99 per kilogram at PnP. Its kosher line's equivalent chicken (fresh and whole) sells at R82.99 per kilogram, leaving a difference of R23.70. A non-kosher pack of fresh skinless chicken breast fillets sells at R74.99 per kilogram at PnP, while the nearest kosher equivalent in stock, fresh chicken schnitzel pieces, sells at R214.99 per kilogram, a difference of R140.

If the cited *schita* fee is deducted, it leaves a mark-up of R23.70 and R135.70 respectively on these products alone. Prices at Moishes were even greater, and Maxis proved consistently the most expensive across all the products assessed.

"This cost goes to providing our services of slaughterers, rabbinic checkers, knife checkers, *mashgichim* for stamping and tongues [in the case of beef], *mashgichim* for de-veining/salting [in the case of chicken], and managing and monitoring the overall system."

Goldstein said there were other costs incurred by the abattoirs and retailers themselves, and though he couldn't comment on them, he could assert that all costs would be increased due to the low volumes consumed relative to non-kosher meat and chicken products.

"Approximately 500 000 kosher chickens are slaughtered a year, whereas the major non-kosher chicken farms slaughter this amount in two days," he said. "In addition, there are parts of the animal which may not be consumed according to halacha, which also

effectively inflates the price per kilo of the rest of the animal."

"Whilst we haven't done a retail comparison with overseas markets, it's well known that the cost of kosher exceeds non-kosher by a significant margin in all countries internationally."

A source within the slaughtering industry who asked to remain anonymous said that kosher slaughter was a much slower, more expensive process, and most abattoirs preferred not to do it.

"They end up with less than 25% of the whole carcass, and have to sell the hind quarter at a loss to the *treif* market," he said. He said that although he supplies some cattle to the abattoirs (which in turn supply the kosher market), he chooses not to get involved in the kosher market because of its expenses.

"To put cattle in a box to slaughter costs a couple thousand rand, something more affordable for players in a large non-kosher market with bigger volumes," he said. "Many larger abattoirs also slaughter halaal on a large scale and don't slaughter kosher. Kosher forequarters are therefore far more expensive."

It's difficult to compare prices between the butcheries because of volumes, he stressed, pointing out that non-kosher butcheries have bigger abattoirs slaughtering for them exclusively, and their large volumes don't go towards the kosher market.

He did acknowledge, however, that the price of kosher meat is high, has been a problem for the past 40 years, and is turning more people away from kosher food because they can't afford it.

A person involved in Jewish charity work within the community, who also asked to remain anonymous, agreed with this statement.

"The cost of meat has escalated to the point that families consider meat and chicken as an occasional treat for Shabbos," he said. "Inasmuch as keeping kosher has been important for many who have done so for many years, some people have sadly had to sacrifice kashrut for *treif* because of the unaffordability of kosher meat."

"There must be a way of reviewing costing in an attempt to bring the prices down which will, in turn, enable more people to replace a starch diet with a more balanced and healthy one."



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How to put pandemic-scale disruption to good use

TALI FEINBERG

While we hope that the challenges of 2020 will be over when the clock strikes midnight on 31 December, experts warn that this is just the beginning, but it's possible to survive, even thrive during the economic downturn in the months ahead. They were speaking at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards Business Breakfast on 27 November.

"To be forewarned is forearmed," said Jeff Gable, chief economist for Absa. He predicts that South Africa's economy will take half a decade to recover to the level it was at in 2019, which in itself wasn't a rosy picture. He emphasised just how different this downturn is likely to be from previous downturns. After the 2008 recession, it took South Africa about five quarters to return to where it was beforehand, but now the recovery will take five years.

He noted that it was barely a year ago that the first case of what was then known as "Wuhan flu" was confirmed, and everything that has evolved since has happened at "an immense speed and in a super-dense way". And because our access to a vaccine is a long



Steven Blend



Lorraine Srage

He offers four lenses to help us "think systemically about what to do next". The first is to consider how the environment around us is changing. He emphasises "stepping out" of the day-to-day routine to network, learn, and adapt. "You don't want to be 'sleepwalking' through it. Habit kills a business. You're living in the fastest change in human history – some of it negative, a lot positive, and very complex."

The second lens is strategy. "Develop an idea in action not just in concept. What will your business do that the market wants, or will want it to do, that your rivals can't do? Answer that coherently on paper, and you may have a strategy. The problem we all have is the fight between memory and vision. So how we got in the room and what we're doing in the room isn't necessarily how we're going to get out of the room," he says.

The third lens is how you organise a business. "Every start-up goes through many periods of reorganising. And this is absolutely appropriate, because the system drives operations. The way decisions are made must suit the changing world around you, but sometimes we lose track of the engine we are trying to build." He said excellent South Africa companies "designed their engine room carefully, and are constantly reviewing it".

Finally, he emphasises the importance of leadership and the people in the business, ensuring that you have the right combination and the right employees to make things happen.

"In some ways, it's been one of the most fantastic years, because the rhythm of normal has been disrupted, and I love

that. South Africa is on a frontier opening up to possibilities and opportunities," said Binedell.

In conclusion, he advised packing "a map and a mirror" for the journey ahead. "The map lays out what you're going to do next. Write it down. Make some assumptions. Test those assumptions. But put together the package of choices that you believe are inherent to what you will do differently, that will give your business an advantage. All leaders need a map. It's how we get from where we are to where we want to go."

Then, "Have a look in the mirror, and ask yourself why you're doing this, and why others should want to do this. You have to have the self-belief to answer why you want to be in this battle. That core belief is the culture of the business. The thing I love about business is that we touch and change people's lives. That's ultimately our mission. Yes, we keep score financially. But the real goal of business is to add value to people's lives in a way that gives them a better life and more opportunities."



Annie and Larry Hodes

way off, "the chance that we will return to a 'normal' is very much something for the future".

This will have huge implications for employment, household incomes, financial systems, debt repayment, and social grants. "Scenario planning is critical as we are in a highly uncertain and volatile period. Until we have a vaccine, it will be a 'stop-start' environment. The government and National Treasury have made it clear that there simply isn't enough money to protect the South African economy. The focus will be on the private sector to lead recovery."

In that bleak picture, how can businesses navigate, let alone excel in the impasse? Professor Nick Binedell, the former dean of the Gordon Institute of Business Science, said, "I've learned that every year has its own story and rhythm. This year has had a particular message for us. Life presents these unexpected challenges. Occasionally there are off-ramps or deviations, and suddenly we find ourselves in very different territory."

He said he had witnessed a changing world and, "The truth of life, strategy, and running a business is that we've got to do the best with what we understand a situation to be." This year, most people have had to focus on keeping businesses afloat, but "the irony is that in periods of massive change like this, whole new opportunities open up. And unless you're keeping your eyes on the bigger prize, you might miss them."

He often thinks of the analogy of keys and locks, and how these have evolved from simple Yale locks to retina scanning in the digital age. "The ultimate question is: do you understand your lock and does your key fit the lock? Can you open up new markets? That's really the heart of good strategy."



Barbara and Geoff Rothschild



Glynne Wolman and her mom Rae Goldberg



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Sir Sydney Kentridge: real-life hero at the bar

JORDAN MOSHE

Legal legend Sir Sydney Kentridge has left an indelible mark on the judicial systems of South Africa and the United Kingdom (UK). At 98 years old, the retired lawyer devoted his life to the law, and strove to guarantee justice for all.

It was in this spirit that Kentridge received the Lifetime Achievement Award in honour of the late Helen Suzman at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards this past Sunday. The award recognises Kentridge's efforts in the legal sphere, and acknowledges his years of service in South Africa and the UK, where he resides today.

"This is a surprise," said William Kentridge, Sir Sydney's son, himself a former recipient of the Arts, Science, Sport and Culture award. "It's fantastic that this is being given to my father.

"When you're young, everyone's father is a kind of hero," he said. "As you grow older, one tempers one's judgements and finds a place where they fit in the world. It's always been odd to say that what I assumed was an exaggerated view of my father was in fact borne out by the experience of his life."

Kentridge said that his father had influenced countless other lawyers, his career exemplifying what it is to be an honourable person.

"On behalf of the family and the Jewish community of South Africa, I'm happy you have the award and wish you congratulations," he said to his father.

A video tribute outlined the years of service Kentridge had devoted to his calling. This included acting for Albert Luthuli, Nelson Mandela, and Desmond Tutu.

Kentridge reflected, "[The cases] brought me into contact for the first time with leaders of the African National Congress. It was really an education in South African politics for me.

"All the accused were simply acquitted. Of course, I and the other members of the defence team felt elated about it. It was the most political of trials in a highly politicised country, but it showed that the judiciary was still completely independent. It was a great day for the South African justice system."

Kentridge rose to prominence overseas after leaving South Africa to practice law in England, where he became a well-respected barrister at the London Bar. He was later knighted by



Sir Sydney Kentridge

Queen Elizabeth II for his services.

"I thought it was a great day when I went to Buckingham Palace and was knighted by the Queen with a tap on the shoulder with a sword," Kentridge recalled. "I did regard it as some public

recognition, and also had the idea that the work I had done in South Africa had a little to do with it.

"I remember telling one of my grandchildren that the Queen taps you on the shoulder with a sword, and the

question I got from her was, 'Isn't that very dangerous?'"

Kentridge expressed thanks for the Lifetime Achievement Award, calling it "very unexpected".

