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Raging regret as super-spreader event hits community

TALI FEINBERG

A matric pupil lies in high care at a Johannesburg Netcare hospital. Her peers are being admitted to hospital or are locked down, battling respiratory symptoms, fatigue, body aches, and nausea. Families are quarantined and long-awaited holiday plans are put on hold. Doctors and virologists fear a wave of contagion that will impact our most vulnerable. All because of a single celebration – Rage in Ballito from 27 November to 4 December, declared a “super-spreader event” by the health department on 6 December.

“I don’t know of a single matriculant that didn’t catch COVID-19 there,” says one mother, speaking on condition of anonymity. “It’s been an unmitigated disaster,” says physician and pulmonologist Dr Anton Meyberg. “The worst part is that parents are saying they weren’t warned, so I’m not sure what we’ve been doing for the past 10 months. These kids are now sick, many have co-morbidities and some have been admitted to hospital. Everyone thinks young people can’t get sick, but this virus doesn’t have any boundaries. There are no rules for COVID-19.” General practitioner Dr Daniel Israel agrees. “It’s madness. We’re seeing a lot of panic. There’s definitely a three or fourfold increase in cases [in Johannesburg]. Matric Rage should never have happened because it was so tempting for teens. It’s putting a stumbling block in front of the blind.”

Subsequent Rage weeks at other coastal towns, which traditionally allow Grade 12s to celebrate the end of school, have been cancelled in light of the rate of infection at Ballito.

A matriculant who went on Rage and contracted COVID-19, says, “I knew the risks, but I had so much taken away this year. I had nothing to look forward to. Going on Rage felt like it was only fair. I haven’t seen friends, I walked around my own home with a mask on since September, I haven’t touched my family. It’s just been work, online lessons, extra lessons, and studying.” Now locked away in her room, she is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms including body aches, headaches, and fatigue.

“I was anxious about going. I knew the huge risk. I was really scared, as were three of my friends. At one stage, we considered pulling out, but then decided to go. We were as careful as we could be. But once you’re there, it’s so different. To keep your mask on the whole time is so unrealistic. You eat together, you’re in your room together, and you can’t sleep with your mask on. So it’s all pointless.

“The actual Rage events were so strict. They would stop the music if people weren’t keeping a social distance. They refused to let people in if it reached the limit, and blasted sirens to remind people to keep apart. There was also a police presence,” she says.

“A lot of people went to restaurants and clubs where it wasn’t so strict. I think it was mainly spread at restaurants, and I saw the people making my food had pulled down their masks. The Rage organisers tried their best – we weren’t even allowed to buy alcoholic drinks at their events, so many people got bored and left. I don’t want to spread the virus, and

have been really careful since I got back.”

A mother whose daughter attended Rage and contracted the virus blames the organisers. Speaking on condition of anonymity, she says there was “immense pressure on parents” to allow their children to attend the event.

“I know better, and I realise the extent of COVID-19. Yet we still sent our kids because of the huge Rage marketing campaign that has been going on since last year. There was talk of cancelling, but then it went ahead and they kept kids as interested as they could. Parents couldn’t say no in the face of that campaign and after a year of lockdown. From the outset, it should have cancelled.

“Yes we can blame parents and some are regretting that they didn’t exert their authority, but the fact is that we’ve kept 18-year-olds locked up for a year. They were told there was a party happening and it would be safe. But there was no way to make it COVID-safe. It was negligent of the organisers to put that bait there. They may have got regulations passed and protocols in place, but it doesn’t mean anything. It was a recipe for disaster.” She is angry and admits that, “While sending my child on Rage was negligent, I didn’t have a choice. There was extreme pressure that came with the event being offered.”

Another parent whose son contracted the

virus on Rage says, “Rage was the one thing that got my child through matric. He had the time of his life, but at what cost? We have been so careful, but we just couldn’t say no to this. I was hoping the government wouldn’t allow it, but when it went ahead, I must admit I wanted him to have fun and put the struggle of this year behind him.”

Professor Lucille Blumberg, the deputy director at the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD) says, “The risk of lots of people being infected from this event is very high because of the very close contact with other attendees. We are going to see the secondary effects on healthcare workers, families, the elderly, and those

with co-morbidities within the community. Matrics really need to take responsibility now to break the chain of transmission, but it is likely the spread has already occurred.

“All those who attended Rage must quarantine for 10 days post last contact with anyone from Rage, irrespective of presence of symptoms or not,” she says. “If any attendees develop symptoms they need to test for the virus and follow national guidelines. It is recommended that all attendees have a COVID test – if no symptoms then probably testing seven days after last contact with someone at Rage would be a reasonable time.

“Even a negative test doesn’t exclude COVID-19 – the tests aren’t 100% sensitive and the virus could still be incubating. So you must self-isolate for 10 days from your

Continued on page 3>>

Chanukah, oh Chanukah...



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

Sarah, Tzipi (lighting the candle), and Mendel with their mother, Rebbetzin Batya Kiewman.

See special Chanukah section on pages 11 to 18

This is our last newspaper of 2020. Our next edition will be out on 15 January 2021.



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Experts plead for adherence to stop second COVID-19 wave

TALI FEINBERG

Even before matric Rage was declared a “super-spreader” event, the country was bracing itself for a second wave of COVID-19 infection. Now, as numbers continue to rise, communal institutions are already taking action and experts are pleading with individuals to take responsibility to avoid another peak that could arrive in the New Year.

“Whether or not this is a second wave is mostly semantic. Case numbers are up, hospitalisations are up, deaths are up,” says Jeffrey Dorfman, associate professor in medical virology at Stellenbosch

University. His comments come as the Western Cape government released alerts about dramatic increases in active cases of COVID-19 in Sea Point and Milnerton. In Sea Point, a Jewish community hub, the number of active cases in the week of 30 November to 4 December was higher than at the peak in July.

“South Africa is currently experiencing a significant and a seemingly progressive rise in new cases of COVID-19,” says Barry Schoub, emeritus professor in virology at the University of the Witwatersrand and the former director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases.

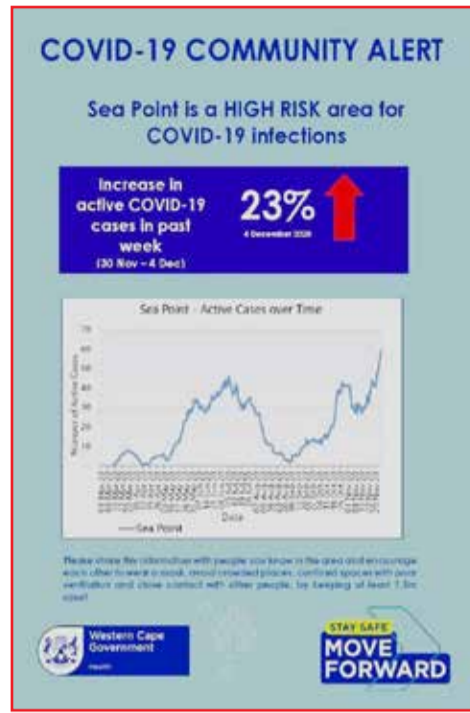
“On 4 December, about 4 400 new cases were reported, three-quarters of which came from the Eastern and Western Cape. Coinciding as it does with the start of the holiday season, these figures have given authorities much to be concerned about.

“After a long and trying year, many in the country are gearing up for the annual migration to the coast,” he says. “The festive season is a red flag for COVID-19, not only because many holiday destinations are situated in hotspots of the virus, but also because the holiday atmosphere itself is so conducive to social gatherings and getting away from COVID-19 precautions.”

In Cape Town, the community is already batten down the hatches. On 4 December, Highlands House Home for the Jewish Aged announced that “until further notice, we will be suspending visits by families and friends to residents”. Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, Acting Chief Executive Dr Leon Geffen explained the reasoning for the decision.

“The Rt value in the Western Cape has remained above 1.5 for the past few weeks, in particular the Cape Metro. The number of patients in hospitals with COVID-19 has increased substantially over the past two weeks. Anecdotally, it has been reported that there are many more cases of COVID-19 being identified amongst GPs working in the City Bowl and Atlantic Seaboard. Schools are breaking up, and there is a noticeable increase in socialising among younger people with loosening of the adherence to mask wearing and physical distancing,” he says.

“Since 16 September, we have had more than 1 100 visits to the home from family and friends of the residents. We haven’t had a case of COVID-19 amongst residents since 31 August, and there have



been no new cases among staff for the past four weeks. We are mindful that closing the home to visitors will have an impact on residents, their families, and friends, however we must weigh up the risks. As soon as the COVID-19 situation in the Western Cape stabilises and risk of transmission decrease, we will restart visits.”

Also in the Cape, Community Security Organisation Director Loren Raize says, “We have definitely seen an increase in people signing up to the COVID-19 wellness programme. We registered 30 new patients between 3 and 7 December. It’s extremely concerning. If we don’t all play our part, the consequences for our communities and our healthcare system will be devastating.”

In Johannesburg, Chevrah Kadisha Chief Executive Saul Tomson says its residential facilities remain on lockdown to shield vulnerable residents. Supervised visits are allowed and almost all residents have had at least one visit under strict COVID-19 protocols, but these are extremely labour intensive. “We have had no cases of infection from visitations,” he says.

Meanwhile, Hatzolah’s wellness monitoring programme went from four new cases in the week preceding 20 November, to 19 new cases in the week preceding 4 December. Four people were

admitted to hospital over that period.

The South African Zionist Federation and youth movements said youngsters couldn’t attend day camps if they had attended matric Rage, reside in the same house as someone who had attended it, or have had direct contact with someone who has tested positive.

Regarding the upcoming holiday period, general practitioner Dr Daniel Israel says, “I’m asked by many patients, ‘Is it still safe to go to Umhlanga, Plett, and Cape Town?’ As far as I’m concerned, the hotspots aren’t the issue, the issue is what you do when you’re at the hotspots. Although it’s back to boring basics, there shouldn’t be a problem if one focuses on wearing a mask, keeping a distance, being in well-ventilated areas, and not letting one’s guard down.

“If you don’t know where someone’s been, and who they’ve been with, even if they are someone who you trust, you’ve got to treat them as a real risk. If you can let that principle govern your holiday, you should be able to look forward to a safe vacation almost anywhere,” he says.

“Some months ago, my colleagues and I predicted that there would be a resurgence or second wave early next year following on the holiday season and the festive spirit and all that goes with it,” Schoub says. “Hopefully these fears won’t be realised, but it’s only human behaviour which can prove the predictions wrong.”

“People should be careful even if not in a hotspot,” Dorfman says. “Some hotspots are picked up slowly because we identify cases inefficiently. And, even in best-case ascertainment, hotspots are identified with delay. The main tools we have to slow it down and flatten the curve are behavioural. Lockdown’s economic costs are too high to implement. Could this be worse than the first wave? I doubt we’ll really know until it has already happened.”

Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
18:15	19:29	Johannesburg
19:15	20:31	Cape Town
18:15	19:28	Durban
18:15	19:45	Bloemfontein
18:15	20:02	Port Elizabeth
18:15	19:50	East London

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Torah Thought

Miracle of the meek against the mighty

The story of Jewish history is unique among all civilisations. No nation has been confronted with adversity as it has and survived. Yet the Jewish people have endured and continue to flourish. One of the extraordinary facets of this phenomenon is the tiny numerical size of the Jewish people who have faced seeming insurmountable odds.

History has produced powerful and mighty empires which have tried to swallow up the Jewish people, yet they themselves have been swallowed while this tiny nation continues.

This is one of the themes of Chanukah – the “few against the many” and the “weak against the mighty”. Ancient Greece with its vast armies was formidable. The Maccabees were a small band of soldiers. Yet the few defeated the many; the weak overcame the mighty.

This week’s Torah portion of Vayeishev coincides with Chanukah. Therefore, a connection must be found as there are no co-incidences.

The commentator Birkas Chaim explains that in both Chanukah and the portion, we see the idea of the numerically small prevailing

over the greater in size and number. Yosef has two dreams. In the first, he and his brothers are in the field and are binding grain into sheaves. Yosef’s sheaf arises and stands. The many brothers’ sheaves surround Yosef’s sheaf and bow to it. In the second dream, Yosef envisions the sun, moon, and eleven stars (referring to his brothers and his parents – the many) bowing to him.

Chanukah also generally falls over the portion of Miketz (next week) and again we see the same allusion. Pharaoh dreams of seven lean cows swallowing seven fat cows. In his second dream, the seven thin ears of grain swallow up the seven healthy and full ears of grain.

The message in all of these is the same. The few and weak prevail over the many and mighty.

The Maccabees’ defeat of the Greeks was a miracle enfolded in nature. The second Chanukah miracle of the oil that was sufficient for one day and burnt for eight days was completely beyond nature. This open manifestation of the divine that shone on the

Rav Ilan Herrmann, Soul Workout Shul & Community Centre



Jewish people was the last nationally revealed “beyond-nature” miracle. Thereafter, miracles were enfolded only in nature.

Why is this the parting miracle? The message is as follows: “You are a supernatural people. You are bound to eternity and cannot be vanquished. Although you are small in number, you are different and not subject to the natural laws of history that have resulted in the demise of vast superpowers. Your size isn’t what counts. It’s your inner might and strength. Yours is the task of being a Maccabee, of holding true to your unique mission and destiny. The key to your individual and national strength is the pure oil of the Torah – the source of light that empowers you and connects you to the G-d of all.”

If one pours gallons of liquid onto a tiny drop of oil, the oil will remain distinct and rise to the top. The quality of Torah with the heroism of a Maccabee is mightier than every force in creation.

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COVID-19 vaccine 'will be a game changer'

NICOLA MILTZ

Virology experts in South Africa have allayed fear of COVID-19 vaccines, saying they are a "triumph of science", and are likely to be game changers. However, they are clear that South Africans have months to wait before rolling up their sleeves.

Given the breakneck speed with which the COVID-19 vaccines have been developed – less than a year since the virus was identified – many in the community are sceptical about having the jab, worried about safety and efficacy.

"There are many who are understandably wary of the safety of the new COVID-19 vaccines," says Professor Barry Schoub, the chairperson of South Africa's ministerial advisory committee on coronavirus vaccines. "The development of these vaccines has been rushed through at five to 10 times the speed of other human vaccines."



In addition, he says, people are worried about the novel formats of these vaccines, such as RNA vaccines and carrier-virus vaccines, which have never been used in humans before.

"Those who are hesitant need to be reassured by the rigour and thoroughness of the safety monitoring at all steps of development," Schoub says.

During clinical trials, the safety of a candidate vaccine is carefully assessed by an independent data safety monitoring board which would immediately close down a clinical trial should there be any incident of a significant vaccine-related side effect.

"Following successful completion of the trial for safety and efficacy, the vaccine is submitted for licensing," he says. "It

again undergoes rigorous scrutiny by a stringent regulatory authority [SRA] often the Food and Drug Administration [FDA] of the United States (US), and often also a WHO [World Health Organization] prequalification evaluation and inspection. Each country then does its own inspection and evaluation."