"I certainly value it, coming as it does from Johannesburg, which was my old home town for many years before I came to England," he said. "I had my Barmitzvah at the Yeoville Shul, and my late wife and I were married in the Wolmarans Shul. I have a very Johannesburg Jewish background which I greatly value."

Kentridge said that his grandfather, who came to South Africa with his family about the time of the Boer War, was someone who he never knew personally but about whom he knew a lot.

"He got a position as the chazzan of the shul in Vryheid which then had a considerable Jewish community. That is what brought the family to South Africa.

"My family has always been what I wouldn't call Orthodox, but a traditional Jewish family. My upbringing in Johannesburg was very much a Jewish one, and so I'm very touched that the SA Jewish Report saw fit to give an award which I greatly value."

Liran Assness: finding opportunity in challenges

JORDAN MOSHE

If you want to know the secret to entrepreneurial success, just ask Liran Assness. A seasoned entrepreneur and chief executive who employs thousands, he knows the meaning of hard work and innovation.

Assness was this year's winner of The Kirsh Family Entrepreneur Award, recognised for his entrepreneurial savvy in his latest venture, Sekta, a holding company that brings together multiple individual entities to form an industrial powerhouse. The group operates across the energy, petrochemical, oil and gas, marine, mining, manufacturing, and construction sectors.

"When you think about successful entrepreneurs these days, names like Elon Musk and Steve Jobs come to mind," said Wendy Fisher, who announced Assness' award at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards held virtually this past Sunday.

"But what about others who do remarkable things in ordinary ways?

"There are big thinkers, challengers, achievers. This is one kind of entrepreneur. There is another kind, the kind that may not be a household name. The kind that provides goods and services that seem more ordinary than extraordinary. Entrepreneurs who start, grow, and run businesses which are the lifeblood of our economy and community."

Perhaps the truest test of an entrepreneur is how they perform when the going gets tough, Fisher said, testing their ability to adapt and persevere. This is precisely what Assness has done.

"He has shown true resilience and sustained his business throughout COVID-19," she said. "Liran has delivered for customers, employees, and the company, a manifestation of his vision and hard work."

Sekta operates throughout South Africa and in various other African countries, and employs between 2 000 to 3 500 staff members. Having formed Sekta only last year, Assness' swift success has been nothing short of phenomenal.

"Liran is able to identify opportunities, and through strategic partnerships and an understanding of the industry, has been able to turn them into something truly remarkable," said Rabbi Aharon Zulberg, a close friend of Assness.

"He's a real active community member. Whenever there is a need, he's one of the first to step forward."

Assness admitted that being an entrepreneur is tough, but said the support he has received has made the journey more bearable.

"It's gruelling work, and it's not easy at all," he said. "That's why the first thank you has to be to my wife, Tamara, for all that she has done. She has a great business mind, so she's always up to date with everything that I'm doing, and she has never doubted me one bit, but has always been behind me."

Assness also thanked his parents and executive team for their invaluable contributions.

"I'm so fortunate to have all of you guys around, and to work with talented people on a daily basis. You know exactly who you are. It has been an absolute pleasure and an unbelievable journey working with you, and I'm excited about what we will do as a group in the future."

The company has made great strides since its inception, Assness said, and is



Liran Assness

today a major powerhouse.

"Today we're a business of close to a R1 billion in turnover with six companies within our group. That's the foundation we're looking at to grow Sekta into the future.

"To the South Africans out there, I know it's tough at the moment with all the challenges out there, but there's tremendous opportunity on the ground," Assness said. "If you're willing to put your head down, we've got everything here in South Africa.

"Go out and do it. I promise you it can be done."



Sharon Wapnick and Frank Kramer



Professor Lucille Blumberg



Joel and Kim Back



Mandi Fine receiving her delivery



Myron, Avril, Mervyn, and Brett Mer



Dr Ali and Shira Bacher



Babette and Professor Michael Katz

Michael Katz: trusted advisor who hardly sleeps

JORDAN MOSHE

When legal stalwart Professor Michael Katz begins a sentence with the words “with respect”, those who know him understand that respect is the last thing on his mind. “He has an expression which those who know him means the very opposite of what he’s saying,” says Miranda Feinstein, senior executive of ENSafrica. “It starts when he says, ‘with respect’. And if he thinks you are behaving like a real nincompoop, he will say, ‘with great respect!’ and everybody around knows that there is no respect intended at all.”

Feinstein was one of many South Africans who paid tribute to Katz when he received the Absa Business Icon Award at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards last Sunday.

Katz, a highly regarded and sought-after corporate lawyer, was this year asked by the president of South Africa to be a board member of the national Solidarity Fund, set up to support the medical response, contribute to relief efforts, and mobilise the country in the fight against COVID-19.

Two years ago, he was called to work on the Nugent Commission, set up to sort out the South African Revenue Service. Katz is also the person behind reforming the country’s tax policy.

“His success doesn’t lie in any one particular case, but in that he has become the trusted advisor of business and public bodies who believe in him,” said Wim Trengove, the founding vice-chairperson of Thulamela Chambers. “He puts in a lot of attention at all hours, day and night.”

David Unterhalter, acting judge on the Supreme Court of Appeal, agreed. “It’s hard to know when precisely, if ever, Michael goes to sleep,” he said. “He’s not only a practitioner of extraordinary repute, he has also been a critical person for the purposes of reforming and developing the commercial law of this country, especially company and tax law.”

Katz has been integrally involved in Jewish community affairs in Johannesburg, offering guidance and advice to communal leaders in times of need. He has even played an integral part in the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre as board chairperson, said the centre’s founder and executive director, Tali Nates.

“He was so pivotal in everything we know about the Bill of Rights in South Africa and the way we look at human rights,” she said. “Michael always was our icon.”

“As the idea of creating a Holocaust Centre in Johannesburg came about, there was no doubt that Michael was the right person,” Nates said. “His knowledge, love of books, and love of history of the Holocaust and genocide always enriches the conversation.”

Katz expressed his thanks, saying that receiving an honour from one’s own community was very meaningful.

“No one who has any achievement does it on his or her own. You need an ecosystem of supporters,” he said. “Mine includes my wife, a dedicated counsellor over 44 years of marriage. I have been truly privileged to have such a wonderful partnership.”

Katz paid tribute to his two daughters, and expressed his gratitude for the support he had received from his colleagues at ENSafrica.

He also offered some words of advice. “The Jewish community is, unfortunately, a shrinking community, in a country that faces many challenges.

“What’s required? Unity. We need unity of the community. We have remarkable institutions in our community with dedicated officers and staff who care for the every need of the community, but they need

our support.”

Communal unity is also fundamentally important to address poverty and inequality, Katz said.

“We need to support the country and the wider community in which inequality abound and where social justice is compromised,” he said. “We need to play a meaningful role, and hopefully, we can be agents of stability against a background of volatility.”

“The SA Jewish Report has played a meaningful role



Michael Katz



Corinne Ossendryver



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Professor Barry Schoub: protector in chief

JORDAN MOSHE

“His life’s work has been saving lives.” With these words, Mary Kluk, the national president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), summed up the personality that is Professor Barry Schoub, this year’s recipient of the Kia Community Service Award.

The retired expert on vaccinology and virology was among those recognised for his heroic contribution at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards ceremony held virtually this past Sunday.

Schoub is chairperson of South Africa’s ministerial advisory committee on coronavirus vaccines, one of the many ways he has dedicated his life to improving the lives of others.



Professor Barry Schoub

“I thought Professor Schoub was retired,” Professor Salim Abdool Karim, chairperson of the South African Ministerial Advisory Committee on COVID-19, said in a video tribute outlining Schoub’s work. “Nothing could be further from the truth.”

Indeed, this emeritus professor in virology at the University of the Witwatersrand and former director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, stepped up to ensure that the community was as well-equipped as possible to traverse the uncharted and choppy coronavirus waters.

“Having the responsibility of working with our shuls, rabbis, and chairpersons to be able to devise a plan of when to close our shuls, Professor Schoub was there every step of the way,” said Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein. “To have a person with the national and

international expertise of Professor Schoub was crucial in getting through this crisis.”

Zev Krengel, the vice-chairperson of the SAJBD, said Schoub heeded the call of a community that desperately needed him in its moment of crisis.

“I said to him, ‘Prof, this is your Queen Ester call. Your community needs you. We need you. You are the one who is going to save us’,” he said.

“In this pandemic, our doctors became our protectors. Professor Schoub was basically our general in understanding this enemy.”

Kluk said that if she had been in admiration of Schoub prior to COVID-19, she was now in awe of his incredible wisdom and empathy.

“COVID-19 has highlighted his capacity in the world of virology and medicine,” she said. “I’m so proud that we have a person of this calibre who is so deeply committed to our community.”

Schoub thanked the committee of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards and the SA Jewish Report for honouring him. He paid tribute to his wife, Barbara, as well as his children and the rest of his family.

“We are a small family, but I can say with firm conviction that size doesn’t count,” he said.

“I’m deeply honoured, humbled, and gratified to receive this award, dedicated to recognising service to the Jewish community. I’m greatly humbled to accept it. For me, it has been a great honour and an enormous privilege to be able to give something back to this wonderful and very special community during the COVID-19 crisis.”

Schoub believes that there many others in our community who are at least equally – if not more – deserving of recognition for what they have done for the community.

“Many exceptional members of our community have played their indispensable part, providing the statistical and epidemiological data for planning, devising the safety protocols for shuls, functions, and schools,” he said.