In South Africa, the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) also scrutinises the data for safety and efficacy. Only then is the vaccine licensed for use in the general population.

So far, no significant vaccine-related side effects have been recorded for any of the COVID-19 vaccines, now followed up for more than two months, Schoub says, describing them as "a triumph of science".

South Africa watched as the United Kingdom (UK) began to roll out multiple doses of the first COVID-19 vaccine this week, becoming the first Western country to start vaccinating its citizens outside of clinical trials. This occurred after British

regulators gave emergency authorisation to the drug produced by Pfizer and BioNTech. The US, which has just had its deadliest week for coronavirus since April, is also likely to decide this week whether to give the vaccine the green light.

However, experts say South Africa can expect to receive the vaccine for only about 10% of our population, most probably towards the middle of next year. This will also be prioritised with those most in need being first in line.

While the wait may seem long relative to other parts of the world, it's only a nanosecond in vaccine terms.

It was welcome news for many in the community when out of the gloom of the pandemic came reports of the results of

the clinical trials of the three front-runner vaccines. The finding of 95% efficacy for the two mRNA vaccines – Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna – more than exceeded the wildest expectations of the manufacturers and medical science, says Schoub, who is also a virologist and the former director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD).

Furthermore, he says, recent studies have shown that the immune response holds for at least three months and hopefully much longer, as future studies may well show. A third vaccine, Astra Zeneca/Oxford, also performed well, achieving 72% efficacy.

Vaccines have been instrumental in treating many viral diseases. One only needs to look at the total eradication of smallpox, the eradication of wild polio in Africa, and very significant control of other vaccine-preventable infectious diseases, says Professor Lucille Blumberg, the deputy director of the NICD.

"In many cases, they have been instrumental in eradicating disease," she says.

"The vaccine is coming to South Africa, and it will be a game changer. In such a short time, results are promising. We don't know if it will stop transmission of the virus, but it may stop you from getting it severely. We still don't know about safety, but so far the data is reassuring," she says.

Schoub says vaccines could be the answer for the COVID-19 pandemic "once certain criteria are met".

"Vaccine-induced immunity would need to be durable, at least for a few years, and in addition, a high enough proportion of the population would need to be covered,"

he says.

However, being a middle-income country, South Africa doesn't have the financial resources of the US, UK, and the European Union, which have collectively pre-purchased more than a half of the current total global production of vaccines.

In order to achieve equitable vaccine distribution to middle and low-income countries, a pooled procurement facility called COVAX was formed by the WHO and several partner organisations.

"South Africa has committed to the COVAX facility along with 189 other countries, and expects to receive vaccines for about 10% of our population, probably towards the middle of next year," said Schoub.

But he said that given the parlous state of

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the economy, the country may not be able in the short term to purchase vaccines beyond that needed for the immunisation of special high-risk groups such as healthcare workers and residents of care homes for the aged.

"When and where the country will be able to immunise the whole population will depend on the availability of vaccines from manufacturers [who need to provide for global demand], and the ability of treasury to find the necessary funds," he said.

He believes about R2 billion would be needed to purchase the vaccine for 10% of the population. However, the total cost could be substantially higher taking into account the cold chain, which includes storing and transporting vaccines, distribution, additional materials, logistics, record-keeping, and personnel costs.

"While the initial selective immunisation of high-risk groups could be managed relatively easily, immunisation of the entire population in the future will be on an unprecedented challenging scale," Schoub says.

South Africa doesn't have a programme in place to target the vaccination of adults, so the more familiar infant and childhood immunisation strategy would need to be scaled up to reach the entire population.

A further challenge to vaccine coverage would come from people refusing vaccination because they are unsure of the safety of these novel vaccines.

mRNA vaccines are a new type of vaccine to protect against infectious diseases. To trigger an immune response, the vaccines put a weakened or inactivated germ into our bodies. They teach our cells how to make a protein that triggers an immune response. That response, which produces antibodies, is what protects us from infection if the real virus enters our bodies.

Eventually, Schoub says, it will be vaccines which will control the COVID-19 pandemic. In the meantime, we need to rely on non-pharmaceutical interventions and we will need to maintain these well after the advent of the vaccine era.

Raging regret as community affected by super-spreader event

>>Continued from page 1

last point of contact with anyone who was at Rage, irrespective of your test results," she says.

Says Israel, "People didn't get COVID-19 on Rage because they went to a hotspot, they got COVID-19 because the behaviour at these events was inappropriate. This time is about taking personal responsibility. The same way you wouldn't go outside and not wear clothes, you shouldn't go outside and not protect yourself against the immediate COVID-19 risks around you. Matrics have now gone back to their communities, and they are likely to spread it to their families, who will now travel again. There needs to be immediate containment."

Says Meyberg, "We've all been restricted in some way this year, so you can't say matrics are different to other groups. This has been a huge wake-up call to people in the community, and I'm seeing more people wearing masks and being careful. We are now trusting that people will quarantine. We also need to comply now so that next year, people are able to go back to school, work, and university."

Says Israel, "Rage definitely increased anxiety in the community. We'll see whether the quick action of GPs, the NICD, and the health department is going to prevent secondary infections. Time will tell."

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2021 vision depends on a vaccine



STEVEN GRUZD

It's that time of the year when we gaze into crystal balls to see what 2021 has in store for us.

The United Nations (UN) has declared 2021 as the International Year of Peace and Trust; the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development; the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labour; and the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables. I kid(ney bean) you not.

So, am I seer worth his salt? Last year, I said 2020 would be significant for South Africa as it was on the UN Security Council and was chairing the African Union. Given the unexpected and far-reaching scourge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country participated and led admirably in these forums. The coronavirus, of course, curtailed travel, and most meetings were held online.

I also wrote, "The Zondo Commission into state capture should wrap up, but will anyone be held accountable? Former President Jacob Zuma's efforts to remain out of jail will drag on." Two out of three aint bad.

South Africa is scheduled to hold local government elections in 2021. What will voters make of the African National Congress, and will the Democratic Alliance's downward trend continue? Will the Economic Freedom Fighters pick up votes?

The status quo of "no South African ambassador in Israel, but no formal downgrade of the embassy" looks likely to continue. Eli Belotsercovsky has been nominated as Israel's

ambassador to South Africa to replace Lior Keinan in Pretoria.

Initially, I felt that the Trump Middle East peace plan was doomed for rejection, but was pleasantly surprised and heartened to see the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, and Sudan recognise Israel. Trade and tourism ties are set to soar in 2021. Some expect Saudi Arabia to be the next to normalise relations with Israel, but is it prepared to do so without concrete progress with the Palestinians?

And will the incoming Joe Biden administration in the United States (US) pay much attention to the Middle East, given his priorities of tackling COVID-19, the economy, and climate change? Will the US rejoin the Iran nuclear deal, which has been heavily criticised by Israeli leaders? Will Africa be back on the US's radar again?

The Biden White House will be carefully watched, as the president-elect seeks to restore America's place in the world. He will try to reverse some Trump policies, and has to contend with the rise of China, and, to a lesser extent, Russia's resurgence. Washington wants particularly to mend fences with its allies who felt alienated by Trump.

Israel will have its fourth election in two years as the current coalition collapses. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's indictment for breach of trust, fraud, and bribery will continue to dominate Israeli politics.



President-elect Joe Biden

Britain will finally leave the European Union on 31 December 2020 with or without a deal, and the future relations between the two will be interesting to watch.

A major dynamic in 2021 will be the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, an operation on an unprecedented scale. The pattern of distribution is likely to reinforce the divisions between developed and developing states; poorer countries are likely to be last in line for the vaccines.

The year 2021 is set down for major events that were postponed from 2020 due to COVID-19 restrictions. These include the UEFA Euro 2020

football tournament; Expo 2020 in the UAE; and the Summer Olympics in Tokyo. The UN's Climate Change Conference in Glasgow – COP 26 – was also postponed to 2021. The Eurovision Song Contest was cancelled in 2020 for the first time in its 64-year history.

A highlight for rugby fans will be the tour to South Africa of the British and Irish Lions. The Springboks won the previous test match series 12 years ago by two games to one. Time will tell if these all go ahead as the world battles rising spikes in COVID-19 infections and deaths.

Shana tova!

• Steven Gruzd is an analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs.

2020 – the year of disruption

OPINION

NICOLA MILTZ



Time magazine dubbed 2020 the worst year ever. On its latest cover, it features "2020" with a large red "X" through it, marking the end of an historic year, but not the end of a battle. The first time it did this was in 1945 to mark the death of Adolf Hitler.

"This is the story of a year you'll never want to revisit," writes author Stephanie Zacharek, pointing out that "most of us alive today have seen nothing like this one".

As a community, we've experienced far worse in our past, but this has been utterly unforgettable. And while it's never good to wish time away, 31 December cannot come fast enough for fear of what still lurks.

This week alone saw hundreds of matriculants convalesce in quarantine having tested positive for COVID-19 following the outrageous Rage festival – hopefully the absolute final rotten cherry on the top of this crazy year.

Cast your mind back to New Year's Eve 2019, when you may have heard of Wuhan for the first time, shrugging your shoulders as you sipped champagne. As the clock struck midnight, you may have been thinking about that new job, that hard-earned raise, that trip of a lifetime, your child's matric year, or about expanding your small business, planning a wedding, or having a baby.

In all likelihood, your plans and dreams went out the window.

It has been novel in every respect, giving rise to a new vocabulary and way of life. From Zoom funerals; elbow-bump greetings; drive-by simchas; stockpiling toilet paper; working remotely; endless webinars; online learning; social distancing; lockdowns; hand washing and sanitising (everything including groceries); to ridiculous, ill-fitting face masks; bizarre hotel quarantines; and empty football stadiums with surround sound pre-recorded cheering; to a delayed Olympic Games and Netflix becoming our "BFF".

2020 can rightly be called the Great Year of Disruption, having taught us that nothing is predictable. As it nears its end, here's a look back at some of the stories that grabbed our attention.

January was marked by devastating Australian bushfires which killed a billion animals and brought many to the brink of extinction. Images of desperate koala bears clinging for life on burning trees were etched in our memory for life.

We were shocked by the tragic drowning of Parktown Boys' High School pupil Enoch Mpianzi, 13, during a Grade 8 orientation camp at Nyati Bush and River Break Lodge near Brits in the North West. This resulted in schools across the community reassessing safety measures and protocols.

A United States (US) airstrike killed top Iranian General Qasem Soleimani, which resulted in Iran retaliating with a ballistic missile strike on US troops in Iraq, causing mayhem in the region and Jewish communities worldwide strengthening security measures.

The impeachment trial of outgoing US President Donald Trump began in the US Senate which resulted in him being acquitted the following month.

In March, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic while the world watched aghast as the Italian government placed its entire country on lockdown. Haunting footage was shared of overburdened Italian hospitals and elderly

patients dying alone in corridors as exhausted doctors and healthcare workers covered in personal protective equipment battled in vain to save their lives. This was followed by much the same misery in Spain and other parts of Europe, coupled with a deep sense of foreboding as the first COVID-19 patients arrived in KwaZulu-Natal from skiing trips in Italy.

It hit our community after that infamous 40th birthday party in Westport, Connecticut, in the US, where several members of the community unwittingly contracted the dreaded virus. This brought out the worst in some of us as we stigmatised anyone suspected of spreading it.

At the same time, it galvanised the community into action resulting in an extraordinary display of communal leadership and solidarity in a bid to safeguard the community.



There was a sense of national pride as President Cyril Ramaphosa lead our nation for what seemed like the first time announcing a national lockdown to "flatten the curve" (new vocabulary).

Initially it felt like a holiday as families came together and spent endless amounts of quality time walking dogs, sharing banana bread recipes, and making TikTok videos.

The 2020 Pesach seder will no doubt go down in the history books as both weird and wonderful, and will provide stories for future generations.

But soon the novelty wore off. While the WHO commended South Africa's immediate response to the pandemic, the lockdown had a devastating effect on the economy and livelihoods, exposing gaping inequalities.

There was an endless drumbeat of morbid stories and pictures of pain and suffering, as well as heartwarming stories of communal organisations and ordinary people making an extraordinary impact during an unprecedented time of generosity and kindness.

Disturbing scenes of local soldiers enforcing draconian lockdown restrictions across townships and suburbs and the untimely gruesome death of Collins Khoza and others at the hands of the South African National Defence Force will forever be a blight on the national conscience. So too will the effect of lockdown on gender-based violence in the country as shocking statistics reveal the extent of the problem.

The ban on alcohol and cigarette sales took up much headline

Continued on page 16>>

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Israelis flock to UAE despite warnings

JORDAN MOSHE

Israelis are flocking to Dubai in droves following normalisation with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and in spite of security warnings against visiting the region.



One of the reasons is to escape the confines of the COVID-19 lockdown at home.

A security advisory reportedly issued by Jerusalem's Counterterror Bureau last week warned Israeli travellers that they risked being targeted following the death of Mohsen Fakhri-zadeh, the alleged mastermind of Iran's rogue nuclear weapons programme. Iran blames Israel for the death, prompting the warning against trips to Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Bahrain, and other Arab countries.

According to the *Times of Israel*, the bureau said there was a "basic concrete threat" in the UAE and Bahrain, the third-highest advisory after "very high concrete threat" and "high concrete threat". Israel's National Security Council reiterated the warning in a statement, saying that Iran might try to attack Israelis overseas.

Nevertheless, hundreds of Israeli

tourists are booking flights and making the most of the opportunity afforded by the normalisation between Israel and the UAE.

"Our main reason for coming here was really a holiday, to get out of Israel," says Carla Bortz, an ex-South African who has

lived in Israel for the past 30 years. "There are a lot of limitations in Israel because of COVID-19, and we really wanted to get away for a bit."

Bortz and her husband have been in Dubai for more than a week, visiting one of only three green-light countries to which Israelis can travel at the moment without having to go into quarantine upon their return.

"I was initially afraid to travel under corona and very scared of being infected," she says. "A day before we were scheduled to leave, an article came out in Israel about Iran and the threat."

"My sister called me and said it wasn't a good idea, and my sons who are serving in the army told me I'd be better off not taking a chance."

"I wasn't so sure about it, but my husband reasoned that it would be misguided for

Iran to use an Arab state to target Jews – it wouldn't look good. So we decided we'd travel."

And they certainly weren't alone. Bortz says that thousands of fellow Israelis are converging on Dubai, with about 50 000 expected to arrive in December alone.

"The plane was completely full," she says. "Plenty of Israeli tour groups are being organised, and we wanted to arrive early so that we could avoid the crowds."

Bortz says her flight to the Arab country was the first Israeli flight from Israel to the UAE with IsraAir. Flydubai, the UAE's first airline to offer direct routes between the two countries has added a third daily flight between Dubai International and Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport starting this week to cope with demand.

Bortz decided to apply for a visa in spite of word of an initial agreement between Israel and the UAE, paying 500 Israeli Shekels to have it issued.

"I didn't want to take the chance," she says. "I have a friend in the department of foreign affairs who told me that he wasn't sure when the visa agreement would come into effect, so I chose to get a visa on my South African passport." She says Israelis are paying 90 Shekels for their visas.

Although more concerned about contracting COVID-19, Bortz says she and her husband decided not to display any signs that they were Jewish upon arriving in Dubai.

"I asked my husband, who normally wears a kippa, not to put it on. I felt afraid. He's wearing a cap instead, and though we've seen a few Israelis around with their

kippon on and tzitzit out, I don't think it's a good idea.

"We're not revealing that we are Jews, and we're not speaking Hebrew. I also deliberated whether to say I'm South African or Israeli because I'm not sure what the response would be."

"Still, some people we've spoken to have loved to hear that we are from Israel. They've been very welcoming and seem happy that we've come."



However, just because the sheikh has said there's peace doesn't mean all will be feeling so positive, Bortz says.

"I haven't really felt a great love for us, but that could just be my Israeli stereotype," she laughs. "People could be behaving kindly because the government has told them to, that they need to be welcoming to Israelis

now. But it's more complicated than that."

Nonetheless, Bortz says her trip has offered a variety of opportunities, affording her access to places and people that were previously off-limits to Israelis.

"It's remarkable to be visiting the Arab world," she says. "As Israelis, we can't get into Syria or Lebanon, but we are now visiting Dubai. It's incredible, and it's been an extraordinary cultural experience. This is really historic, though Dubai is very Western and feels glitzy like Las Vegas sometimes."

Thousands more Israelis are scheduled to visit, desperate to get away from lockdown and restrictive measures at home.

"People need oxygen and want to get out," says Bortz. "Israelis love to travel, and coupled with the need to get away and visit a country that won't require them to isolate when they go back, they're all coming here. It's not just the peace agreement that brings them here, it's a chance to get away to one of the places we can go to."

With Israeli tour programmes running day and night, Bortz is sure that the UAE will make a fortune from Israelis flocking to its shores.

"A group of tour guides is being trained to bring more groups here, offering kosher options as well," she says. "Plenty of people from Israel are heading to Dubai to establish kosher restaurants, and the demand for kosher food is actually going up."

"There was even a haredi wedding held here this past week because there are fewer limitations than in Israel. People are eager to get away from restrictions and breathe a bit, in spite of the warnings."

Investigating the Angel of Death's twin persona

JORDAN MOSHE

"If Auschwitz as a place stands as a symbol for the Holocaust, then Mengele as a perpetrator has come to serve a similar role for the death camp itself."

So writes American historian and author David Marwell in *Mengele: Unmasking the 'Angel of Death'*. If anyone embodies the evil of Auschwitz, it's surely Dr Josef Mengele. From horrifying experiments to casual train-platform death selections, Mengele is remembered as the "Angel of Death" by surviving inmates of the camp.

Marwell discussed the infamous figure with Israeli historian, Tamir Hod, in a virtual lecture co-presented by Israel's Ghetto Fighters' House and the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre this past Sunday.

"If you look to his childhood for clues of the man he would become, you would be disappointed," said Marwell. "There's no evidence in his childhood home or activities as a child of him involved in killing cats in the yard or the like."

He explained that Mengele grew up as part of a prosperous family in the town of Gunzburg, Bavaria. He was the first of three sons born into a home with wealth and parental support. A middling student, Mengele wasn't terribly distinguished in his youth, but after enrolling at university in 1930, he began to display his first glimmers of interest in science that was to become his passion.

"He was the recipient of an elite education under Nobel prize winners, and became completely caught up with the science of genetics," says Marwell. "He earned a PhD in medicine and anthropology, and together with genetics, these subjects became the basis for Nazi ideology."

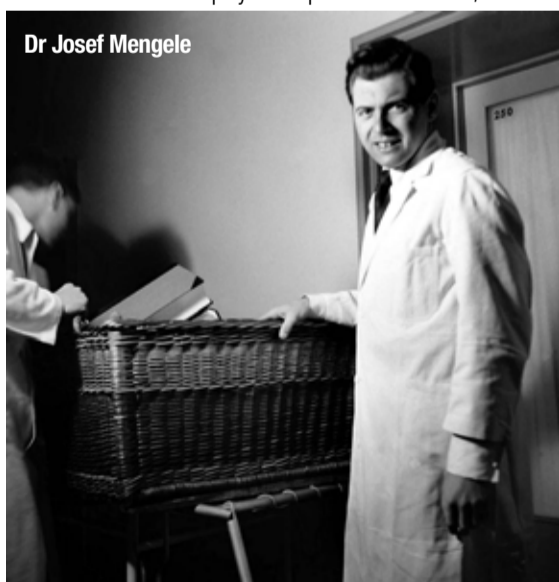
Mengele's interest in these subjects led him to become involved in Nazism, though he didn't join the party until 1938.

Marwell explained that the sciences he studied were

elevated by the Nazi state. "The role of the physician was changed under the Nazi view," he said. "They became responsible not for the care of the individual, but the racial well-being of a whole community. The individual was substituted with the collective."

Mengele showed great promise in his field, and had the war not broken out, Marwell said he might have ended up as a lecturing professor at a university. However, the outbreak of hostilities changed his trajectory.

"He was assigned to the Viking division in 1941, then trained and deployed in Operation Barbarossa," said



Marwell. "He remained a combat physician for about 18 months until evacuated during the retreat from Stalingrad, when he was flown out in January 1943."

"In all, he served 18 months of uninterrupted, severe fighting and was exposed to mass shooting and intense combat, leading some to speculate that he suffered from some PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] later."

Mengele was assigned to Auschwitz at the end of May 1943. "We don't know whether he was sent or

Continued on page 14>>



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- ♥ To sponsor security for Camp Keshar in December.
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- ♥ To contribute towards the work from home initiative implemented for parents and children in need of this assistance.

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COVID-19 rides roughshod over calculated risks



In the past few weeks, so many of us let our guard down in terms of COVID-19, myself included. I was a bit more relaxed about wearing my mask in company, although I did try to keep a social distance.

I guess we all got to a point when the numbers were down and we felt we could relax a little in spite of what the doctors were telling us. Unfortunately, that laxity has come back to bite us.

The first inkling I had that our – or my – eye was off the ball (or virus) was when I received a message from a respected pulmonologist who had just seen last week's *SA Jewish Report*.

She was upset that we ran a photograph on our front page of two of the leading doctors in the fight against COVID-19, unmasked and not keeping a social distance. She questioned the message we were sending, not least because the number of people getting very sick in our community and in broader society was increasing. The photograph didn't fit the reality.

I know that these doctors on our front page – both Absa Jewish Achiever Award winners – posed for our photographer, who may well have asked them to take off their masks momentarily for the photograph. When I was choosing the best photograph for the front page, COVID-19 was unfortunately not front of mind. It was all about the best photograph.

Hence, I say, my guard was down. Six weeks ago, I wouldn't have even considered that particular photograph. *Mea culpa!*

The point is, many of us have fallen into this malaise, and have been pushing the boundaries. And, while so many parents were super strict with their teens while writing matric, ensuring that they were protected from any viruses before and while writing exams, they allowed their children to go to Rage. (See page 1)

I know people have been horribly judgemental and frankly quite nasty toward the parents who allowed their children to go to Rage, calling it irresponsible.

Here's the thing, I know a number of parents whose children came back from Rage with COVID-19, and they aren't irresponsible people and would never risk harming their children or others ... ever.

They took what they believed was a calculated risk, believing it very unlikely that their children would contract the virus because of safety measures in place. They certainly didn't believe that if they did, it would hurt them or harm anyone else. These aren't bad people. In fact, they are good, upstanding, caring, and wonderful people.

All they wanted was to give their children a tiny bit of freedom after being locked away for most of matric. Many of the matriculants booked their tickets for Rage in October last year, long before we had even heard the word COVID-19.

And throughout the year, it was the idea and pull of Rage that kept many of them in their swotting seats. It was the idea of letting their hair down and finally partying after an extraordinarily tough year that attracted them.

And parents wanted that for their children. Who wouldn't?

And, in spite of what doctors may have said, most people believed the danger cloud of COVID-19 had lifted, at least until next year. Yes, they heard about the rising numbers of people in the Eastern Cape getting COVID-19 and hospitals there filling up fast, but that was there.

As for the doctors, the parents may have believed they were being super cautious.

But they were actually being realistic. The virus didn't care about Rage and all the matriculants who wanted to party and have some freedom.

No, COVID-19 struck Rage in KwaZulu-Natal with a vengeance and an extraordinarily high percentage of teens left Rage with COVID-19. Apparently, there are as many as 4 500 people who could potentially have contracted the virus because of Rage.

The youngsters got on planes to come home with the virus, potentially infecting others en route to their families.

Now, there are many who are asymptomatic and some who are very sick. There is even one teenage girl in high care in a Netcare hospital.

This illness is like Russian Roulette – you simply don't know the impact it will have on you. The way people have described how they feel also varies. For some, it feels like a poison in their system, and others battle to breathe. Those are just two of the many possible symptoms of this dreaded virus.

I don't blame the parents, but I also understand why doctors are furious. They knew what we were up against, and they made it clear. We were wrong because we let our guard down out of sheer exhaustion from everything this year threw at us.

The wake-up call is that this damn virus isn't going to stay at bay if we don't protect ourselves all the time. (See page 2)

There are no party breaks. There are no holiday breaks from this virus. We aren't safe without social distancing, sanitising, and wearing masks. There can be no calculated risks because this particular virus knows no boundaries.

We should still go on holiday because, well frankly, we need it. This has been a tough year for all of us. But if we do go on holiday, we take our COVID-19 protocols and safety measures with us. We have to.

We need to take every precaution – no matter how irritating it is and how bored and tired we are with doing it. I know I'm so sick of wearing a mask and social distancing, but that's my problem. I need to suck it up – we all do – to protect ourselves from this dreaded virus.

Until the vaccine is available to us all and we can safeguard ourselves another way, we have to maintain the protocols. (See page 3)

Dr Daniel Israel spells out how we can have a holiday and protect ourselves. (See page 7)

As we move into Chanukah this week, this is our official end of year and Chanukah edition. Please take the time to read the insightful and thought-provoking pieces on Chanukah that were written for you. (See pages 11 to 18)

May you have a blessed, healthy and miraculous Chanukah! We also wish everyone a safe and COVID-19-free holiday.

We won't be publishing the *SA Jewish Report* over the holiday season. This is our last newspaper for 2020. Our next edition will be out on 15 January.

Shabbat Shalom
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

Markets bet on recovery in 2021



OPINION

DAVID SHAPIRO

Last Tuesday, I took a call from my good friend, Ronnie, whose equity portfolio I manage.

It was the first day of December, and the media was describing November 2020 as a record month for global stock markets. The S&P500, a measure of United States (US) equity markets, had climbed a staggering 11%, supported by news that an effective COVID-19 vaccine would be available before the end of the year, that a Joe Biden presidency would repair America's battered international image, and that the leading nations would continue to sustain an ailing world economy. "Did you catch the bounce?" was Ronnie's only concern. "Were we fully invested, huh?"

Ronnie had worked hard his whole life and was very well-off. But he was a born worrier. He would openly confess that if he had nothing to worry about, he couldn't sleep at night.

I shook my head, bemused, and laughed out aloud. "Ronnie, back in March [when the stock market plunged dramatically], you phoned me in

recovered from the financial and psychological devastation caused by the virus, additional stimulus packages will follow. A precondition of these remedial actions is that interest rates will remain low for a very long time. With interest rates at rock bottom, equities will continue to outperform other asset classes like credit, bonds, and property. This isn't good news for investors seeking yield who might have to modify their income targets, substituting capital gains for interest

We should also not underestimate the role of the outcome of the American election on a rebound in the world economy. A Biden victory has raised hopes that, in the absence of troublesome Trump tweets, trade and commerce between the US and its allies will thrive. Popular appointments to Biden's cabinet, too, have added to the positive sentiment surrounding his victory.

There are many companies whose services helped us cope with the challenging times experienced over the past eight months, businesses

such as Zoom, Amazon, Netflix, Google, Facebook, and Uber Eats, and the question is whether these firms will continue to prosper when life returns to normal after the pandemic is beaten. In addition, investors ask, will those businesses that were wrecked by the lockdown – hotels, restaurants, theatres, shopping malls – recover speedily, or will the change in attitudes and habits encountered during lockdown leave a permanent incision on our lives?

Patterns about the future shape of our lives are clearly emerging, from families requiring more space for stay-at-home work to increased

outlays on upgrading residences and purchasing more powerful computers. Moving to the suburbs has driven a demand for privately owned motor vehicles, while seeking the companionship and joy of four-legged friends has led to a boom in pet food. Home fitness programmes are flourishing, athleisure has replaced formal office wear, and exposing your face on Zoom has sustained the demand for face cream and makeup.

Other developments and changes we have embraced, such as signing documents digitally, ordering home delivery from restaurants and shopping online, will stay with us well after the pandemic is over.

The rise in share prices that has pushed global equity indices to record peaks during 2020 have been the "virus winners" – the big technology giants that helped us keep our sanity during lockdown. Their dominance in the markets in which they operate and their policy of using their vast profits to seek new avenues of growth will underpin further gains in 2021 and beyond. But as infection rates in the world diminish and the global economy renews itself, "vaccine beneficiaries" – hospitality, leisure, financials, energy, and metals – will broaden the market's opportunities and appeal. Whatever, we are safely positioned for another good year in stock markets.

I ended my call with Ronnie, assuring him affably that during our long and established relationship, we had learnt to navigate his impulsive outbursts. As I explained at the time, the one thing I had learnt over many years on the stock exchange was that after every major disturbance, no matter how severe, the stock market soon recovered – some a little sooner than others. It happened after 1969, 1987, 2000, and 2009 – and 2020 didn't disappoint!

• David Shapiro is one of South Africa's most respected stockbrokers, market commentators, and the former deputy chairman at Sasfin Securities.



a total panic, insisting I build a cash buffer against further losses. Get out, if you must, you urged me. Now you are asking me if I ignored your hysteria, stayed fully invested, and rode the recovery?"

Ronnie's mania bears testimony to the extraordinary emotional buffeting we weathered over the past eight months. When news of the deadly virus first broke, we were consumed by fear and uncertainty, troubled not only about our health but also about our financial well-being. We were shaken to the core.

Yet, as the medical profession developed a better understanding of the virus and modified its treatments accordingly, and as the scientists made progress in creating vaccines, society gradually regained its confidence and adapted its lifestyle to new conventions, sanitising hands and wearing masks in public places and contacting friends and families on video rather than in person. People have slowly returned to shops and restaurants, keeping their social distance and not lingering unnecessarily.

The advances mitigating the virus and the wide distribution of vaccines projected in 2021 are guaranteed to make next year more prosperous than 2020. The global economy will recover from the steep decline suffered in the first half of 2020, when governments around the world imposed far-reaching lockdown measures, bringing international trade and industry to a near standstill. The extent of the recovery we expect is difficult to calibrate, particularly against the recurring outbreaks of the virus in the US, United Kingdom, and Europe, although the consensus among leading investment houses suggests that global economic output and corporate earnings will reach pre-pandemic levels by the end of 2021.