“The GPs of our community face what I believe to be the most difficult and demanding task of our profession. The specialist frontline healthcare workers, the pulmonologists, the ICU [intensive-care unit] nursing personnel and others, along with the crown jewel of our community, Hatzolah, have shone so brightly during the COVID-19 challenge.”

“I feel privileged to belong to this very special South African Jewish community. Sometimes, it may take a crisis or a challenge for us to take a step back and reflect on how blessed we are,” he said.

“From the Chevrah Kadisha to the Beth Din and the SA Jewish Report, we are undoubtedly and unequivocally the leaders of the world, Jewish and non-Jewish.”

Wendy Fisher: looking for the light

JORDAN MOSHE

“There’s a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.”

The words of the late Leonard Cohen never fail to invigorate Wendy Fisher. An avid artisan and philanthropic powerhouse, she seeks out the light in the bleakest of times, striving to uplift not just herself, but those who are struggling most.

For this reason, Fisher received the Humanitarian Award in honour of the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards this past Sunday.

Those who have witnessed her passion for philanthropy lauded her via video, including her father, the renowned Natie Kirsh.

“As a father, I’m expected to talk well of my daughter,” he said. “But I have something to say beyond what can be expected of a father.”

Kirsh said that Fisher wasn’t just a respected president of the Guggenheim Art Museum in New York, but also someone who had made a difference in the lives of thousands through an online university lecture programme she piloted earlier this year. Called Lockdown Academy, the project has given 3 000 people from around the globe a range of free and fascinating lectures every day.

“Wendy, I congratulate you on this award,” Kirsh said. “As your father, I’m proud of your achievements, and I believe that all your university listeners around the world join me in celebrating you receiving this honour. Well done Wendy.”

Fisher’s family and friends praised her commitment to others, listing her exhaustive array of philanthropic ventures aimed at uplifting and supporting the less fortunate.

“Wendy is South African, and her heart lives in South Africa,” said clinical psychologist, Dr Dorianne Weil. “She and her family found themselves in South Africa over the lockdown, and she offered herself and her resources in helping to uplift the many who were being affected by COVID-19.”

Fisher said she was humbled to receive an honour in the country where she feels most at home.

“Receiving this award made me reflect on my work over the past four decades, and how I’m directing my energy going forward,” she said. “This opportunity comes as we endure a global pandemic and the broader existential concerns it brings.”

In looking for inspiration to lead us forward,

Fisher said she reflected on her youth, how she was raised, and how that influenced the path ahead.

“Coming of age in Swaziland was pivotal to who I am today. I remember our solitary house on the hill, the uneven dusty roads, and the bright starry nights. We didn’t have electricity in the early days, and had a fresh water tap in the garden.

“Our family values have always been to help others, so it was only natural that villagers came to retrieve fresh water from our tap. There are



Wendy Fisher

countless examples like this that left a lasting impression on my siblings and me, compelling us to continue to invest in community and philanthropy.”

Her parents’ values are imbedded in the family DNA, said Fisher.

“From my energetic, generous dad, Natie, I learned what it means to be a passionate visionary and entrepreneur,” she said. “His mantra is, ‘teach a man to fish’. People can build on the support you provide and become self-sustainable.”

From her mother, Frances, Fisher said she learned to prioritise family and look for opportunities to come together and really see each other.

“My mum’s wisdom is simply that when people sit and break bread together, their shared humanity is what’s felt, not their differences. Together with my siblings, we have carried the legacy of our parents forward, and I share this honour with them.”

Fisher encouraged others to seek their own inspiration as we look to the future.

“Teach a man to fish, to bring light where there is dark, to come together and build strong, vibrant cultures, and step up to help people in need,” she said.

“I hope you are inspired in your own journey to embrace our shared humanity for the benefit of all.”



Sir Sydney Kentridge



Yael Geffen



Mandy Fine and her family



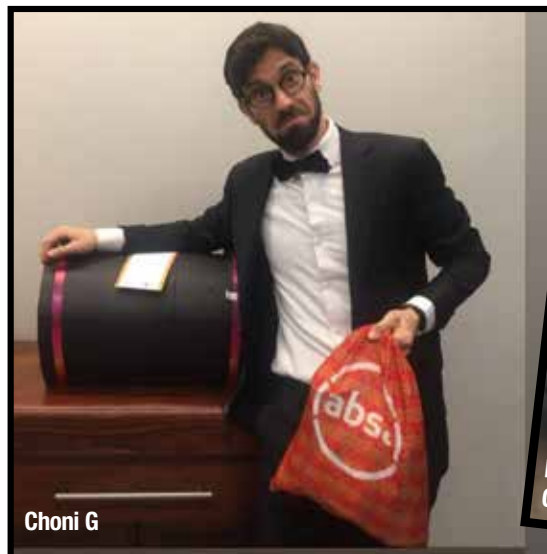
Jeanne Zaidel-Rudolph



Ronnie and Yvonne Kaplan



Rhona Solomon



Choni G



Lindi Markowitz Katzoff, Glynne Wolman and Hayley Glasser



Nicole Hocter



Kim Lieberman



Simone and Dr Daniel Israel

Professor Mervyn Mer: making the impossible possible

JORDAN MOSHE

No matter the odds, Professor Mervyn Mer believes that what sometimes seems impossible might not necessarily be so.

“The expression ‘nothing is impossible’ is often bandied about, but I like to turn it around so it reads: impossible is nothing.”

Mer shared this and other insights at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards this past Sunday after being awarded the Absa Professional Excellence in the Time of COVID Award at the virtual ceremony.

This principal specialist and head of intensive care at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital was recognised for his herculean efforts in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, with associates and colleagues paying tribute to him for his work on the frontline.

“He is amongst the top representatives of our continent,” said Gauteng Premier David Makhura. “I had the responsibility of putting together the COVID advisory committee, and I had the honour of appointing Mervyn to the committee.

“I had no doubt that on that committee we had one of the top minds on our continent.”

Indeed, Mer was a key figure in the drive to better equip the hospital to battle the dreaded virus weeks before it hit the country, drawing up numerous health protocols and doubling the size of the hospital’s intensive-care unit (ICU) in record time.

“Mervyn is a leading light in the field today,”



Professor Mervyn Mer

said Mer’s brother, Hilton. “He has really made an impressive and lasting contribution during the COVID period. He understood that there would be a significant need for ventilators and that the country was desperately short of the equipment.

“He did a lot of canvassing in corporate South Africa to lend assistance and support the need to buy these ventilators. He sourced and arranged 300 ventilators for South Africa, a number of which were used in his unit, but many also distributed around the country for the benefit of others.”

Other personalities attested to this fact, among them the minister of co-operative governance and traditional affairs, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma (whose brother Mer tended to in hospital), as well as Carol Furlonger, senior nursing sister and unit manager at the hospital.

“He managed to get that ICU ready in six weeks, which is unheard of within state,” Furlonger said. “He saved one of my own staff, and got her into ICU. If it wasn’t for him, she would be dead. Mervyn does this for every patient. Every single patient.”

Head of clinical haematology at the hospital, Professor Barry Jacobson, agreed that Mer had undoubtedly been a stalwart in managing COVID-19.

“He put the ICU on the map, got outside funders, and stood at the forefront of managing patients,”

Jacobson said. “He’s there in times of crisis and other times as well.”

“I’m a bit sad that the award is only for excellence in terms of COVID. It should be excellence in terms of excellence.”

In accepting the award, Mer said that the honour was really about a collective and cohesive effort on the part of all healthcare workers who had been champions of care during the pandemic. He paid tribute to all doctors, nurses, healthcare professionals, laboratory staff, administrative staff, security personnel, porters, catering staff, and others.

“All the nominees, too, are outstanding contributors and heroes, and this award is accepted on behalf of all of them and all those who have been involved in this pandemic.”

In addition to his family, Mer thanked those who had supported his medical initiatives, pointing out that there had been many valuable lessons learned over the past few months.

“Communication is pivotal in all walks of life,” he said. “Preparation is paramount – it helped us cope with this pandemic.

“I’ve always been an advocate of keeping things simple. If you do the simple things well, you’re likely to have a successful outcome most of the time. If we knew everything, it would be easy, and I guess that’s why it’s called life experience.

“We keep learning all the time, and it’s no different with COVID.”

Mer stressed that all we do should be done in the most human way, in the spirit of *ubuntu*, “a wonderful South African philosophy which means to be compassionate and humane. This is a philosophy well known in our community,” he said. “You need to be a *mensch*.”

“Working in critical care, I always like to say: it’s critical to care.”

The blood, sweat, and cheers that went into Achievers

TALI FEINBERG

The extravaganza that graced our screens on Sunday night in the form of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards 2020 was a labour of love by Mann Made Productions, who took on the project to support the community in the way they knew best.

“Working for [SA Jewish Report chairperson] Howard [Sackstein] is excruciatingly difficult – he’s incredibly demanding, and there’s never any money!” quips Shayne Mann, the co-founder and chief executive of Mann Made, an award-winning, experiential brand agency for top local and global companies.

“So, when he approached us to take on the project, we were hesitant and held off making the decision for a number of weeks. We eventually had a discussion and realised that if there was ever a time to get behind the community, it was now. We decided to go all in. We spent three or four times the budget we were given – all our own money. We benefited from branding to the huge audience, but this wasn’t a commercial venture in the slightest.”

well, but that was complicated.”