These forecasts take for granted ongoing fiscal and monetary measures from governments and central banks designed to bridge the loss in income and revenue inflicted on households and businesses by the closure of the world economy in 2020. And until the world's largest economies have fully

Is it still safe to go on holiday this December?



DR DANIEL ISRAEL

OPINION

Enraged by the Rage outbreak, and ambivalent about upcoming "simple" travel plans, patients have increasingly contacted me this week, enquiring as to the safety of going on holiday this December.

What a complicated – yet unsurprising – situation we have landed in, as we reach the pot of gold at the end of an isolating and protracted 2020.

Internationally, COVID-19 is still unremitting, and in most countries – even those with the best preventative measures in place – a significant second wave has occurred at a mean of 57 days after the first wave.

We all expected another rise in cases in South Africa. The uniqueness of the South African picture is that this potential second wave coincides with our festive season. With a 2020 mantra of "stay home, save lives" in mind and now apparent proof that those who didn't stay home and attended the matric Rage celebrations indeed contracted COVID-19, our community members are justifiably asking questions like, "Doctor, am I crazy to be going to Umhlanga next week?"

The April 2020 level-5 lockdown was partly informed by panic. Our understanding of COVID-19 has evolved significantly since then. I clearly remember the WhatsApp video clips I received of citizens in Wuhan seemingly dropping dead from COVID-19 after "breathing in its air" in April. We have since learnt that COVID-19 is spread primarily through respiratory droplets. Its main route of spread is direct contact, at less than 2m, and that simple mask wearing reduces the risk of transmission significantly.

Conversely, in the initial weeks of this pandemic, it was unclear how sick a patient had to be in order to transmit the virus to another individual. We have since learnt that asymptomatic transmission is very real (as seen at the Rage festival). We have, therefore, learnt to take precautions.

Another real shift in understanding has been the shift from sterilising surfaces to sterilising hands. I may not have let my children sit on a public bench in April 2020. Today, I maintain my focus on cleaning hands. These examples of the evolutions of COVID-19 knowledge talk to the point that we are much better equipped to go on holiday in December 2020 than we would have been 10 months ago.

There is no doubt in my mind that the safest way to live through this pandemic is to confine yourself to a room indefinitely. Don't leave. Ensure you pass sterilised food only through a small crack in the door, and you won't contract COVID-19.

In reality, the challenges for mental and developmental health on a personal and family level as a direct result of COVID-19 isolation measures has never been higher. Every day I see patients with significant depression, anxiety, loss of income, and relationship break-ups as a direct result of "preventing" COVID-19. We need a holiday more than any other year. Holidays help recover relationships, shift perspectives, and allow for rejuvenation.

Can you go on holiday safely this December? In my mind, absolutely yes. Safe holidays require a return to boring basics though. I have attempted to stratify the following tips in order of importance in my mind:

- Ventilation during social interaction is vital. Unless you are exposing yourself to family



you live with, all other social interaction should happen outdoors or at least in very well-ventilated spaces;

- Masks work. Pictures with friends look great with masks too. Set the tone of, "It's cool for us to have fun and wear our masks too – just in case";
- Avoid large crowds. Full supermarkets with social distancing and sanitising are not large crowds. Packed night-clubs, clubhouses, or concerts are;
- Hosting guests for a meal must be done

with *seichel* (wisdom). Ensure that there is at least a >3m distance between you if you are eating, and as for as short a time as possible. Serve the food while wearing masks. Let the host do the serving as much as possible;

- Alcohol magically washes masks away and closes distances. Take extra precautions if you drink;
- If you feel unwell, contact a doctor and get tested. Identifying a positive case early prevents major outbreaks. The Rage super-

spreader event started with a couple of cases at most.

What's the safest way to travel to and from your holiday?

Car travel with adherence to festive-season road safety is certainly the safest option. It also allows for a possible return home should you become infected. However, a study published in the *JAMA* journal in October 2020 showed that with the implementation of new air-travel regulations, the incidence of COVID-19 cases were negligible.

I recently flew. Scrutinising my trip, here are my tips for safe air travel:

- Wear a well-fitted mask throughout the process. Door-to-door. A three-layer cloth mask (or a medical mask if they are available);
- Don't touch your eyes or your face on the flight;
- Use your hand luggage as a barrier to ensure other passengers don't come too near to you during embarking and disembarking;
- Stay in your seat at the departure gate or on the plane until there is ample space for you to move;
- Keep the air vent above your seat blowing

on you throughout the flight. (The air is filtered);

- Try not to eat or drink on the flight. You can manage a short flight without refreshments.

Lastly, how about hotspots? Should you be anxious if you are travelling to Plettenberg Bay on the Garden Route as opposed to the Magaliesberg?

The most challenging issue with hotspots is the relative lack of resources for patients who may complicate in that region. For example, intensive-care units in the Garden Route have been saturated lately.

If you are a patient with significant comorbidities and lack the means to be privately transported home early in an infection, I believe you may want to reconsider your choice.

However, it's important to remember that by adhering to basic principles and keeping in mind daily that COVID-19 is still with us, even in the hottest spots in South Africa, you can enjoy a well-earned holiday and pace yourself for a better and healthier 2021.

- *Dr Daniel Israel is a family practitioner in Johannesburg.*

Vaccine could be shot in the arm for Netanyahu in 2021



PAULA SLIER

OPINION

For most of us, next year can't come soon enough! Here's a look at what's in the pipeline for Israel and the broader region.

Coronavirus

The much-anticipated American biotech firm Moderna's vaccine against COVID-19 is expected to become available in Israel during the first half of 2021. Meanwhile, Israel's Biological Research Institute is scheduled to begin testing its own coronavirus vaccine in humans by the end of this year, raising the possibility that it will be ready before Moderna's.

If the virus isn't in check in the next six months, between 60 000 to 80 000 Israeli businesses may be forced to close. This bleak prediction follows a 70% jump in the number of closures this year compared to 2019. Worst-hit industries include restaurants, construction, transportation, and fashion stores.

Israeli elections

Israel faces the prospect of political chaos once again after legislators last week approved a preliminary measure that would dissolve the turbulent coalition government. This sets the country up for its fourth election in two years. The push to topple the coalition received a major boost when leader of the Blue and White party, Benny Gantz, who shares power with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, announced that he would support ending the government.

In addition, the 2020 budget hasn't yet been passed. If this doesn't happen by 23 December – and the chances are diminishing by the hour – parliament will automatically dissolve, and elections will follow next March.

Israel has been operating on its 2019 budget and as things stand, this budget will continue into next year. The problem is that government spending is supposed to increase each year to ensure that services keep pace with the growth of the population. The transition from year to year without a budget creates major problems for the ministry of finance.

But for Netanyahu, new elections are good news. If a COVID-19 vaccine is rolled out next year, that would help ease the health crisis, and he has a better chance of winning

a larger majority and forming a government without Gantz's help.

Polls suggest a combination of right-wing factions, including Netanyahu's Likud, the ultra-Orthodox groups, and a party led by former Defence Minister Naftali Bennett, would obtain a clear majority of Knesset (parliament) seats if a vote was held today. Bennett, who has focused relentlessly on efforts to counter the pandemic, has soared in popularity, and is positioned to play a kingmaker role in the coalition-building that always follows elections.

Iran

American President-elect Joe Biden has said he will rejoin the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between Iran and the P5 + 1 and EU (European Union), colloquially known as the Iran nuclear deal. He has also promised to lift sanctions on Tehran, but only if its leadership returns to strict compliance with the deal.

Tehran insists that it won't accept preconditions from a new Biden administration, and says the United States (US) must return to the 2015 deal before talks can take place. Both sides appear to want the other to readopt the agreement's terms first. This has led key Israeli and American officials to doubt that a deal will be reached in 2021, much to the satisfaction of the Israeli government.

But it's still possible that next year, there might be a smaller, short-term, confidence building interim agreement. The Gulf states, particularly those with whom Israel has in recent months established relations – the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain – are demanding to be consulted if a US nuclear accord with Tehran is revived. Like Israel, it's not in their interest for Washington to engage with Tehran, which they, too, consider to be an arch enemy.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is the next moderate Sunni Islam country on the cards for Israel to make peace with. But Riyadh is insisting it won't normalise relations with Jerusalem until a Palestinian state is established.

Last month, Netanyahu reportedly held a secret meeting with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in the

Saudi Red Sea city of Neom, alongside US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. The countries are believed to have long held clandestine ties, particularly on the issue of Iran. Following the meeting, the Saudi foreign minister said, "We have supported normalisation with Israel for a long time. We think Israel will take its place in the region." But he stressed that it was "critically important" to encourage the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. It remains to be seen whether ties between the two countries will be formalised in 2021.

Middle East

The US is expected to continue to disengage from the Middle East, and Russia continues to fill the vacuum it leaves in its wake. Turkey and Israel must now accept the presence of Russian troops on their borders. Saudi Arabia has given Russian President Vladimir Putin the red-carpet treatment.

China, too, is gaining ground. According to surveys of people in the region, Beijing is a more popular global power than America or Russia. Its influence in the Middle East will only grow in 2021.

Still, Iran remains the primary axis around which countries in the region are orientating themselves. The UAE's de facto ruler, Mohammad bin Zayed, is active against political Islam in the region, which he views as a major threat. He has used the UAE's hefty resources to beat back Islamist groups. This pits Bin Zayed against Turkey's strongman president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who champions the Islamists. Istanbul has become a hive of Arab dissidents.

Most Arab states still don't consider Turkey to be as big a threat as Iran. But countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt are increasingly concerned about Erdogan's adventures in their backyards. With Turkey drifting away from the West and towards Iran and Russia, a so-called "rejectionist" bloc is forming in the region.

- *Paula Slier is the Middle East bureau chief of RT, the founder and chief executive of Newshound Media, and the inaugural winner of the Europcar Women in Leadership Award of the South African Absa Jewish Achievers.*

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The music stops with Dawn's passing

ANTHONY CHAIT

Legendary South African entertainment personality Dawn Lindberg had all but written the script for her death just weeks before she died from COVID-19 in Plettenberg Bay this week.

Her devastated close friend, Dr Dorianne Weil, was incredulous when thinking back to how Dawn had written to her about every last detail of the send-off she wanted for herself or Des (her husband) should he go first, which included a memorial ceremony and a musical celebration of her life, at Weil's home.

"It keeps playing in my head how it was just six weeks ago that she brought this up again, after sending the original 'Des and Dawn's wishes' letter back in August," Weil said this week. "How could she have known what was coming?"

"She wanted me to have a musical tribute to her here, but I explained that I was happy to have a memorial for her where people got up and spoke about her, but a celebration of her life with people singing wasn't how we Jewish people deal with death."

Weil says the letter Dawn sent her at the end of August included everything about the burial procedure. "She wanted Josh and Adam [her sons] to arrange it, close friends and family to pay tribute, and artists to perform, but wanted me to provide the refreshments. It included what she wanted done with everything, including her animals. It was seven pages long, and clearly something she and Des had discussed. She clearly wanted her life to be celebrated through words and song."

These were effectively preparations – Dawn getting her house in order – for an eventuality that one would have imagined would be way in the future. But then on Tuesday, this larger-than-life personality who was apparently healthy until COVID-19 struck, passed away.

"Dawn needed to be organised, which she was to the 'nth degree', and in control," said Weil.

"She was often accused of being bossy and interfering, but it was always recognised that it came with great intention, and was offered with warmth and generosity," says Weil.

"She was a larger-than-life person with energy and creativity that belied her years."

Born in Durban on 19 April 1945 as Dawn Avril Silver, she had a Jewish father and an Afrikaans mother. Together with her husband of 55 years, Des Lindberg, they became known as the formidable Des and Dawn. They began their careers as a folk duo in the 1960s.

Says Weil, "Des and Dawn were there to commiserate, celebrate, participate in every significant milestone and event of ours, and Les [her late husband] and I for them. We participated in each other's journeys with abundance, love, care, enthusiasm, passion, and alacrity.

"Dawn was a character, with her own brand of quirkiness and chutzpah, which sometimes she was entirely unaware of,



Dawn Lindberg

but that was Dawn. She was always a presence, leaving a trail of laughs and conversation."

Leading musical director Bryan Schimmel said, "Dawn was a force of nature who had an indefatigable commitment to the theatre industry. Together with Des, they challenged the apartheid government in the 1970s and blazed a trail when their production of *Godspell* became the first multiracial production to play to a multiracial audience in South Africa.

"I, and many others in the theatre industry, stand on their shoulders," Schimmel said. "The word 'no' wasn't in Dawn's

vocabulary. I didn't always agree with her, and we had our differences, but I admired and respected her tenacity and ferocious passion for everything she did. The theatre is a darker place without her in it. Bless you Dawn, you have a left an astonishing and unmatched legacy."

Avid theatre-goer and close friend, Denise Goldin, said, "Remembering our grade years at Parkview Primary School we all looked forward to the birthday parties that she organised, best of which was her imaginatively planned garden treasure hunt!"

"I'm most grateful to Dawn for offering to recognise the significant loss of my son, Brett Goldin, who was an internationally recognised actor, tragically murdered in a hijacking in Cape Town. Dawn in her caring and comforting manner dedicated a trophy in his name to be awarded at her Naledi Theatre Awards for the best breakthrough actor. It's gestures like this that endeared her to many, both in the industry she loved so dearly and personally as well. An icon whose memory will live forever."

Jonathan Roxmouth, the lead actor best known as South Africa's Opera ghost in *Phantom of the Opera* said, "I struggle to imagine an opening night in South Africa without the legendary Dawn Lindberg. She was a force of nature who left her indelible stamp on everything and everyone she connected with. I will forever be changed by Hurricane Dawn."

Dawn Lindberg together with Gill Katz co-authored a book, "*How Did I Begin?*" explaining the facts of life for young children.

Playwright Yaël Farber recalls the words, "Puff the magic dragon lived by the sea. And frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called Honah Lee."

"I spent hours as a child listening to the record of you [Dawn] singing Puff. Years of being welcomed into your home," she said.

My own early memories date to 1966, when Des and Dawn came to perform at Greenside High School during one Friday break. The school had a music club, and the entry fee was 10c per term. The school hall was packed to capacity.

Our friendship began in the late 1980s, and the Sunday Soirée evenings at their home in St Patrick's Road, Houghton, were not to be missed. Johnny Clegg and Siphon Mchunu performed one of their earliest gigs at the venue. Other regulars were Tessa Ziegler, Mark Banks, and of course Des and Dawn themselves. Supported by the Jewish community, Jules and Selma Browde were always in the audience, as were Dr Joseph Teeger and his wife, Isa.

Yet Dawn's biggest acclaim was for the annual event she founded called the Naledi Theatre Awards. Year-after-year, each surpassed the previous one in magnitude and glamour, always succeeding to acknowledge and encourage the theatre industry through nominations and winners across a host of different categories. All genres of live theatre were covered with the support of a loyal panel of judges who diligently went to see eligible productions.

I lent a hand to oversee the judging process and hand the envelopes to Dawn at the start of the live event. For Dawn, it was a labour of love, and even when funding became an issue, she and Des continued regardless and unstintingly gave of themselves. It was a full-time job over a year that culminated in a number of events. The awards ceremony was usually packed with entertainment drawn from the fare of eligible productions for the year.

The 2020 ceremony was a challenge because of the pandemic. Undaunted and with the motto "the show must go on", Dawn teamed up with webinar maestro Dan Stillerman to make it happen.

Stillerman said he was utterly shocked by the news. He met Dawn through one of the Naledi judges, Thea Gafin, when she was seeking to take the 2020 ceremony online. Dan was struck by her energy, passion, and enthusiasm, and found it hard to believe that she was 75 – more like 65, he says.

I'm comforted in the loss of Dawn Lindberg by the characters of Pippin and Gandalf in JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. For me, Pippin is even more appropriate because it's the name of the international musical that Dawn obtained the rights for and produced in South Africa in 1975, which she would care to forget because it was a financial disaster.

Pippin, "I didn't think it would end this way!" Gandalf, "End? No, the journey doesn't end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take."

Rabbi Ben Isaacson – a maverick soul finds rest

HOWARD SACKSTEIN

I could write a standard obituary tribute to Rabbi Ben Isaacson. I could praise his Torah knowledge, his love for the biblical prophets, his passion for Israel, and his voluminous writings. It would be a dull and boring literary piece that would give no insight into the unique character and genius that was Ben Isaacson. Ben was no cowering wallflower, he was a man with a big ego, who wanted his story told, and what a unique story it was.



Rabbi Ben Isaacson

Ben was crazy, quirky, and off-beat in the way that geni are often misunderstood. He was a unique maverick, that no one could force-fit into the standard rabbinic mould, yet most of all, he longed for acceptance by the rabbinic establishment after a long journey in the wilderness.

When the late Suzanne Belling was appointed Isaacson's biographer, he regaled her with colourful stories of a life well lived, anecdotes of trips to the south of France, love affairs, adoring groupies, and tennis games in the searing tropical heat with the Palestinian Liberation Organisation's representative to Zimbabwe.

But that wasn't the story that his family wanted told, and so the book was edited, re-written, and stripped bare of its life. When the toned-down version of the book was submitted to the establishment for a foreword, the response was less than enthusiastic. A book on the angry biblical prophets, would be so much more appropriate, they thought.

So resultantly, we were deprived of a unique glimpse into the life of the most rebellious rabbi to have ever graced the pulpit in South Africa.

Over many cups of tea in his apartment, near the iconic Doll House Roadhouse, Isaacson, would tell me about his life, his struggles, and his vindication as South Africa's most iconic anti-apartheid struggle rabbi. He longed for recognition for his political and humanitarian work from the Jewish community, which he never truly received.

Ben, whose impeccable social-justice credentials were beyond reproach, was a proud Zionist, and vociferous supporter of the state of Israel, where he had lived for many years. He wasn't shy to call out antisemites, and considered the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement a thinly disguised form of antisemitism.

My interview with him was published some years back in the *SA Jewish Report*, but parts deserve repeating here.

"It portended an ominous Shabbat evening in 1957, when Rabbi Ben Isaacson, assistant to Chief Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz, rose to the pulpit of The Great Synagogue in Wolmarans Street, Johannesburg. After a rousing sermon about the 'twelve spies' who scouted the land of

Israel, during which Isaacson had unequivocally condemned the racist policies of apartheid, the president of the Wolmarans Street Shul, Percy Yutar, dismissed Ben Isaacson on the spot. Yutar would later be the infamous state-prosecutor who prosecuted Nelson Mandela at the Rivonia Trial, and who called for the imposition of the death penalty on Madiba."

And so began the journey of Ben Isaacson, the "struggle rabbi". Sent into *cherem* (banned) for the sin of condemning apartheid, Isaacson found himself rabbi to the small conservative community of Krugersdorp, west of Johannesburg. The day after the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, Isaacson travelled to the blood-soaked streets of the dusty township, where 69 protestors had been mowed down by police in a protest against oppressive apartheid pass laws.

Together with other clerics, Isaacson visited the hospital and morgue to see the lifeless bodies caked in mud and blood. That evening, Isaacson's home in Krugersdorp was raided by the security police. His library of struggle and Jewish religious books was confiscated and never returned. His wife and young daughter were traumatised by the rifle-wielding uniforms. Police even cut open the mattress of baby Ilana Isaacson's crib, looking for evidence against the Jewish clergyman.

At that time, Isaacson was also harbouring the young children of anti-apartheid activist Ben Turok, who together with his wife, Mary, were on the run from the police. Indeed, Isaacson and his then wife, Ann, were regularly providing a safe house for African National Congress (ANC) operatives to meet.

The "rebel rabbi" was too much for Krugersdorp, and Isaacson was under extreme pressure to resign. This time, he was sent further into the purgatory of Bloemfontein, no place for a member of the Congress of Democrats. In Bloem, Isaacson would be broken, and he once again became a rabbi with no pulpit.

The friendship between Isaacson and struggle heroes Beyers Naudé and Helen Joseph was so deep that when he was left an unemployed rabbi, Naudé, the head of the South African Council of Churches, would send the rabbi a monthly cheque.

Isaacson is the only rabbi in South Africa to have ever joined the banned ANC. While in exile in Zimbabwe, Thabo Mbeki, who would later become the second president of South Africa, came for Shabbat dinner and loved the chopped liver. When Isaacson returned from exile to South Africa, he asked Mbeki, "Why have you forgotten me?" Mbeki replied, "We will never forget you," yet, says Isaacson, "they did".

Isaacson's religious journey led him through many flavours of the Jewish faith, including his own Har'el branded congregation along the M1 highway in Houghton, Johannesburg. Ultimately, he returned to Orthodox Judaism where he felt most at home and where he believed he had the most to contribute. Whether the Orthodox establishment truly accepted him back into its fold played heavily on his mind.

As Rabbi Isaacson's body is laid to rest this week, South Africa should mourn one of its true struggle heroes, an anti-apartheid icon, a rabbinic genius, and a true maverick, who looked at the world and was determined to make life better for all who live in it. Therein lies the greatest Jewish lesson that Rabbi Ben Isaacson could ever teach – the true meaning of what it means to be a Jew.



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Tiny Torah scroll lost in space makes huge ripples on earth

JORDAN MOSHE

When Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon headed into space in 2003, he took with him a miniature Torah scroll which had survived the Holocaust. Tragically, both Ramon and the scroll were lost in a fatal accident upon re-entry into the atmosphere.

However, their spiritual legacy will remain alive for generations to come thanks to a determined South African, Neil Rubinstein, the driving force behind an effort to replicate the lost Torah scroll.

Ramon, an Israeli fighter pilot and later the first Israeli astronaut, was a space shuttle payload specialist of STS-107, the fatal mission in which he and six other crew members were killed in the re-entry accident in February 2003.

From space, Ramon broadcast a message in which he acknowledged the resilience of the Jewish people, something he felt the tiny Torah scroll in his hand captured so well.

"This was given by a rabbi to a scared, thin young boy in Bergen-Belsen," said Ramon from the space shuttle. "It

represents more than anything the ability of the Jewish people to survive. From horrible periods, black days, to reach periods of hope and belief in the future."

This message resonated deeply with Rubinstein at the time.

"When I first saw this clip many years ago, I had a sense that was something almost prophetic about Ramon's words," he told the *SA Jewish Report* from his home in Israel, where he lives today. "He was a completely secular Israeli with no religious background at all, and he chose to share that story with the world in the minute that he had. That was what he felt was most significant to show about the Jewish people."

Rubinstein said Ramon had first come across the Torah scroll while training in Houston, Texas, in the home of Joachim Joseph. Joseph, an expert in weather patterns, was a Holocaust survivor who had been given the Torah after reading his Barmitzvah portion from it clandestinely in Bergen-Belsen in 1944.

Only 4.5 inches tall, the scroll belonged to Rabbi Simon Dasberg, who passed it on to Joseph on condition that he share its story if he should survive the Holocaust.



Ilan Ramon holds the miniature Torah during the live broadcast from space

Said Rubinstein, "Ilan, himself a child of Holocaust survivors, was blown away by the story. He thought it through for a long time, and eventually asked Joseph if he could take the Torah with him into space.

"You can't just take anything on a space mission, and NASA [the National Aeronautics and Space Administration] was taken aback. He managed to create an

aura that so moved NASA, that even after the disaster, a non-Jewish astronaut flew up a replica of the Sefer Torah into space in Ramon's honour. He moved them all."

Inspired by the story, Rubinstein, a partner of an Israeli educational programme called Ner Le'Elef, looked for ways to carry the story forward and use it to uplift others. Rubinstein worked closely

with the programme's dean, Rabbi Yirmiyahu Abramov, to devise a non-profit project which would connect young Jews with their Jewish heritage and spirituality.

"A lot of work has been done to perpetuate Ramon's memory in the scientific field," said Rubinstein. "The Ramon Foundation is doing amazing work in terms of science and space, but there is no focus on perpetuating the spiritual legacy of what he represented."

Eventually, it was decided earlier this year that the ideal tribute would take the form of an exact replica of the Torah scroll, one written according to halacha by a sofer (scribe).

"It's a real challenge," said Rubinstein. "You're fitting 42 lines into a scroll the size of a mezuzah scroll. No sofer wants to do that – it's basically micro calligraphy, very expensive and complicated."

"Most scribes aren't prepared to write on a continuous basis, but we found a sofer who has been writing day and night for nine months. It's tough work."

Rather than be housed in a museum, the Torah will be used to promote the concept of Jewish heroism, perpetuating the spiritual legacy of Ramon by being used by Barmitzvah boys across various programmes in Israel.

An accompanying curriculum based on the idea of spiritual heroism is being devised, with Ramon featuring as one of the three figures used to convey lessons of bravery within a spiritual context.

"The non-profit is called The Triumph of the Jewish Spirit," said Rubinstein. "It's based on the concept of the spiritual fortitude and incredible strength of Jews over the years as a catalyst to ignite each Jew and start their journey."

"The Ilan Ramon section of the project is really about trying to educate a Barmitzvah boy on the centrality of Torah to a Jewish lifestyle. Most Barmitzvah boys in Israel are really disconnected, and we're hoping to give them a meaningful context through which to connect."

"Ramon became more connected to his heritage, and went from being an Israeli to a Jewish hero. The replica will take his story forward and perpetuate the spiritual legacy which he represented."

Because the project isn't affiliated with any particular institution, the Torah will be circulated amongst various educational programmes in Jerusalem, including Birthright heritage groups.

"Many of them have never had a Barmitzvah," says Rubinstein. "We hope to use the Torah and its story to inspire and challenge youngsters to connect to their own spirituality."

"It's a powerful educational tool, and the idea of having them read their *parsha* from the replica Torah will close the circle and make the occasion even more significant."

The replica is nearing completion, and should be ready in time for Ramon's 18th *yahrzeit*, scheduled for the end of January next year.

"It's an incredible story," says Rubinstein. "We're giving life to this story as we approach the 18th *yahrzeit* and celebrate the spiritual legacy of Ilan Ramon, a real spiritual icon."

Businesses rewarded for pivoting overnight

TALI FEINBERG

If there's one word that captures the challenge of business in 2020, it's "pivot". But what does it really mean to find that your entire market, customer base, and business model has been obliterated overnight? What is it really like to rebuild, re-imagine, and begin again in no time at all, with the hope that your enterprise will blossom in a totally new environment?

"We had to act really quickly and within three days adapt our clothing factory into a mask factory," says Mandi Dicks. She and her mother, Sue Clague, of Ajay Apparel, are the winners of the Shining Light Awards, an initiative created by communal organisations ORT Jet and Staffwise in Cape Town "to celebrate businesses that have managed to survive and thrive in a year that seemed intent on dimming the lights".

After a tough "shark-tank"-style competition between 45 businesses, the awards concluded with a ceremony last week. Judged by a prestigious panel and with sought-after prizes, it brought to light a plethora of businesses that encapsulate the meaning of evolution and innovation.

"Pivoting was very exciting, but also nerve wracking," says Dicks. Over the past six months, the company produced more than one million masks and kept three factories open without cutting costs or laying off staff, most of whom are women from disadvantaged communities. In fact, its annual turnover increased 80% this year, catering to local corporates like Dis-Chem and Discovery, and producing masks for export to the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe.

Behind the scenes, it was a constant battle. "We had to ensure that the factory had measures in place to protect the staff and ourselves against COVID-19, and this wasn't something we knew anything about," says Dicks. "We had to arrange special permits with all workers, ourselves, all service providers such as couriers, printers, and packaging companies quickly."

"Changing production lines in a factory isn't that easy, plus the machinists had never made masks before, so it took a little time to improve efficiency. This had to be balanced with the urgent need to get masks to customers as soon as

possible.

"It was exhilarating, exciting, scary, but most of all rewarding to see that we could keep people employed and paid. In between production, we had many days when we had to close the factory for a day for a deep clean due to a COVID-19 case, and then we had to make up this production time in limited working hours," she says.

"Exporting our masks to the UK and the United States (US) has been a wonderful experience, and it has been fantastic to receive positive feedback about the quality of our masks and fast turnaround times. Hopefully this will lead to other exports, which means more South African-based production and more people employed," says Dicks. Second-place winner, Vanessa Frankal, went from being a busy travel agent to business coming to a complete standstill overnight. In a desperate situation, she did anything she could to make

ends meet until she was "tapped on the shoulder by an old client who needed to get from Cape Town to the US on a repatriation flight". After successfully assisting her, she decided she needed to "fake it till you make it". She branded herself a "repatriation flight expert", and set out to make herself just that.

With her new offering, Repatriation Flight Specialists, she has seen countless families and couples reunited, and has got people where they need to go in spite of endless obstacles. Few were offering this service, so her name spread like wildfire, especially to stranded Australian travellers. She made connections at Home Affairs, and the acting deputy director general of immigration, Modiri Matthews, allowed her to WhatsApp him anytime with queries.

She continues to repatriate people, and hopes to evolve her business to focus on immigration and emigration. She plans to partner with other businesses to make this a seamless process.

Third place winner Philip Rubín of Health Island recalls how "with the advent of COVID-19, our market ground to a halt and we went from 15 000 sales a month to zero". Started



First prize winners Mandi Dicks and Sue Clague of Ajay Apparel



Third prize winner Philip Rubín of Health Island



Second prize winner Vanessa Frankal of Repatriation Flight Specialists

Ideas matter

OPINION

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN



Ideas matter. Great leaders are driven and express big ideas. Technical bureaucrats may put policies in motion, but the leaders who made a difference throughout history are those who understood the influential power of big ideas.

Nelson Mandela championed the ideas of non-racialism, national reconciliation, unity, and the dignity and equality of all human beings. At once diplomatic and formidable, it was the power of his ideas that drove him and liberated South Africa.

Winston Churchill inspired his generation by articulating the ideas that they were fighting for. The Allied soldiers of World War II weren't just engaged in a battle over land, but a struggle for the soul of an entire continent. They were defending freedom and human dignity from the evil forces of fascism and destruction.