The team then had to take on the mammoth task of conducting 124 interviews all over the world in six weeks. “People were remarkable. We had to schedule, organise, record, get the lighting right and so on. We were talking to amazing people, so we were motivated to push hard. We are in awe of what these achievers do.”

Then there was the entertainment side, which meant working closely with artists in different cities as well as in their own studio. “The entertainment was just beautiful, and it was great to work with so many talented and creative artists,” says Mann.

“With two and a half weeks left, Howard still hadn’t seen anything, so we had to double down. We hired another three editors and a content producer to work with more than 200 hours of footage. We had a full-time staff of seven editors, one content producer, a tech director, a show producer, camera men, and the team in the studio.” Towards the end, “we had an overnight team working till 03:30, and then coming back at 06:00. Even three nights before, Howard was approving content at 01:00.”

He says their biggest achievement is “how it all came together and we pulled it off. People around the world are saying this is a new benchmark for online events.”

Under the pandemic, Mann’s production company quickly had to pivot in a new direction. With 40 events cancelled, it fast became adept at online productions. Its Singularity University, which usually has people attend from 44 countries, was turned into an online event with 1 900 tickets sold.

It has since worked with a number of institutions, from the United Nations to major banks, and Mann is optimistic about what the online events space can offer. “It’s very exciting – you can do so much more,” he says.

“The South African Jewish community is completely unique,” Mann says. “You feel such a sense of camaraderie – that we’re all in this together. It’s a privilege to do our small bit to enhance that.”

In the editing room of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards



The team started the process only seven or eight weeks ago. “Howard knew what he wanted, and briefed us clearly that this mustn’t be corporate, but get to the heart of emotions. We had to find the right director to do that. Then, we needed to work out a way to stage it, and we had a whole technological element. Howard wanted to work on Zoom which is the medium his audience knows



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Suzanne Ackerman-Berman: the best and the worst of times

JORDAN MOSHE

Ensuring that millions of South Africans have food on their table is all in a day's work for Suzanne Ackerman-Berman.

The transformation director for Pick n Pay Group and head of the Ackerman Pick n Pay Foundation, Ackerman-Berman was the recipient of this year's Europcar Women in Leadership Award for her monumental efforts to feed the nation of South Africa in lockdown.



Suzanne Ackerman-Berman

As the brains behind the Feed the Nation campaign, she assisted vulnerable families by providing hampers, groceries, and essential items during lockdown, and has since raised more than R80 million to fund it.

Colleagues paid tribute to her at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards held virtually this past Sunday.

"If you want to see leadership skills, watch people in a time of absolute crisis," said Marc Lubner, the chief executive of Afrika Tikkun. "Suzanne herself contracted the virus, and you would never have known it because she continued to operate by making everyone else's priorities more important than her own."

Several others agreed, highlighting Ackerman-Berman's persistent commitment to helping others

and to rallying as much support as she could in pursuit of her goal.

"Suzanne can put herself on any line," said Hazel Levine, the head of Jewish Community Services in Cape Town. "She has the most incredible determination. She rallied everyone she was connected to, and together with Pick n Pay, she has fed 22 million mouths to date.

"Suzanne, this is such an accomplishment," she said. "Tonight, you aren't giving. You are receiving. I'm so proud to witness this moment."

Ackerman-Berman said that she was deeply moved and honoured to accept the Women in Leadership Award, particularly after the past six months of the pandemic.

"I don't believe it's over yet," she said. "It's been a terribly difficult time for each one of us, and often in the very worst of times it takes hardship, trouble, and challenges for the best people and personalities to come out."

Ackerman-Berman recognised the efforts of all those involved in Feed the Nation, from store staff to suppliers.

"I would like to thank our unbelievable teams on the shop floor, the frontline staff who kept our stores open, kept our staff safe, and who kept feeding the community," she said.

"More than 900 stores have been sourcing, packing, and distributing food hampers over this difficult period. It's been quite a remarkable exercise where we've worked together as a team. We've all

learned that we need to come together.

"I want to thank my colleagues who allowed me to step up, to step into their space in terms of distribution and operations, and to create this incredible programme with each of them."

These are outrageous times, said Ackerman-Berman, who believes that we've all learned a new way of being.

"Einstein himself said that for evil to perpetuate, a good man must do nothing. I think that what we've seen here tonight, with all the awardees, extraordinary work is being done across this nation of ours. It makes us proud to be South African," she said.

"Thank you to all our customers and to society for helping us to feed the nation."

Jody Scheckter: driven by the fear of losing

JORDAN MOSHE

Jody Scheckter's exploits on the Formula One (F1) circuit live on in the minds of many South Africans. Although he has gone on to become a cheese aficionado, Scheckter walked away with this year's Arts, Science, Sports and Culture Award at the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards for his 10 F1 victories in a 10-year-long career that culminated in him winning the F1 Drivers' Championship in 1979.

The racing champion was among those honoured at the annual ceremony for his remarkable achievements, with a video outlining his accomplishments played live on Sunday evening.

"If you look at how many people try to become F1 drivers, let alone successful world champions, what Jody accomplished was extremely difficult," said Zak Brown, the chief executive of McLaren Racing.

"Jody won with three different teams. A lot of Grand Prix drivers have success with one team at the right place at the right time. But Jody won with three. Not many Grand Prix drivers have won with multiple teams, and that tells you that his outstanding talent wasn't car specific."

Scheckter was born in 1950 into a car-mad family. Not being especially keen on academics, he had a single goal in mind: to become the F1 world champion. At 22, he participated in his first Grand Prix for McLaren in the United States. In 1979, he joined the Ferrari team, dominating the scene in the Monaco Grand Prix, and after scoring wins in Belgium, he secured the title of world champion in Milan, Italy.

Scheckter reflected, "It feels like such a long time ago. I was brought up in East London, was useless at school, and loved going to the workshop. My dad had a garage where he worked on cars, and he gave me a car, a second-hand Renault, to go to work and back."

"After my first race, I did three years in South

Africa [probably my most enjoyable time in all my racing], and then I went to England where I raced Formula Four and Three. McLaren offered me Formula Two, so I did that, and they gave me a F1 drive at the end of my second year."

Scheckter subsequently came third in the world championships twice, left the team, and joined another where he came second in the world championship. A year later, he joined Ferrari, and won the championship.

"I was always motivated by the fear of losing rather than the glory of winning," he said.

Those who know him describe his determination and grit, commending him on his receipt of the award.

"He was very aggressive in a car," said Sir Jackie Stewart, three-time F1 champion.

"I've known him as a friend and a competitor. As a competitor, he was a pain in the

arse.

"I'm proud that he's being recognised in this fashion. He's a very proud South African, and he carries the flag well."

"He's still rough around the edges," said Ross Brawn, the managing director at F1. "His South African heritage is still very strong within him. That commitment and dedication that he has is what has made him successful in all of his enterprises."

Although a cheese enthusiast and manufacturer these days, Scheckter said that the next career he's planning involves the beach.

"I still feel very much a South African, and I want to thank you all very much for honouring me," he said.

Any F1 driver will tell you that their best win would be first place in Monza, Italy, in a Ferrari in a world championship. Only one person has ever achieved that: Jody Scheckter.



Jody Scheckter

Johnny Broomberg: Solidarity and teamwork will see us through

JORDAN MOSHE

When COVID-19 struck, Dr Jonathan Broomberg heeded the call.

Discovery's chief executive of Vitality Health International, Broomberg assumed the role of head of healthcare for South Africa's Solidarity Fund, a feat which saw him take the Absa Business Leadership in the Time of COVID award last Sunday at the virtual Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.

Colleagues and friends paid tribute to Broomberg's efforts in video messages streamed during the awards ceremony.

"He's one of the smartest and most effective people I've ever met," said Discovery Chief Executive Adrian Gore. "His role in the fund and in our country's fight against COVID-19 is something we should be incredibly proud of."

The president announced the establishment of the Solidarity Fund in March, and Broomberg landed at the centre of it all. The fund has raised more than R6 billion in its six months of existence, and has helped to acquire much of the critical care and personal-protection equipment (PPE) used in the country as well.

Business and government came to an agreement that South Africa needed a single, independent body that would unite everybody in the face of COVID-19.

Broomberg was one of the first people to be called on to weigh in on the crisis, applying his business mind to devising workable solutions in response to the pandemic.

"Johnny is an incredible South African citizen," said Nicola Galombik, the head of disbursement strategy at the Solidarity Fund. "Nothing has demonstrated that as much as his response to this pandemic."

Said Gore, "This award is significant, substantial, and very well deserved. I'm proud to be associated with him."

Broomberg said he was humbled and grateful to receive the award, admitting that he didn't expect it.

"It really came as a surprise," he said. "One of the hallmarks of the work I've done in dealing with COVID-19 through the fund, something true of everyone who has worked in some way to deal with this pandemic, is that it has really been a question of teamwork."

Broomberg stressed that it's not a question of recognising individuals, but about how well our community has come together, how government has worked with business and the broad private sector.

"That's certainly been true of the work I've done," he said. "As many of you know, the fund was set up very quickly after it became clear how significant the pandemic was going to be.

"It raised more than R3 billion quickly, and then



Johnny Broomberg

deployed R2.5 billion of that largely in the health response to the pandemic, providing PPE when there was none in the country, acquiring thousands of ventilators, and supporting testing across the public-health system."