President John F Kennedy rallied the United States around his vision of standing up to Soviet aggression and promoting freedom and democracy around the world. He spoke movingly about the importance of altruism and of serving one's country. President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher articulated a philosophy of protecting the independence and creativity of the human spirit, which needed to be shielded from government interference so that it could flourish and uplift society. President Barack Obama offered stirring rhetoric about a post-race America, and presented his own story as an example of the American dream and the vision of a society filled with opportunity for all.

Ideas matter. This is the essence of Judaism. Ideas – G-d's ideas for our lives and our world. Jewish history shows how ideas can change the world. Look at how Judaism changed the



trajectory of human history. What makes these ideas so potent is how they are translated into a programme of action, into a living wisdom. This is because G-d not only gave us the concepts that give meaning to our lives, but also the 613 *mitzvot* that help shape our days. These commandments, which are a blueprint for how we should behave in the world, are a practical expression of G-d's profound ideas.

All of this comes to the fore at Chanukah, which was, in essence, a battle of ideas. The ancient Syrian-Greek empire had conquered most of the known world, including the land of Israel, and worked to impose its Hellenistic philosophy across the land. Having occupied and defiled the Temple and outlawed the observance of Shabbat and circumcision, the Syrian-Greeks pushed the Jewish people to worship idols of Greek g-ds and heed a philosophy that prized physical prowess

and pleasures.

The Maccabees, who rose up against the Syrian-Greek soldiers, were engaged in a political and military struggle, but they were also – more profoundly – fighting for the core ideas of Judaism. Instead of a philosophy of idolatry and paganism, the Maccabees defended the Jewish belief in one G-d who created all of existence. He created every human being with a mission to improve themselves and the world through fulfilling His will, and to use their bodies and minds to do *mitzvot*, imbuing all with an immortal soul that carries the eternal merit of these deeds to the World to Come. The purpose of life is to do good. The Maccabees were driven to bring the ideas of Judaism back into their society, where even many of their fellow Jews were drawn to the ideas of Hellenism.

This is why the central miracle that we

celebrate on Chanukah is the lighting of the flames of the menorah. The menorah, the golden candelabrum that stood at the centre of the Temple, represents the divine light of G-d's gift of the Torah. When the Maccabees liberated the Temple, they famously found only a small vessel of untainted oil to light the menorah, yet it burned for eight days instead of one.

The miracle of Chanukah may seem modest when compared with the remarkable events that have shaped Jewish history such as splitting seas and manna falling from heaven. So why was an entire festival established to remember it? The answer is what the flames of the menorah represent: the divine ideas at the heart of Judaism that the Maccabees fought for. We light Chanukah candles to remind ourselves that being Jewish isn't about culture or ethnicity – it's about ideas. As we light the candles, we remind ourselves that ideas matter, that we should place the Torah's eternal ideas and the actions that flow from them at the centre of our lives.

We are a nation and a people driven by noble ideas about being good and generous to others and improving ourselves, of drawing closer to G-d by dedicating ourselves to His will. As we light our Chanukah candles this year, let us remember that Jewish history has been one long struggle to bring these ideas to life, and that the beauty of the Torah is the way it translates these ideas into a blueprint for action. As we bask in the glow of the menorah, we must impart the lessons of these ideas to our children, because we know that the future of Judaism lies in inspiring the next generation with the eternal ideas of what it means to a Jew, and that it is the privilege of a lifetime.

MOST SA JEWS (BOTH OF ASHKENAZI AND SEPHARDI HERITAGE) ARE ELIGIBLE TO REINSTATE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AND, ACCORDINGLY, AN EU PASSPORT.

A common misconception is that European citizenship and EU passports can only be obtained if one has documents providing his/her lineage. The fact is that not having any documents proving lineage, doesn't lead to disqualification of eligibility. Jews of Ashkenazi heritage can rely on documents obtained in Lithuania or Poland.

Jews of Sephardi heritage need no proof at all!

In his experience, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived, and therefore they are entitled to reinstate it, and accordingly obtain an EU passport.



Adv. Horesh has been operating in SA market with the Jewish community since March 2018. He arrives regularly to South Africa, and can meet in person with Jews who are interested to do so.

Ashkenazi: This ad refers to Jews of Polish & Lithuanian heritage only.

The most important thing is the understanding that prior to the end of WW-I, the European map was very different than the one we know today. Countries like Poland and Lithuania did not exist as independent countries, and until 1918 these territories were only known as Lithuanian or Polish regions/counties of the Great Russian Empire who ruled all of north eastern Europe. Accordingly, until 1918, residents of these territories were Russian citizens, as Polish and Lithuanian citizenships didn't exist. Therefore, since applications for reinstatement of these citizenships can only be based on whether one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen, whoever is a descendant of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 will not be eligible.

In addition, it is highly important to remember that since borders in Europe were shifted once again during and after WW-II, one's eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor hailed. Horesh explains: Shifted borders resulted in cities changing nationalities, and that the resultant effect for descendants of Jews left Vilnius is that their application for Lithuanian citizenship will be declined whereas a similar



Adv. Avi Horesh is an Israeli attorney, who lived in Poland for seven years.

Horesh is recognised in Israel as one of the leading lawyers in the field of reinstatement of European citizenship.

application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship may very well be approved! Horesh has an in-depth knowledge and a full understanding of European immigration laws.

Sephardi: This ad refers to all Jews of Sephardi heritage – Jews who arrived from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, as well as many descendants of Jews who arrived from Holland and the UK.

Most descendants of Sephardi Jews (who were exiled 500 years ago) are eligible to reinstate Portuguese citizenship and, accordingly, an EU passport. If applicable, Adv. Horesh will apply for (on behalf of the applicant) an official certificate confirming such eligibility, on the basis of which, an application for Portuguese citizenship is most likely to be approved. Horesh resides in Israel – a four-hour flight from Warsaw and Vilnius – enabling him to travel to Poland and Lithuania, as well as to Portugal, where he collaborates with local professionals who assist him in tracing documentation required for successful applications of reinstatement of European citizenship.

Adv. Horesh closely collaborates with professionals who assist him in tracing documentation in Europe required for successful applications of reinstatement EU citizenships.

Due to Corona virus, I'm not sure when will I visit SA again. However, I do plan & hope to arrive by the end of 2020
You are most welcome to contact me on adv.avi.n.horesh@gmail.com or whatsapp +48783953223

How a chanukiah defied the Nazis

JORDAN MOSHE

Many of us are familiar with the iconic black and white photograph of a chanukiah on a windowsill with an ominous Swastika banner flying above the street behind it, but how many of us know its story?

Rabbi Yehuda Stern, the associate rabbi of Sydenham Shul, was determined to uncover the truth behind the iconic image. To his amazement, he discovered that the chanukiah not only still exists, but it remains in the possession of the same Jewish family who took the photograph almost 100 years ago.

This miraculous story was recounted last Thursday in a webinar hosted by Sydenham Shul, with Stern interviewing Rabbi Yehuda Mansbach, a 69-year-old resident of Beit Shemesh, Israel, the grandson of the man who originally owned the chanukiah.

It is with Mansbach's grandfather that the story began.

"My grandfather, Rabbi Akiva Baruch Posner, was born in 1890 in a town on the border of Germany and Poland," Mansbach explained in Hebrew. "As a boy, he moved to Berlin with his parents where he joined a training programme for rabbis, going on to join the German army as a chaplain to serve in World War I."

After the war, Posner attended university, earning a doctorate on first-century Jewish historian Josephus Flavius, before going on to be appointed the rabbi of Kiel, a port city in the north of Germany. In 1922, he met his future wife, Rachel, and the couple married soon thereafter.

Said Mansbach, "At the time, there were 500 Jews in total in Kiel (ranging from Orthodox to completely secular)

but Rav Akiva was insistent that there should be only one shul in the city and one community. He spoke in German at shul, his sermons drawing even non-Jews and priests."

Three children were born to the couple (among them Mansbach's mother), and they were all enrolled in Sunday classes where they learnt

"On the final night of Chanukah, grandmother took out a box camera and took a photo of the chanukiah with its eight candles. She finished taking the photos, removed the film, and sent it away for development."

The famed photograph was developed in January 1932, and mindful of the conflicting Swastika and chanukiah (with

Said Mansbach, "Grandfather spoke to his congregation one final time, telling them that there was no future for Jews in Germany. He told them that whoever could flee must do so, and that wherever they should end up, they must always remain together."

"Until today, there are communities around the world that stemmed from Kiel because their founders stuck together at the instructions of their rabbi."

Mansbach said that when the shul was razed in 1938, only 250 Jews remain in Kiel, and by the time the Nazis were rounding up Jews for extermination in 1939, a mere nine Jews were left in the city.

"Not all of them could flee Germany, but almost all of them left Kiel," he said.

After stopping in Belgium, the Posner family left for Israel in 1934 with the help of Rabbi Abraham Kook, the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of Israel, who arranged the necessary certificates for their immigration. The Posners arrived in Jaffa in November that year, before traveling to Jerusalem. In that same week, Mansbach's father's family also arrived in the Holy Land, and settled in Haifa.

Of course, the famed chanukiah had come with the Posner family to Israel and was used annually at Chanukah.

Said Mansbach, "In 1960, when grandfather turned 70, the family bought him a silver oil menorah, but he passed away two years later. Granny Rachel moved to Haifa, and when she passed away, my mother passed the chanukiah on to my son, Akiva, named after his grandfather."

This wasn't the end of the story, however.

Mansbach explained that in 1932, Rachel had sent a copy of her

photograph to a local Jewish newspaper in Kiel.

"When the Nazis took over, they took ownership of all Jewish possessions [the photograph among them]," he said. "When Yad Vashem was established in Israel, it purchased the picture from the Germans and designed a window exhibition to house it."

"No one knew where the picture was from, who took it, when it was taken, where the chanukiah was, or what happened to the photographer. They knew nothing."

The truth emerged years later during the construction of the Holocaust museum in Washington.

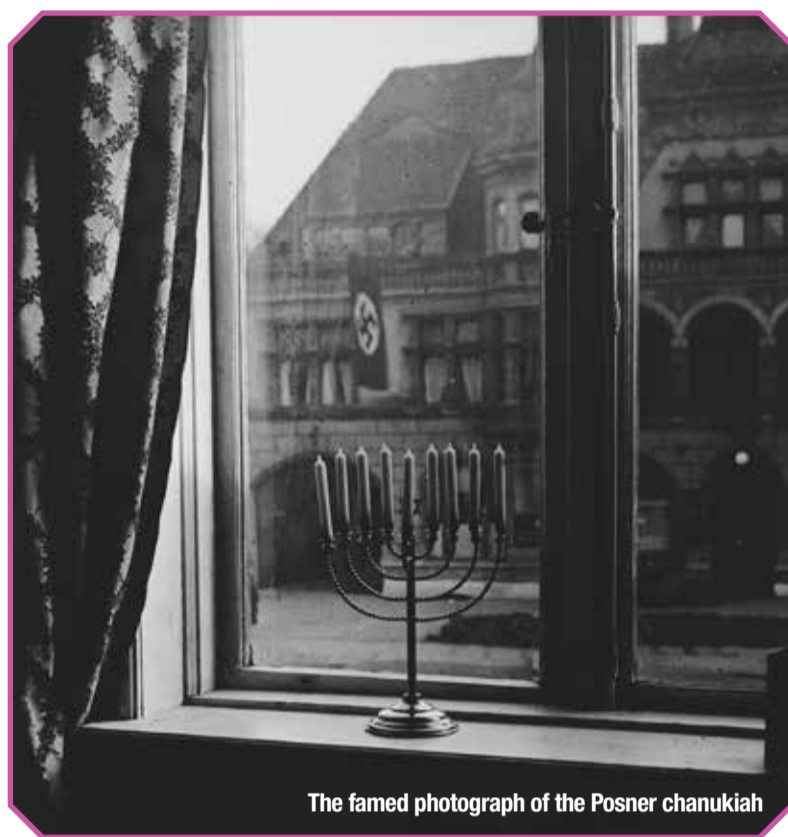
Said Mansbach, "They heard that the chanukiah was still around, and was in my mother's possession. They visited her in Haifa, took photos to Washington, and notified Yad Vashem that the chanukiah was still being used and that the family had survived."

"Yad Vashem came to my mother and said it wanted to place the chanukiah in the museum so that people could learn about what had happened. She refused, saying it belonged to her grandson who lighted it annually and continued the legacy of the family."

A compromise was eventually reached in 2016, and the family agreed to have the chanukiah housed at the museum throughout the year. Come Chanukah, however, they collect it and take it home for lighting.

This remains the arrangement today, and on every night of Chanukah, the chanukiah sits in the Mansbach's window, looking out over a Beit Shemesh skyline instead of a Nazi office.

"The chanukiah remains ours," Mansbach said. "It remains a part of our family."



The famed photograph of the Posner chanukiah

Hebrew, Torah, and a love of Israel. It's at this point that the chanukiah made its first appearance.

"On Chanukah in 1931, grandmother put the chanukiah on the windowsill in her home," said Mansbach. "Across the road was a Nazi party headquarters, the flag with the Swastika flying above, but the Nazis weren't yet in control.

a Magen David on its stem), Rachel inscribed the back of the image: "Death to Judea,' so the flag says. 'Judea will live forever,' so the light answers."

The Nazi party came to power the following year, and amid the closure of shuls and Jewish shops across the country, the Posner family decided to leave Kiel in June 1933.

The audacity of light

OPINION

Light has always been used as a metaphor for revelation. In Kabbalah, the Jewish mystics referred to the highest expression of divinity as "infinite light". And, of course, when revelation strikes, we "see the light".

But what drives people to be so obsessed with light?

Plainly, I am thinking about Chanukah, the Festival of Lights. For generations, Chanukah was observed at home and the menorah (chanukiah) would also be kindled in shuls before the evening service. But, in our times, public menorah lighting ceremonies are so widespread, they have become part of the Jewish landscape.

It all started back in Chanukah 1974, when Rabbi Abraham Shemtov, a leading Chabad shaliach, kindled a menorah outside Independence Hall in Philadelphia near the Liberty Bell. The following year, an old friend of mine, Rabbi Chaim Drizin, erected the first giant menorah in San Francisco.

When they tried to do a public menorah lighting in Burlington, Vermont, it was met by protests. The then mayor came to its defence. His name? Bernie Sanders! The world's largest menorah was designed by renowned artist Yaacov Agam in 1977, and is located, appropriately, in New York City. It goes up on Fifth Avenue at Central Park, and is certified by the Guinness World Records. It was inspired by a hand drawing by the Rambam (Maimonides) of the original menorah in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem.

For Israel's chief rabbis to kindle a giant menorah at the Kotel doesn't raise any eyebrows, but it's heart-warming to see a huge menorah outside the White House in Washington or at the Eiffel Tower in Paris. And isn't it awe-inspiring to see that they've been lighting up Red Square at the Kremlin in Moscow since 1991, a year before the fall of the

Soviet Union, and now also at the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, a former symbol of Nazi power and tyranny?