A huge amount of good work was done, said Broomberg, by more than 200 individual volunteers at the Solidarity Fund and tens of thousands of individuals and companies who provided donations.

"It's no surprise that South Africa's coming together this way has meant that our country has coped better with this pandemic than almost any

other country in the world in spite of our enormous challenges," Broomberg said.

"In accepting the award, I don't accept it for myself but on behalf of all my colleagues at the Solidarity Fund and at Discovery, which has worked tirelessly as a corporation. Truly, everyone in this country deserves a pat on the back for their enormous patience and effort in dealing with this pandemic.

"We aren't at the end yet, and there's plenty more patience and effort required. I'm deeply grateful and thank you very much for recognising me in this way."

Jewish astronaut Jessica Meir aims for the moon

HADAS RAGOLSKY CHRISSY – JTA

Since astronaut Jessica Meir returned to earth in April from the International Space Station, she, like all of us, has spent a lot of time indoors and cooped up.

While many of us have spent our confinement dreaming of future trips, Meir is working on travel plans to a singular destination: she wants to walk on the moon.

It's not just a pipe dream.

Meir, the fourth Jewish woman (and 15th Jew overall) to travel to space, made the Guinness Book of World Records when she and fellow astronaut Christina Koch conducted the first all-female spacewalk – lasting 7 hours, 17 minutes – on 18 October 2019. Not long afterward, the pair did it again.

Named as one of *Time* magazine's 100 most influential people of 2020, Meir has an interesting Jewish story.

She grew up in Caribou, Maine, the daughter of a Swedish mother and an Iraqi-born father who immigrated to Israel as a child, fought in the Israeli War of Independence, and later moved to Sweden before ending up in the United States. Meir, the youngest of five, also has Swedish citizenship.

Meir, 43, was raised in a Jewish home, regularly attended synagogue as a child, and feels very connected to Israel. She last visited there four years ago, and she took with her to the space station a postcard from Yad Vashem with a painting by a Holocaust survivor, a medal coined in memory of late Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon, and the Israeli flag.

"My father grew up in Israel, and most of my relatives from my father's side still live in Israel," Meir said. "I hope I can visit Israel soon. It's a very important part of my life."

We sat down recently with Meir for a Zoom interview to talk about her work in space, what it's like to be a role model for girls and women the world over, and her Jewish connections. Meir talked to us from the NASA Space Center in Houston while wearing her iconic flight suit.

"There are some key moments in becoming an astronaut, one of which is when you first wear your blue flight suit," Meir said. "This is such an iconic image. Throughout my childhood I associated the suit with my dream of becoming an astronaut. So, wearing this suit when I'm being interviewed here, or giving

a lecture to children, I suddenly realise, 'Wow, this is me now, I'm the person on the other side, I'm the role model.' And I take it very seriously.

"It's a very important part of our role as astronauts, to be in touch with the public, to communicate with people, and to educate them. This is one of NASA's key mission statements. So even though it's still a little hard to believe that I'm the one who inspires others

much fun it was.

"Ever since I was a child, even younger than you, I have always said I want to be an astronaut. Even the simple act of floating – when you're in a state of constant weightlessness and floating around – it's just so much fun," she said.

"Everything is more fun when you're floating, whether you have just finished eating or fixing something, or doing an experiment, you can just take a moment and float up and down or do some cartwheels in mid-air, or float around like Superman inside the space station. I think it allows us to feel like children again, to express this cheerfulness which sometimes we lose when we grow up and become adults."

Aside from the Israeli items Meir took with her to space, she also brought some American Jewish totems with her, including a pair of socks with menorahs (for Channukah). In an ode to Jewish grandmothers everywhere, she also baked some cookies while in space, much to the delight of her

250 000 Instagram followers.

In first grade, when Meir was asked to draw what she'd like to be when she grew up, she drew an astronaut standing on the moon. At the age of 13, she enrolled in a NASA summer camp, and at her college graduation, her parents held a sign that read, "Congratulations, space girl!"

But though her path was supposed to lead her straight to aeronautics and space studies, Meir first earned a doctorate in marine biology. Her dissertation focused on the diving physiology of emperor penguins and northern elephant seals, including research

expeditions in Antarctica and Northern California.

She described how that experience connected to her space work.

"The topics I was drawn to, the physiology of animals in extreme environments, required work in isolated places such as Antarctica, and were driven by curiosity and the need to explore," Meir said. "I felt satisfied and made it my career, and it led me to fulfil another dream – reaching outer space."

Prior to joining NASA, she participated in a joint mission of the space agency and the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. This time, she and her friends were themselves the subject of an experiment: as part of their mission, she and a number of other crew members spent six days underwater in a state of saturation diving.

Meir also spent a lot of time researching the physiology of animals in extreme environments, such as penguins, seals, and birds that live at high altitudes.

"At that point I was the scientist and researcher – and the animals were the subjects of my research. Now I'm the 'animal' being experimented on," Meir said. "I think it's a natural role we play as astronauts."

"On my mission, the studies in which I was the subject examined how space flight and a micro-gravity environment affect the human body. Understanding these things will allow us to monitor astronauts' health and will be even more relevant to missions that require a longer stay in space, for example, when we return to the moon and eventually travel to Mars."

Meir says that being Jewish is an important part of her identity. While in space in March, she tweeted a photo of Tel Aviv that she took from space. Earlier in her mission, Meir tweeted a Channukah greeting that included a photo of her menorah socks with Earth seen through a window in the background.

This article is part of a joint project of Onlife, the Gesher Leadership Institute and JTA, featuring some of the most influential Jewish women from around the world.

• Shani Tsur contributed to this article.

Jessica Meir prepares to be submerged in NASA's Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory for spacewalk training

Photo: NASA/Josh Valcarcel



to be like me, I think it's my duty to continue making that connection and inspire the next generation of researchers."

But Meir doesn't take herself too seriously.

My two daughters joined me for the interview, and when my seven-year-old, Tuti, asked if there were any other creatures in space that were "human-like", Meir answered enthusiastically.

"I was at the space station with a few other crew members, with American, Russian, and Italian astronauts. They certainly looked like humans," she said. "Other than the astronauts and cosmonauts who were with me at the space station, we saw no other life forms or anything that looked like humans."

"I definitely believe that there are some forms of life in outer space – maybe there were in the past, and maybe they are there right now, or will be in the future. Statistically, if we look at the sheer size of space and the dimensions of space and time, it's very unlikely that we are the only planet where any kind of life has evolved."

Later, when my nine-year-old, Lihi, wanted to know what it felt like to be in space, Meir talked about how

Getting the Jewish community BACK 2 WORK

So many in our community have lost jobs since the onset of lockdown. We are publishing their details to help them find work. This is the last group for this year. We will resume in 2021.



Fran Lurie
Experience: Sales Consultant
Education: Matric
More information: I have worked in the exhibition industry for 20 years, and because of COVID-19

this was the first industry to go. I was retrenched and now seek new employment. I am driven, enthusiastic and ready to take on a new venture.

Current location: Johannesburg

Willing to relocate: No

Email address: franlurie@telkomsa.net



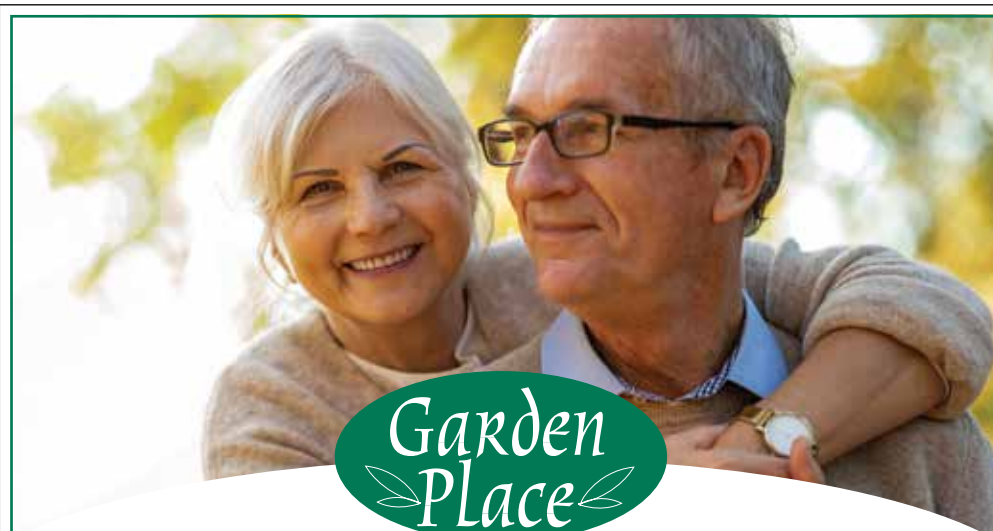
Nicole Williams
Email address: nmoskovitch@gmail.com
Experience: National Key Accounts Manager/PA/Secretary
Education: Matric (Herzlia); Travel and Tourism diploma (Travel and Tourism Academy)

More information: I'd like to work for a company which will allow me to grow professionally and as an individual. I'm eager to work in a team structure and am happy to travel. I enjoy new challenges, and having a proactive mindset has helped me achieve success. I'm creative, energetic, and pay attention to detail. I'm committed, loyal, enthusiastic, and give 101% in everything I do.

Current location: Cape Town

Willing to relocate: No

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Let Me Go to the Grammys

TALI FEINBERG

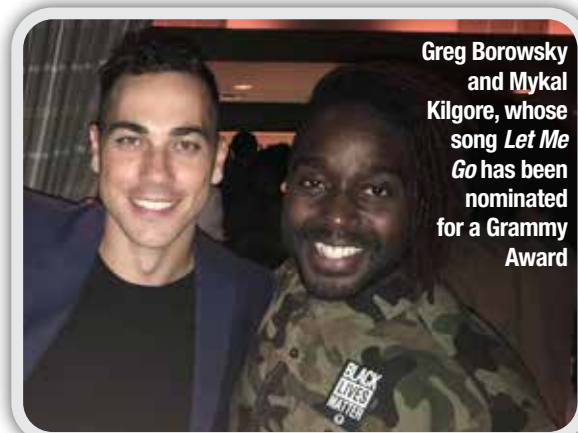
Greg Borowsky was in an Uber last week when a friend called to tell him that a song he had composed, *Let Me Go*, had just been nominated for a Grammy Award. "He was screaming. I started screaming. The Uber driver started screaming. Everyone was screaming!" he recalls with delight.

The song was nominated in the Best Traditional R&B Performance category in the 63rd Grammy Awards which will take place on 31 January 2021. The Grammys (originally called the Gramophone Awards) are presented by the Recording Academy to recognise achievements in the music industry. They are considered one of the four major annual American entertainment awards.

"It still hasn't sunk in fully, but it's been amazing to receive so many messages of love and support from all over the world, which has made it start to feel real. It's an absolute honour and dream come true," says Borowsky.

Borowsky grew up in Johannesburg, and attended King David Victory Park.

Although he played the piano and starred in school plays during his younger years, he eventually studied to be a chartered accountant and went into business, dabbling in music only on the side. But in 2014, he packed up his life and headed to New York with "absolutely no idea what was next", but wanting to make it in the music world. That he did, winning



the Off Broadway Alliance Award for Best Family Show in New York for the musical *Polkadots* in 2018.

Now, his career is soaring to even greater heights. *Let Me Go* was written with Mykal Kilgore, a singer, songwriter, artist, and activist. "I knew Mykal from the Broadway community. He was already well-known in the industry as one of the

best singers in New York. So I had asked him to feature on a song of mine when I was putting together my own album," says Borowsky.

"But as fate would have it, when we got together, we started working on another song as well. I was on the piano playing around with chords and progressions, he was free-styling, singing verses and hooks, until we felt the lightning had struck and we had something to work with. Then I recorded a basic piano guide track for him to write lyrics to, and so began the creation of what would become *Let Me Go*. Three years later, he finished recording his full album *A Man Born Black*, and I was thrilled that he chose *Let Me Go* to be the lead single."

Working with Kilgore was "an amazing experience, as he was already so well respected in Broadway circles as an incredible vocalist. He had been in *Hair*, *The Book of Mormon* and *Motown*, and this was his first solo album. Working with him was pretty electric. I have never seen a lyricist write the way he did. No pen or paper. He just asked me to keep playing the piano over and over and he would close his eyes, freestyle verses and hooks off the top of

his head without missing a beat."

When it comes to writing music, "Every song is different and has its own process," says Borowsky. "A lot of people say there's no right or wrong when it comes to writing a song, but most of the time I think you just know when you have something that 'feels right'. This one happened so quickly and organically [with Kilgore], I think we both had the feeling we were onto something with it, but you still just never know if anyone else will feel the same way. That's the excitement I guess."

Borowsky believes he got to this point through a combination of luck and persistence. "I was lucky to be able to have had the opportunity to come to New York and chase a dream, but also to [be able to] not stop trying even when it seemed like luck was out the window. Arriving in New York was incredibly intimidating as you quickly realise how talented and driven everyone is, but I've tried to turn that intimidation into inspiration, and didn't want to waste the opportunity."

In a pre-pandemic world, the period before the Grammys would be "a campaign period for the nominees, with events, dinners, and parties where the artists get to meet, network, and sometimes perform for Grammy voters all around the country",

says Borowsky. "However, with the pandemic, no one quite knows how the next two months will play out leading up to the Grammys."

"It still feels crazy to me that we're up against some of my favourite artists, like Ledisi and Yebba, Chloe X Halle, Marcus & Jean B Baylor, so I'm still pinching myself and am just truly honoured to be nominated alongside them," he says.

Meanwhile, he's working on other exciting projects. "I'm working on a Mandela musical in partnership with the Mandela family, which will premier in London in 2022. We'll be recording a Broadway all-star concept album of the musical next year, so I'll be in 'musical-theatre land' for the next 12 to 18 months. If we win the Grammy, I'd love to keep working with as many artists as I can, and hopefully it will make some of those collaborations possible."

Borowsky says his phone hasn't stopped buzzing with messages of love and support from the community back home as well as around the world, "so thank you so much to everyone who has reached out. It really means the world".



Layers of history and mystery in delicious 'Jodetert'

TALI FEINBERG

It's a showstopper of a cake – pancake-thin baked biscuits layered with homemade custard, piled high in a way that's pleasing on the eye and the appetite. It's called a "Jewish custard tart", but it's most commonly known as a "Joodsetert", "Jodetert", or "Jodetort" in the Afrikaans community, where it's a favourite at bake sales and celebrations. So why don't South African Jews know about the cake that's named after us?

Jewish caterers across the country say the recipe has never crossed their tables. "This is the first I've heard of it. In the 40-odd years of being in this industry, it's never been requested, offered, or discussed," said restaurant owner Michael Wener in Cape Town.

Chefs Sharon Glass in Johannesburg and Linda Nathan in Durban echoed the sentiments. Jodi Chait in Cape Town responded positively, saying "I make this all the time!", but she didn't inherit the recipe from her mother or *bobba*. Rather, she was told about it by her dentist, who is Afrikaans. She still follows his recipe today.

Responding to a post on Facebook, Lynette Cronje and Charlotte Smith told the *SA Jewish Report* that growing up in Pretoria and East London, Jodetert was a favourite in their homes.

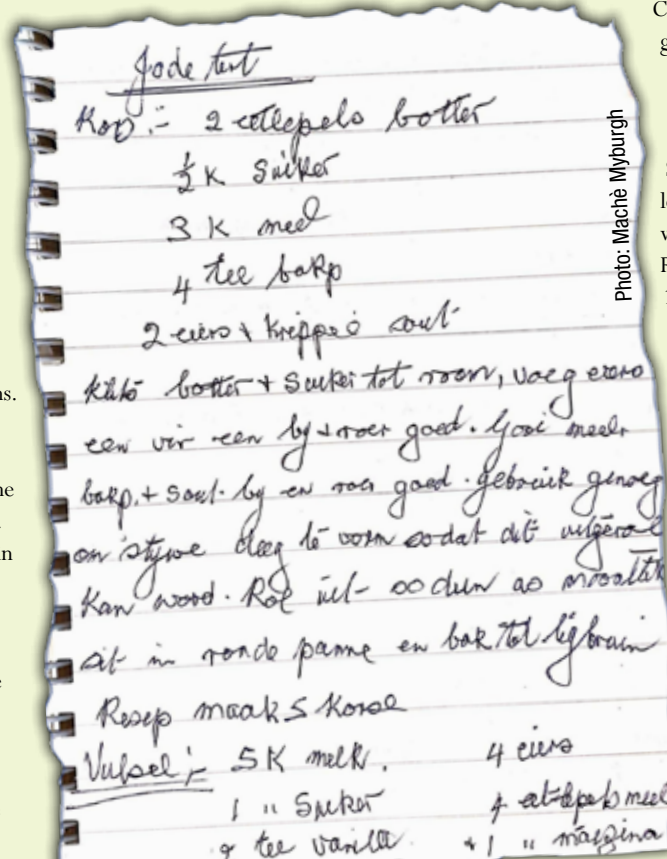
"My Afrikaans grandma always used to bake this. It was her star recipe, and she passed it on to me," says Smith. "Her recipe was handwritten. I think she probably got it from her local women's organisation or a friend or family member. Her Jodetert was the favourite at the *tuisnywerheid* [home industry store]."

Cronje's story is almost identical to Smith's, and when both women asked Jewish friends if they had heard of Jodetert, they hadn't. Cronje landed up bringing one all the way from Pretoria for her Jewish friend to try.

When Small Jewish Communities Association National Director Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft asked Jews living in country communities if they had made or heard of Jodetert, all but one said they hadn't. "The one coffee shop in Bethlehem makes Joodsetert, and others in Bethlehem make it too. We always said we've never heard of it or made it. We

find it very strange," says Lauren Klevansky.

Megan Furniss wrote a blog post in 2016 describing how she had known her husband "for almost 13 years, and over those 13 years, he has told me about his most favourite dessert, a thing called Jewish Tart." He came from an Afrikaans background, and "his *ouma* and mom made it for him on very special occasions, and it was his best thing. I have never heard of or seen a Jewish Tart, so I thought maybe his strange and wonderful family had given something this name, and they were the only ones."



Maché Myburgh's grandmother's handwritten Jodetert recipe

Furniss subsequently made the cake, but it was "a disaster". She suggests that the recipe may have been named for Jews whom Afrikaans-speakers interacted with.

In response to Furniss' post, Ronni Israelstam wrote in 2018 that he went to an excellent Afrikaans-owned bakery in Joburg, and they had miniature Jodeterte for sale. "It got me searching for the origins amongst my 'boerejode' and Afrikaans friends. They had all heard of it, and many had

recipes from grannies, but no one could explain the origin. As a Jewish person, I've never come across this confectionery, so I'm really puzzled."