I was privileged to organise the first giant menorah in Johannesburg at the Killarney Mall way back in 1979 when I was the director of Chabad House here. It was such a novelty then that there were, literally, thousands of Jews at the nightly ceremonies.

Which Jew in the world hasn't seen or experienced these iconic public menorahs? Indeed, they have helped to publicise the miracle of Chanukah, and have encouraged countless Jews to observe it themselves with their families.

But it wasn't always that simple. In fact, it would take the United States Supreme Court itself to give the legal stamp of approval for the City of Pittsburgh to erect a giant menorah outside City Hall on 3 July 1989. And even after that, a series of court cases up until 2002 were necessary finally to put to bed the arguments of the ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) that contended it was a violation of the separation of church and state principle enshrined in the American Constitution. (Why the ACLU never argued that against the thousands of festival trees and nativity scenes in public areas is a moot question.)

My question is this: the Lubavitcher Rebbe was famous for always being positive and non-confrontational. Why would he instruct his people to fight the case and indeed to take it to the highest court in the land?

It may be because the Rebbe was infatuated with light. He believed more than anyone in the power

of light to stamp out darkness. Others concentrate their efforts on fighting darkness, while the Rebbe taught us to spread light.

Can you imagine a Chabadnik throwing rocks at people driving their cars on Shabbos, as so sadly happens in Jerusalem? Impossible! The Rebbe would have been horrified. We must teach, encourage, invite, share, and inspire, not threaten people here or in the hereafter.

His way was always to spread light. To share the



The world's largest Menorah in New York

beauty of our faith rather than the consequences of disregarding it. "A little light dispels a lot of darkness" became one of the most quoted lines in the movement, almost a mantra.

But, in fact, it goes all the way back to the Talmud itself, which states that the Chanukah menorah should ideally be kindled "at the outside doorway of one's home". If we cannot manage that

(can you just imagine us trying that in South Africa today?) then a windowsill which is visible to the outside may be used. The guiding principle here is *pirumei nisa*, (to publicise the miracle) of Chanukah as widely as possible. That is also one of the main reasons we light the menorah in shul.

Clearly, the purpose of the Chanukah lights isn't only to light up our own homes, but to illuminate the night, to remove the darkness from the streets.

Yes, there is something audacious about taking the Chanukah lights out into the streets and into the most public square. But the Rebbe believed in the power of light. He was absolutely determined and focused on changing the world by disseminating light. He was single-minded about sharing and spreading the light of Torah and Judaism in every corner of the world.

Are you embarrassed? Do you question why we should be flaunting our faith in public? Then, I quote my deeply lamented senior colleague, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, obm, who said, "Non-Jews respect Jews who respect Judaism, and they are embarrassed by Jews who are

embarrassed by Judaism." Be proud of who you are, and others will be proud of you too.

Why the Rebbe's obsession with light? Perhaps to banish darkness once and for all and usher in a new dawn, a new light, the light of redemption.

• Rabbi Yossy Goldman is rabbi at Sydenham Shul and the president of the South African Rabbinical Association.



RABBI YOSSY GOLDMAN

Finding the gifts in the year 2020



REBBETZIN AIDEL KAZILSKY

Shoot me down if you want. Call me what you will. Throw as many *vrot* tomatoes as you want at me ... I think COVID-19 was the next best thing to sliced bread!

Before you get really mad at me, let me qualify that up front. I'm not diminishing the pain, anguish, and suffering of all those who have suffered at her hands. I'm not minimising the sorrow and heartbreak of those who lost loved ones during this pandemic.

This has certainly been a cosmic exercise in no pain, no gain. And we have certainly had more than our fair share of pain and suffering. But I want to fly up high, leave our daily humdrum behind, and soar above into the heavens and look back at the world from that viewpoint.

What happened this year? What have we learnt? What was the purpose of it all?

The biblical story of Jacob sheds light on these enigmatic questions. Jacob spent 20 years in the company of his wicked father-in-law, Lavan, and eventually decided to relocate his now big family back to his homeland, Israel. On the way back, he must deal with the spectre of meeting up with his brother, Esau, whom he initially ran away from because Esau wanted to kill him. Jacob makes prerequisite plans, dividing the family into two camps, preparing gifts to appease his brother, and praying for his salvation.

But the most interesting part of this whole episode is that the night before this fateful meeting, Jacob crosses his family over the Yabok River, and he remains alone. There, he encounters a man with whom

he wrestles throughout the night. As dawn breaks, this strange man wants to take his leave. By this time, Jacob is wounded in the hip and I'm sure exhausted from the energy needed to fight this unknown assailant. Strangely, Jacob says to him, "I will not let you go until you bless me." Now, pray do ask, if you meet a thug in a dark alley and you wrestle with him for a

was a classic example in Torah of *ma'aseh avot, siman lebanim* (that which happened to our forefathers was a portend of that which will occur to the children). So, Jacob's struggle with the guardian angel of Esau was symbolically prophesying that the Jewish people would be at war with the descendants of Esau, the Edomites, or in modern nomenclature,

to in Heaven), Jacob says, "I will not let you go until you bless me".

Now here's the profound lesson. Exile is hard, the trials and tribulations we have gone through have been painful, agonising, and debilitating, but as a people, and yes, even as individuals, we must not let go of the hard times without looking for the blessing in the struggle.

The year 2020 has undoubtedly been a very difficult year for mankind and for every one of us personally. While the struggles may have differed, the bottom line is that we were all put in a situation where we were challenged.

Much has been written about the trials and tribulations of this year and when this difficult predicament will come to an end. Let's hope and pray that this hideous virus takes its leave, and we can return to some normalcy. I believe though, that before this microscopic menace goes, we must demand that it blesses us.

This means that we have to look inward and find the good that it has brought in its wake. For many, there has been a reprioritisation of values, a reawakening of important relationships neglected by the frenzied life we used to live. We have asked questions about how we do business and conduct our lives on a daily basis.

Indeed, behind the anguish and anxiety, we have been gifted with a newfound sense of what it means to be human, loving partners, steadfast friends, and contributing people of society. There is a huge blessing in this. We need to recognise it and say thank you.

That's on a personal level.

On a cosmic level, undoubtedly, we are at the dawn of our redemption. The struggle with our biblical brothers is over. Esau and Ishmael, represented by the Western and Arab world, are turning over a new leaf, and they too are looking to make peace with brother Jacob. This is a huge blessing.

That's a sure sign that the worst is over, and we can only look forward to the fulfilment of the messianic redemption, when peace, health, and harmony will flood the world once again.

As we go to print, Jewish people over the world will be about to celebrate the festival of Chanukah. It's a reminder to us that although things may be very dark, although we have limited resources (just one jug of oil), our ability to shine and create light is enormous.

And just a little bit of effort from us will elicit divine help, and the light will miraculously grow and grow and illuminate the world at large.

So, as we wave 2020 goodbye, look for its blessings in your life, recognise the profound changes we have learnt, recommit to being a lamplighter, and make a concerted effort to illuminate the world with acts of goodness and kindness. The dawn is undoubtedly breaking and we are almost home. Happy Chanukah!

• *Rebbetzin Aidel Kazilsky is a radio and television host and an inspirational speaker who teaches the wisdom of Torah and applies it to contemporary times. She also publishes a weekly podcast called The Infinite Loop, which is available on all major podcast platforms.*



prolonged period, and the guy eventually gives up and asks to be let go, do you grab him by the collar, and say, "No I won't let you go until you bless me"? Obviously, this exchange calls for a deeper answer.

The rabbis explain that Jacob wasn't fighting some thug who acted opportunistically. He was, in fact, fighting the guardian angel of his brother Esau. And, as our rabbis explain, this

the Christian, Western world. And doing it throughout the night is about this happening throughout the long, dark night of exile, which in fact, has lasted more than 2 000 years.

But there will come a time when the sun will rise, dawn will come, and the exile will be over. So though Jacob is wounded, as dawn comes and the angel asks to take leave (apparently, he had a *minyan* to attend

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1939 = R10 000 Up to R30 000



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From small flicker to giant flash of illumination



RABBI YOSSEI CHAIKIN

OPINION

One of the most memorable Chanukah holidays of my life was spent in the Old City of Jerusalem. Walking through the narrow lanes and alleyways of the Jewish Quarter, just after dark, I was deeply moved by the sight of the little candles shining in the doorways. Special recesses had been carved in the Jerusalem stone of the doorposts, where the chanukiah was placed, protected from the winter winds and rains by a glass covering. This enabled the literal fulfilment of the Talmudic instruction: "Chanukah candles must be placed on the outside of the doors of our home."

There was an interesting architectural anomaly in King Solomon's Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Windows are usually built to maximise the penetration of light into a building. As described in the Book of Kings, the windows of the sanctuary were shaped by design so that light would shine out, rather than in. According to Talmud Menachot, this was meant to convey the message that G-d doesn't need outside illumination. On the contrary, the spiritual light of the Menorah, with everything it symbolises, must spill out and brighten the world.

Since March, we have each been transforming our homes into sanctuaries. Our personal dwellings have always been hallowed: places of sanctity and purity which serve as mini-homes for G-d. Confined as we have been for the past eight months, this exercise has intensified.

For months, synagogues were closed for worship and prayer relocated to our flats and houses. Our rabbis, previously preaching from towering pulpits, arrived right into our living rooms on the screens of iPhones, iPads, and iMacs.

Our homes also became beacons of kindness, caring, and giving. Physical hospitality was of course severely curtailed by lockdown limitations. But *chesed* doesn't only happen in the home, it also emanates from the home. In counterpoint to the numerous stories of corruption, graft, and theft that dominated our headlines were thousands of acts of selfless attention to the lonely,

the elderly, and others needing assistance.

Fortunately, this pandemic is playing out in an age when communication technology is extremely advanced. This made it so much easier to be connected with the rest of world even without stepping out.



Today, we can reach out to show care via a telephone call or a WhatsApp message. We can wish each other a good Shabbos through cute little graphics sent out to broadcasts lists. We can help friends shop online even if they aren't technologically

adept. All of these advances became tools for kindness and *chesed*.

I have seen the inside of many more of my congregants' homes in the course of 2020 than in any single calendar year in more than three decades as a pulpit rabbi. Zoom Torah classes and virtual services propelled me right into studies, dining rooms, kitchens, and family rooms of hundreds of residences. In spite of the physical distance there was a sense of presence and home-to-home connection that cannot be achieved by gathering in a lecture room at shul or in the rabbi's house.

Our sages tell us that the world stands on three pillars: Torah, *avodah* (prayer), and *gemilut chassadim* (acts of kindness). While we worked, played, prayed, and studied in our homes, we were busy consolidating the spiritual pillars that are the real foundations holding up a Jewish home.

Here's the powerful message of Chanukah 2020: we have had eight months to strengthen the structure of our personal home sanctuary. To renovate it, redecorate it, and spruce it up. If it's to be G-d's Temple in a true sense, then its glow must shine out into the outside world, a lighthouse radiating sanctity, serenity, and *shalom*.

The darkness out there may be thick and appear impenetrable. The miracle of Chanukah was the victory of the few over the many. A small light can dispel a lot of obscurity.

We will start with one little candle, in our doorway or window, solitary but valiantly radiating the warmth and purity from our home to the world out there. That light will increase, night after night, and combine with literally millions of other little Chanukah flames from Jewish homes around the world, to illuminate the entire planet with a giant flash of goodness and purity.

• Rabbi Yossi Chaikin is the rabbi at Oxford Shul and the chairman of the SA Rabbinical Association.

The problem with miracles

OPINION

RABBI SAM THURGOOD



I was 20 years old when I met one of the greatest rabbis of recent times – Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv. A genius with an almost unparalleled knowledge of and authority in halacha, I found myself (to my surprise) in a private audience with him and with a few minutes to ask him anything I wanted. I told him about a certain wish that I had, a problem in my life that I had prayed for years would improve.

He encouraged me, offered a new perspective on the challenge, and gave me a blessing that things should be better. (The nature of my issue was very personal, so please forgive my not sharing it.) I emerged with renewed hope and faith that the miracle I sought – the solution to my problems – could indeed be made real. But it didn't happen. Some months later, I thought back on the meeting with a rueful shrug, and the acceptance that not all prayers are answered in the affirmative.

As we approach the end of 2020, I'm sure you'll agree that we could all do with a miracle.

About 10 years later, I revisited it in my mind and realised – with more than a little shock – that slowly and quietly, without me noticing, my life had changed and my prayers had been answered. It had happened over the course of years, not the weeks or months that I anticipated, but it had happened. I had my miracle.

I believe this illustrates the problem with miracles: we can visualise so clearly the miracle that we want (that we think we need!) that we don't always appreciate the miracle that happens. The Talmud teaches us that it's natural for miracles to go unnoticed (Nidda 31a). We are so good at putting a chain of events together into a coherent story that the most unlikely things always seem to make sense – even to be inevitable – in retrospect.

I have heard from many people about the anxiety that they felt in the lead-up to the Six-Day War of 1967. The news and forecasts were all bad, and they feared the worst for our beloved Israel. But, a miracle! Not only did we survive, we merited to hear the joyous cry of "Har Habayit beyadeinu!" (The Temple Mount is in our hands!) Yet, read many contemporary writings today, and they almost gloss over that aspect of it. "Well of course Israel won that war," you'll see them write, "but what happened afterwards is what's really important."

This points to the second challenge of grasping the miracles in our lives. Our memories are short and our

gratitude short lived. One of my favourite cartoons contains this line, "I thought my search would end when I found G-d. But then I couldn't find my car keys." Life goes on after even the most momentous revelation, and to appreciate a miracle requires us to remind ourselves constantly of its value.

Speaking personally once more, after our first child, my wife Aviva and I struggled unsuccessfully for years to have another child. They were years of longing and heartbreak, of hope and shattered hope, that resulted in our discovery that Aviva was expecting twins. Due to another series of miracles, they were born healthy and on-time, and I remember thinking that there would never be a moment in which I wouldn't be grateful for them. And then a few months later, getting up in the middle of the night for the fourth or fifth time, I found myself questioning, in frustration, if this was indeed the miracle I had hoped for. Fortunately these feelings lasted only a moment, and I quickly reminded myself what a blessing it was to be getting up in the night to take care of these infants, but how many miracles in my life have I indeed forgotten?

As we approach the end of 2020, I'm sure you'll agree that we could all do with a miracle. What would that miracle look like? A vaccine, researched and produced in record time and made accessible across the globe? A financial recovery, and with it the renewed hope and dignity of so many millions? More effective treatments for COVID-19 and the saving of lives feared lost? The chance to hold our friends close again in a warm embrace, without the fear and caution that have become associated with basic human contact? Surely all of these and more.

I pray to Hashem that we will see these miracles. We are already seeing some of them. But one of the great Chassidic masters, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk, once implored, "Why do you cry out to Hashem for redemption? Don't you know Hashem's desire to bring redemption to His people? Cry out rather to the Jewish people that they should want redemption, and then it will come."

We have a history that is filled with miracles, and we have a future replete with many more. I believe it's our task to want – and to work towards – those miracles, to appreciate them for what they are when they arrive, and to nurture and maintain our gratitude for them for years to come.