Some in the South African Jewish community say they know of a similar cake, called a Napoleon or a Tort Medovik, and that their mothers or grandmothers baked such a cake. Writing from Lithuania, Nida Degutiene told the *SA Jewish Report*, "After reading the recipe, I'm confident that this is a Napoleon – the iconic cake baked in Lithuania for more than 100 years. The only addition to the recipe is one layer of cranberry jam. Without Napoleon

Cake, any celebration, wedding, or family gathering wouldn't be possible," she says. Degutiene is "more than certain" the Napoleon Cake was made by Jewish women in Lithuania and taken with them to South Africa. She spoke to Professor Rimvydas Lauzikas, the leading expert on culinary history in Lithuania, who said that the Napoleon Cake was created in Russia in 1912 by a French chef to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of the so-called Patriotic War or French invasion of Russia.

Lauzikas says the recipe could have travelled along with Jewish families from Lithuania to South Africa, in particular from larger cities, as wealthier members of society often had French chefs who may have made the Napoleon Cake.

However, "The problem is that neither Tort Medovik nor Jodetert nor anything similar appear in South African Jewish community cookbooks," says Gavin Beinart-Smollan, a food historian and archival researcher for the course "A Seat at the Table: A Journey into Jewish Food" at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

"I haven't come across anything resembling these recipes in my own research on these cookbooks," he says. "And the cookbooks certainly do include Litvak baked goods and sweets that Jewish immigrants brought with them – teiglach, pletzlach, imberlach, and so on. So even if Jodetert did originally come from Jewish immigrants to South Africa, it was likely never something that was particularly widespread amongst Jews." Asked if Jodetert could have been an Afrikaans recipe named for Jews, Beinart-Smollan says this is plausible.

And yet, the Jewish connection remains there – a link as thin as the biscuit bases it features. In her

meticulously researched story, "Putting the Jew back into Jodetert" in *Daily Maverick* on 23 October 2020, food writer Dr Anna Trapido found a recipe closely resembling Jodetert but listed as a Napoleon Tort in the *Kitchen Stories* community cookbook published in 2018 as a fundraiser for the Ohr Kodesh Congregation, Beit Shemesh-Match Yehuda, Israel.

The recipe was supplied by Leningrad-born émigré Stella Shurhavetsky. "Her layers are made using the same ingredients and virtually the same quantities that South Africans use in a Jodetert," writes Trapido. "Mrs Shurhavetsky also offered a theological explanation for the seven layers in her recipe. Seven represents the seven species, the seven days of creation, the seven laws of Noah, and the seven times Israelites encircled the walls of Jericho. In South Africa, the meaning has been lost but the number remains". As one Free State baker observed, "I don't know why, but I just do it that way. It's seven because it has always been seven – that's what my *ouma* did."

For now, the recipe remains a treasured heirloom in Afrikaans households – and a way for Jewish and Afrikaans communities to connect.

"I grew up eating Jodetert at all the special functions on my mother's side of the family. My grandmother used to make it especially for my uncle, it was his absolute favourite. This photo is taken from my mother's ancient cookbook," wrote Maché Myburgh on her food blog in 2014, sharing an image of a typewritten recipe in Afrikaans.

"No one knows where it comes from. It's called a Jewish Custard Tart, but nowhere else in Jewish cooking do we see anything like it. It's not typically *boerekos* [Afrikaans food] either, since it's a bit more intricate in construction."

When contacted by the *SA Jewish Report* six years after writing this, Myburgh becomes emotional. "We follow my gran's Jodetert recipe, and we just found out this afternoon that she isn't well – she may not make it to her 90th birthday in January. It would be such an honour to share her recipe with you."

School's out for brave Yeshiva matriculants

It's a wrap! And just like that, matric 2020 has finished! Yeshiva College's brave and strong matrics have completed their exams, and can have a well-deserved rest after their chaotic year. They left school in style, celebrated with balloons and the true Yeshiva College vibe. We wish them *hazlacha* in their post Yeshiva College journeys, and will miss them all!

Yonit Herring
and Rebbetzin Natalie Altman



Letters

DEMOCRAT WIN IS GLOBAL JEWRY'S LOSS

I read the article "Challenge to get Biden to focus on Israel, not back off the country", (*SA Jewish Report*, 13 November) with some dismay.

The Jews of America overwhelmingly supported Barack Obama in 2008 and in 2012. They also supported Clinton overwhelmingly in 2016.

"We voted with the winner, and our influence will ipso facto be greater" says the article's author, Simmy Zivel. In what dream world is he living? The Obama era was exceptionally difficult for Israel, with the Palestinians refusing to accept a Jewish state, refusing to negotiate, and then being rewarded for their intransigence with Israel being pressured for more concessions. Obama changed his election platform after his first election dramatically. The Iranian deal supplied billions to a regime which promotes terror throughout the region and regularly states blatantly that it will wipe Israel off the face of the map.

After President Donald Trump was successful in 2016, with nothing to gain or lose by being pro-Jewish, Obama vindictively got a bill sponsored to declare that the Jews had no connection to Jerusalem or the Temple Mount, and made sure that America didn't veto the bill. Whether you accept the importance of Jerusalem, Yehuda, Shomron, and Hebron and other areas of religious significance or not, they are important to millions of Jews throughout the world, including Israelis.

In the words of a great Labour leader and the second prime minister of Israel, Moshe Sharett, to be good for the Jews, it must be good for all Jews. I'm not sure that that's possible, but for sure, I can say that divorcing Jews from their history and traditions certainly can't be good.

BUT IS IT FUNNY? YES, IT IS.

Communal organisations and rabbis have responded with outrage to recent spoof videos that made fun of the controversy over kashrut prices. A video of Hitler shouting at his generals in the movie *Downfall* was generated with new subtitles that related to communal unhappiness with the cost of kashrut.

The association made by the video was clear: the chief rabbi was being criticised for being unsympathetic and dictatorial when it came to kashrut fees.

Some have even demanded that the creators of the video be outed and shamed.

The *SA Jewish Report* ran an article on the controversy headlined: "But is it funny?" Well, the answer is yes, it is.

Sometimes what's funny doesn't coincide with what's politically correct. Sometimes the very controversy of the association (in this case, the dying days of Hitler's power) is possibly what makes it so funny.

This particular video has been used time and again to protest against things that people are unhappy about, including superficial things like the unavailability of a beloved coffee shop or rugby matches during lockdown. This makes it a meme – which is hard for anyone to define, but it's definitely not a personal insult.

Similarly, the scene used, in which Hitler shouts and screams at his generals, makes fun of Hitler. Perhaps that's one of the reasons why it's OK as a form of protest.

Far be it for anyone, including our learned rabbis, to declare what's funny and what's not. The very nature of satire is that it's controversial, otherwise it's not satire.

What anyone criticising the outrageousness of daring to compare the chief rabbi with Hitler – and by Jews, no less (shock and horror) – seem to miss is that it's a way of protesting a situation that some feel to be untenable.

This isn't to deny that the Holocaust was horrific beyond measure, but the video wasn't about the Holocaust, it was about the Union of Orthodox Synagogues and kosher prices. Perhaps that, at the heart, is what is shocking our communal leaders so much.

Satire is a form of protest. It's not about insulting a man who is the spiritual leader of the community, it's not about making light of the Holocaust, it's about generating comment regarding an issue that's important to the community.

We don't need more censorship. We've been down that road again and again. Rather, those insulted and offended by the video should consider why it was made, and respect our constitutionally enshrined freedom of speech.

Maybe they should also just let go a bit and understand that laughter, no matter how it's generated, is healthy and healing. – **Julie Leibowitz, Johannesburg**

The statement that Palestinian democracy wasn't addressed for even one day is blatant nonsense. The Palestinians were invited – and turned down – a number of opportunities to participate in negotiations. The truth is that world leaders have used the same approach to try and solve the so-called Palestinian problem for more than 70 years with no success. Einstein said doing the same thing repeatedly, and expecting different results is the definition of insanity.

Trump used a different approach, and he has achieved very important results. The Abraham Accords bring recognition and co-operation from three Arab States, with more to come.

Joe Biden has impeccable credentials? He stated that he would have used Jerusalem to leverage more concessions from Israel. His priority is to return to the Iranian deal. Will he make demands on the Palestinians? Their approach is "no recognition of a Jewish state". "No Jews to live in Palestinian territories". They are "insistent on the return of more than five million 'Palestinians' to the non-Palestinian state".

The refusal of the Democratic Party to censure antisemitism, its support of Antifa and Black Lives Matter, and the hypocrisy of the left in not accepting the election results of 2016 then blaming the division, acrimony, and polarisation on the Trump administration is astounding.

Simmy, you won? On the surface, Jews have lost. I'm confident that with Hashem's help and in spite of Biden and the Democrats, things will be good.

– **Michael Rootshtain, Johannesburg**

JNF Blue Box enters the digital age

BEV GOLDMAN

When is a Jewish National Fund (JNF) Blue Box not a blue box? Never. Even though the physical box now has a digital donation option, it's still the age-old Blue Box.

This box has for decades symbolised the JNF and the commitment of Jewish people around the world to rebuild Israel.

And for decades, it has been filled to the brim with pennies, cents, nickels, dimes, lira, and francs – coins of every denomination dropped in, one could almost say, religiously every Friday evening before Shabbat candle lighting.

Now it's no longer limited to physical coins and a metal box. The new Blue Box with a digital donation option via SnapScan will be launched in time for Channukah to keep the tradition of the Blue Box alive for the next 120 years.

The first real Blue Box was, oddly enough, Theodor Herzl's hat. At the Fifth Zionist Congress in 1901, he used his hat to solicit donations from delegates as a means of purchasing land to establish a Jewish homeland.

Soon after, a Polish bank clerk proposed that a collection box bearing the words "National Fund" be placed in every Jewish home to raise money for land purchases. Production began in Vienna. The boxes were initially produced in a blue material and thus became known as Blue Boxes.

Over the past 120 years, funds collected via the Blue Box from around the world have assisted the JNF to realise its aim of developing land in Israel: building roads and water reservoirs, establishing parks, and preparing the soil for agriculture and settlement. Beyond fundraising, the Blue Box is also an important educational tool for spreading the Zionist message and renewing the historic bond between the Jewish people and *Eretz Yisrael*.

Stories about the Blue Box have become legendary. In the United States around Tu B'Shvat, teams of children brandishing JNF Blue Boxes would travel from Brooklyn to Manhattan on the New York City subway system. They would move from train car to train car with these ubiquitous boxes in hand, soliciting contributions from passengers and stopping only when they sensed or saw the approach of policemen.

In South Africa, members of the JNF would visit Jewish homes every Sunday to collect and then empty Blue Boxes, diligently counting the hundreds or thousands of coins inside them. In addition to being proudly displayed in almost every South African Jewish home, Blue Boxes

were also present in schools, shuls, Jewish-owned businesses, medical waiting rooms, even hairdressing salons.

In times past when life wasn't so frenetic and women could spend afternoons playing rummy and socialising, the money raised and won during the games was often dropped

into the Blue Box, adding to the largesse and reputation of that particular hostess.

Today the iconic Blue Box (or *pushke*) remains the link between the Jewish people and the land, and to many, perhaps even to the majority of the Jewish world, it's a symbol of Jewish continuity. They can also be quite valuable: a few antique Blue Boxes were auctioned by Sotheby's recently, realising more than \$3 000 (R46 006) each.

However, in the age of credit cards, cryptocurrency, and e-wallets, fundraising via a coin-based Blue Box risks becoming an anachronism.

So, the JNF has relaunched the Blue Box and linked it to the SnapScan mobile-payments app. A QR code will be found on all new Blue Boxes purchased from the JNF. People with old boxes can bring them in to have the QR code imprinted for no extra charge.

It's modern technology indeed, but inextricably linked to a century-old tradition of keeping Israel alive in every Jewish heart.

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A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Jewish achievers demonstrate what's possible

The annual Absa Jewish Achiever Awards held last Sunday showed once again how even in the most trying times, Jewish community members from across the age and gender spectrum continue to build, contribute, and innovate in multiple areas, whether in the economic, communal, cultural or human-rights fields. Fittingly, this year's awards celebrated the heroes of COVID-19, and "how a small Jewish community rose to the challenge of our generation". Those honoured, along with the various nominees, demonstrated how even in the unprecedentedly difficult circumstances that have confronted us this year, much can be accomplished through innovation, creativity, and a willingness to accept the risk of failure in order to succeed. It's encouraging indeed to see how Jewish South Africans go about making their dreams a practical reality. Rather than being discouraged by obstacles, they are finding new and creative ways to deal with them. Equally inspiring is how much these individuals are contributing to the broader society as well as our own community.

Democratic Alliance meeting

As reported in previous columns, an important part of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' (SAJBD's) work consists of building relations with government, policy and opinion makers, and political parties across the spectrum. Such relationships are essential to fulfilling our core mandate of representing the interests of South African Jewry, upholding its civil rights, and bringing any concerns it might have to the attention of those in a position to make a difference. Last week, a SAJBD delegation headed by National President Mary Kluk met Cape Town Democratic Alliance (DA) interim party leader John Steenhuisen along with other representatives of the party. The main issue was certain Holocaust analogies recently made by DA spokespeople,

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ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



which the SAJBD felt to be inappropriate and misleading. Steenhuisen sincerely apologised for any hurt caused, and in general, the meeting was a warm and constructive one in which our delegation felt its concerns had been heard.

Meeting with Chinese community

Establishing relationships in the political sphere goes hand in hand with forging ties of friendship and understanding with other communities. This week, Gauteng Council Vice-Chairperson Danny Mofsovit and other council members met the leadership of the Chinese Association. The initiative followed Mofsovit's attendance of the recent World Jewish Congress's Jewish Diplomatic Corps annual conference, the aim of which was to get members of the corps to reach out to local minority groups in their home countries to take a united stand whenever they or other minority groups are discriminated against. It was an opportunity to learn more about our Chinese fellow citizens, who likewise regularly come up against negative stereotyping and hate speech on social media. Our delegation was thanked once again for the solidarity shown by the SAJBD to the Chinese community in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. In turn, we thanked them for reaching out to our community when Simone Kriel published antisemitic social-media posts. We agreed to stand together on these issues, and the meeting ended off with both groups looking forward to sharing in each other's calendar of cultural events.

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

Funerals aren't what they used to be

If there is one event that we attended in abundance in 2020, it has been funerals. Larger and more conventional ones early on in the year, Zoom ones as lockdown became a thing, then "by-invitation-only" ones. Then there were the "come if you are close ones", and then ultimately "I have no idea if I am expected to go" ones.

Like most people, in 2020, I attended them all, with my least favourite being the Zoom ones. Not because I didn't appreciate not driving out to Westpark, getting a traffic fine en route, or standing in the unbearable heat or bone-chilling cold (it's always one of the two). But rather because Zoom funerals always seem to lack the X factor that I need to stay engaged.

The result has always been that my name remains present on the screen, but truthfully, I'm nowhere to be seen. It honestly amazed me when my father died, not only did so many people log on to watch the event, they also actually listened to the speeches. It blew me away. I was there and I found it hard to focus (as brilliant as they were), yet people not only joined to show their respects, but actually paid attention.

Jewish funerals in 2020 simply aren't what they used to be. Gone are the days when we would arrive early just to catch up with long forgotten friends (maybe that was just me). Or where we would gather on the steps of the Ohel to watch the new arrivals greet each other with a well-heeled and well-practiced air kiss.

Gone are the days of hugs and sad smiles, because why bother

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



when no one can see you with your mask on in any event? So much so, that with a hat and sunglasses for the sun and a mask for the corona, attending a funeral in person is much like being on a Zoom call with the camera switched off. Unless you have a distinct figure or limp, no one is even going to know that you were there.

And then there is hand sanitiser. The gusto with which the wonderful "Chev" cemetery workers have embraced this life-saving liquid is truly impressive. They are hand-sanitiser zealots of the best kind. If hand sanitising was an Olympic sport, the Chev personnel would win gold! Either that or they just don't have the heart or energy to bury one more person than they actually need to.

Men who attended a funeral back in March this year and who acted as pallbearers are no doubt still trying to get rid of the copious volumes of hand sanitiser that they were showered with. And it's not the normal stuff. It's the Dove soap of hand sanitiser, not because it leaves your skin silky smooth, but because no matter what you do, you can simply never wash it off.

There are many things that I miss about 2019. Large gatherings with friends and family, loud weddings where we could scream into a friend's ear without fearing that you were killing them, and anxiety free shopping. I miss those.

But I also miss the funerals of 2019. Not because I wanted to attend them in person, but really and very simply, because I could.

A column of the Union of Jewish Women

UJW nurtures with love

The Union of Jewish Women (UJW) has tackled the COVID-19 pandemic with passion, creativity, and incredible generosity.

Beneficiaries in rural and urban areas across South Africa included new-born babies and the aged, the homeless and the dispossessed, refugees, foreign nationals, farmers, school children and university students, nurses, doctors, children in dialysis units, the physically and mentally challenged, the lonely, the needy, and the anguished.

Desperate families received donations of food, toiletries, and household goods. Children were handed masks, sanitisers, and educational packs to alleviate the boredom of not attending school. Brain Boost participants enjoyed challenging puzzles and crafts to work on at home. Kosher Mobile Meals recipients relished daily cooked meals. New mothers at hospitals and clinics were thrilled with baby bags filled with all the basic necessities for their babies. University students in lockdown appreciated regular food parcels. Cupboards for storing work garments after a shift were provided for medical staff. The most destitute of rural families, those "far from the madding crowds", were sustained with nourishing e'Pap parcels.



On Mandela Day and Mitzvah Day, UJW women rolled up their sleeves and covered a spectrum of wishes. Schools received donations of school bags and shoes. Community cottages housing people with psychiatric disabilities were refurbished. Children in dialysis units in hospitals loved their goodie packs. Distressed families were thrilled with generous hampers of groceries to see

them through the December period. Adults with special needs were taken on their first outing to the beach, and loved their treat bags. Indigent municipality members and those attending feeding schemes were delighted with food parcels and meals. Relief boxes were donated to farmers, their families, and staff members after the devastating fires that destroyed their farms and livestock. Hundreds of sandwiches were made and distributed to the most hungry.

But it wasn't all hard work. There were some amazing Jerusalem dance events, with different branches challenging one another. There were Zoom meetings full of laughter, shared ideas, discussions about joint projects, and the enthusiasm was palpable.

The UJW has made a huge difference to so many. It nurtured with love.

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