• Rabbi Sam Thurgood is the rabbi at Beit Midrash Morasha @ Arthur's Road.

Chanukah What's On

Giant menorah lighting at Sandton City:

10 to 17 December at 19:00 (Friday night 18:00, Saturday night 21:00). Zoom ID: 975 5070 6280.

Chabad special event – Chanukah Live, Sandton City,

Thursday, 10 December at 19:00, featuring local and international presentations through words, music, art, and more. Virtually or safely in person. Zoom ID: 97550706280.

Great Park Shul will celebrate the Miracle of Chanukah in a way that has probably never been done before. Each night, starting on Thursday night, it will send searchlights two kilometres into the sky – one the first night, two the second, and so on until the full house of eight columns of light are beamed skyward on the last night.

Chabad of Greenstone is

hosting an outdoor menorah lighting and party on 13 December at 17:00. Socially distanced, children's programme, doughnuts, latkes, and candle making. Contact: 082 341 7485.

Zoom candle lighting every night from 10 December with Temple Israel and the South African Union for Progressive Judaism. All nights at 20:30, Friday night at 18:15. Zoom link: <https://forms.gle/NBnHLDdoMFajLVyh6>



Investigating the Angel of Death's twin persona

>>Continued from page 5

volunteered for it," explained Marwell. "He really took to Auschwitz – it was something that unlocked him in some way."

It was here that Mengele could pursue his scientific interests, carrying out research that benefitted not only himself but also his mentors at institutions in Germany. According to Marwell, many of the specimens Mengele took during the course of his work were sent to other researchers, advancing their research at the same time.

This included research into twins, a subject that enjoyed much popularity in scientific communities around the world at the time.

"Research on twins was a kind of standard protocol for genetic research around the world," Marwell said. "When the war started, it became difficult because the supply of twins became limited. Those used in research tended to be young (as older twins tended to separate as adults), and young people had been sent away to the countryside. The supply of twins dried up."

When Mengele arrived at Auschwitz, however, he had a nearly unlimited supply of twins coming off the trains, allowing him to engage in his own experiments and others on behalf of his colleagues in Berlin.

Marwell said Mengele also recruited assistants from among the deportees. "Imagine the number of physicians, anthropologists, and pharmacists that came out of rail cars," he said. "There were tens of thousands. They weren't willing, but Mengele forced them to conduct his research with him."

The belief that Mengele experimented on twins in order to better the genes of "pure" Germans is difficult to prove, says Marwell.

"I don't believe it's true," he said. "It ignores the long tradition of twin research so prevalent at the time, and it's at odds with Mengele's earlier research interests. It raises the question about what exactly Mengele's research protocol was, and what he wanted to do at Auschwitz."

Unfortunately, this can only be speculated about, as few records actually exist which can shed any light on what Mengele really aimed to achieve at the camp.

"There are some reports based on the testimony of people experimented upon, but sensitive though it may be, it's difficult to rely on them to determine what Mengele's objectives were," he said.

"People who were subjected to experimentation can say what was done to them, but it's difficult to know what Mengele was trying to do."

For this reason, Marwell maintains that the picture of Mengele at the camp has become distorted. "There are countless testimonies of encounters with him that make it seem that his name became detached from the actual person, that somehow he has stood in for every German physician involved in selection," he said.

"There were dozens of doctors on the platform, selecting in routine fashion on a schedule. Mengele wasn't there all the time."

Nevertheless, popular culture has come to fixate exclusively on the infamous doctor, partly as a result of the war-crime trials after the war.

"Mengele became a major figure in popular culture," said Marwell. "There's a whole series of Mengele-like caricatures which have populated culture since the 1960s. I couldn't find the first use of 'Angel of Death', and I'm not sure when it happened, but he is certainly far more notorious and famous at that point than he was in 1945."

Mengele's infamy grew in the post-war period, and he came to stand for what had happened at Auschwitz and the evasion of justice by many Nazis.

"He has a twin persona that I think has distorted who he was," said Marwell. "My book aims to replace the caricature with something far more unsettling – a human being."

WE WISH OUR JEWISH CUSTOMERS A

HAPPY CHANUKAH

FILLED WITH LIGHT



Revolution then and now

OPINION

RABBI GREG ALEXANDER



Chanukah in South Africa is weird, let's face it. It's a festival of lights in the middle of summer! It's a time to eat greasy latkes and doughnuts when you want to be on the beach eating granadilla ice lollies. And for a family-friendly holiday, waiting up to 20:30 in Cape Town to light isn't exactly helping that bedtime routine, is it? So how does one take a holiday that makes complete sense in New York, London, Jerusalem, or pretty much any frosty northern hemisphere location, and make it meaningful in Cape Town or Umhlanga?

You see, Chanukah actually isn't just about candles and doughnuts, it's about revolution. It recalls a time that a band of Jews decided to say, "no" to the greatest empire of the time and heroically and against all odds won a hard-fought victory. That was 2 200 years ago, but today, it's still revolutionary.

Daniel Gordis, one of my teachers when I was studying in yeshivah in Jerusalem, wrote in his book, *Does the World Need the Jews?* that,

"Judaism's claim is simple: Jews have a voice; it's the voice that reminds the world of the power of the weak. Just as we survived as a powerless minority, we cry to the world: so, too, can you."

The Jewish festival of lights

is designed to bring light to those in need. Chanukah isn't just a holiday in which Jews celebrate their own experience, but rather, a festival in which Jews seek to bring a message of hope to the disenfranchised everywhere. On Chanukah, Jews remind the weak and the impoverished everywhere that our own survival should give them cause for hope."

Taken in that light, lighting the chanukiah is an act that has resonance not just for the Jewish people, but for all people, and at a time that South Africa and the world urgently needs it. As the plague of coronavirus shut the world down, what emerged was the inequality between those who had the ability to sit this out and those who didn't. Those who had access to homes, data, laptops, and spare rooms to convert to offices or classrooms, and those who depended every day on the ability to get to a job or a donation to feed their family. And here we are at the end of 2020, still with no definite end in sight.

What's the way out for those who don't have the luxury of locking down? Gandhi is famous for saying, "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members", but 3 500 years before him, the Torah commanded protection for those who would be least able to protect themselves – from orphans and widows, strangers and migrant workers, to day labourers and the

impoverished. How will the world step up to a growing gap between rich and poor? How will we break a cycle that means that those who have money to invest grow more wealthy, and those who don't, have no way to break out of poverty?

Lighting a candle this Chanukah says "no" to that reality.

South Africans wait for their political leaders to show us the way forward, to give us a clear message of hope for the economy, to end corruption, for cross-party collaboration to get us out of recession, pandemic, and fear. Instead, we see and hear the same old tired lines from politicians squabbling while the country burns.

Lighting a candle this Chanukah says "no" to that reality.

As I write this, we mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. Statistics show that more than half of these attacks come from someone known to the victim. Forty percent of South African women have experienced intimate-



partner violence in their lives. That means nearly half of all the women in this country (20 million women) have been attacked by the person who should be most responsible for protecting them.

Lighting a candle this Chanukah says "no" to that reality. Lighting the chanukiah now is a symbolic act of hope and of justice: hope that we will all overcome this plague, that our leadership will step up to govern for the good of all, and that as we emerge from this lockdown, it will be with a new world order, one that serves all the people.

It's about bringing the world some light when it needs it most.

Chanukah is a message for all South Africans, Africans, and the world that where you are isn't where you have to be forever, that with passion and faith, you can overcome seemingly unconquerable odds, that you can take a small light, share it with a few and in time, it can be a great light.

On the Shabbat of Chanukah we read from the book of Zechariah. In it we read a *passuk* (verse), (Ch. 4:6) often quoted that should inspire us all to action.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit – said the eternal of hosts."

May we have light and be light this Chanukah.

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

Get rid of this year's fuzzy slippers, and light the fire

OPINION

LISA HACK



There's a joke in the Jewish community that we don't have happy holidays. I mean, it always goes along the lines of, "They tried to kill us, it took a while, let's eat."

Hello 2020, you obviously got the memo!

Quite frankly, this year has wiped so many of us out emotionally and spiritually. It's early December now, but the memory of what has been one long, morbid year has got me looking forward to a little sparkle and magic this Chanukah season.

Many of us entered the high holy days feeling depleted. We know it's a time of intense introspection and awe. But for a lot of people, this year's high holy days were spiritually parched. For others, there was a sense that, even though the point of the holy days is a union with Hashem, all they could muster was a basic connection.

To be honest, my prayers were along the lines of, "I love you, you're my guiding light, but I'm tapped out. Please go easy on me, and bless us all

with a much better year."

It's hardly deep stuff.

One holy day morphed into the next, and then, almost like a vague dream, it was all over for the year. Chesvan's lack of holidays was, for me, the perfect time to reconnect with myself and Hashem. A time to sit back from the busyness and craziness of 2020 and take stock; and it's in those types of times that I feel that we reconnect with matters of the soul.

Now that the madness of 2020 is fading and we've settled into what we've dubbed "a new normal", I feel like my own soul has slipped into an oversized dressing gown and old fuzzy slippers. I feel more like I'm living with G-d, not just performing.

It's kind of like a marriage, don't you



think?

Sure, marriage is ripe with those fuzzy slippers, Netflix, and popcorn moments (or latkes and doughnuts this month). But just like a marriage, we should strive for more than comfort and routine, and create that spark with our creator. Even a healthy and balanced marriage needs some fire now and then.

Finally, here we are in the month of Kislev, and the sparkle of Chanukah, romantic candlelight and all, and we sure need some fire. For a passionate, thriving, and meaningful relationship – be it with a spouse, a sibling, a child, a relative, or a friend – we need a spark. Don't we all deserve that sort of energy?

Interestingly, G-d didn't command us to light the menorah. It's humans that initiated the idea as a way of acknowledging Hashem and the commitment to us through even the darkest times.

This is a beautiful instruction for our physical and spiritual marriage with G-d. We can sit and wait for our partners to waltz in with a big romantic gesture, or we can make the first move. We can create the heat.

No matter how rough this year has been, Chanukah is a chance to take off the fuzzy slippers and put on your best heels. Take your relationship to

the next level. Ignite the passion and fire your life deserves – and the lives around you.

Think about the Shamash. It's the first candle we light, and it's the same one we use each night to light the other candles. Now, think of yourself as the Shamash – the first step, a beacon of light that spreads joy to others.

I want you to think about that this holiday season. If we look at ourselves as a beacon of light, that's when we can really make a change. It's not enough just to feel safe within a community. We should actively fight for the safety of everyone.

Now more than ever.

Throughout Chanukah, we add a light to the menorah. Each night, we build on what was the day before; we take it another step further. We add new dimensions of gratitude and commitment. We add more passion and spark to our lives, and if that's not romance, I don't know what is!

Wishing you a festive, sparkly Chanukah, and a safe and healthy holiday season, and this time next year, may we be able to say, "We're still here, let's eat!"

• Lisa Hack is the Gauteng chairperson of the South African Union for Progressive Judaism.

2020 – the year of disruption

>>Continued from page 4

space as many resorted to buying cigarettes illegally. Although South Africans bemoaned the restrictions, people found lots to laugh about. Memes, parodies, TikTok dances (parodying Minister Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma and her now famous "zol" speech) as well as huge doses of humour and feel-good stories united South Africans during the year. The proudly South African gospel song *Jerusalem* by Master KG became a global sensation and had the world dancing through the pandemic with the artist going on to win Best African Act Award at the 2020 MTV Europe Music Awards.

The US was convulsed by countrywide protests following the gruesome death of George Floyd by a white police officer who knelt on his neck for several minutes during an arrest in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Floyd's death sparked global protests about racial inequality and police brutality, and renewed pledges by the Black Lives Matter movement and others to fight racism.

2020 was a year of hurricanes, typhoons, plane crashes, space explorations, fake news, conspiracy theories, and online shopping. It included historic agreements and Israel normalising relations with several Arab nations.

The most controversial and watched news item of the year was no doubt the highly contested US presidential election battle between Donald Trump and Joe Biden. This fought alongside the pandemic for domination of the news cycle.

Sadly the world lost more than 1.5 million people to COVID-19.



Denis Goldberg

It has also lost many beautiful souls who left this earth for other tragic reasons, including people like professional American basketball player Kobe Bryant, US actor and *Black Panther* star Chadwick Boseman, singer songwriter Joseph Shabalala, Zindzi Mandela, actress Elize Cawood, Dawn Lindberg and Auditor-General Kimi Makwetu, as well as actor Sean Connery. We witnessed the passing of the irreplaceable Ruth Bader Ginsberg, George Bizos, Denis Goldberg, and Diego Maradona.

This has been the Great Year of Disruption characterised by scuppered plans, a sense of loss about life experiences unfilled, loved ones not seen or embraced, and time that's impossible to get back, but it's also been the Great Year of Change and Reset. 2020 has tested us all beyond measure. We can only hope we will pass the next test with flying colours.

Going Greek for Chanukah

LAUREN BOOLKIN

Although the Greeks were the villains in the Chanukah story, and because I can't write another potato latke or doughnut recipe, I've chosen to go Greek for Chanukah. We are finally reaching the end of this tumultuous year, and we can kick back and relax. I'm taking out my braai and aiming for simple, meze-style light meals. I hope you enjoy these. I promise they are delicious and easy.

Mielie latkes



Ingredients

- 1 cup rice flour
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ½ tsp baking powder
- 2 tsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp cumin

- 1 tsp salt
- 4 cups cooked mielies (off the cob – it's about 4 mielies)
- 2 eggs
- 2 tsp lemon juice
- ¼ cup finely sliced spring onion
- ¼ cup chopped coriander
- Sunflower oil for frying
- Pea shoots for garnish

Method

- Sift the dry ingredients. Add the lightly beaten eggs and lemon juice. Beat together, and then add the remaining ingredients. (Note: If your dough seems excessively stiff, add a little cold water although I never need to). Heat a little oil in a non-stick frying pan.
- Drop two tablespoons of the mixture into the oil when it's hot. Be very careful as it splatters. Cook until the underside is golden brown, and then flip.
- Garnish with pea shoots, and serve with sweet chilli sauce.

Chocolate hazelnut biscotti

These use one bowl and take less than 10 minutes to make. Warning: it takes 10 minutes to eat the entire batch too!

Ingredients

- 2½ cups of flour
- 1 cup of sugar
- ½ tsp of bicarbonate of soda
- ½ tsp of baking powder
- Pinch of salt
- 1 tsp of vanilla essence
- 3 eggs

- Rind of 1 orange
- 1 cup of chocolate chips
- 100g blanched and toasted hazelnuts (toasted in a 180-degree oven until light brown)

Method

- Preheat your oven to 170 degrees centigrade, and line two baking trays with parchment paper.
- Place the flour, bicarbonate of soda, baking powder, and salt in the bowl of your Mixmaster. Add the vanilla

essence, orange rind, and eggs. You may need to add a little more flour. Stir in the hazelnuts and chocolate chips by hand. Shape into three sausages with floured hands. Bake these for 30 minutes, and then remove them from the oven. Cool for 10 minutes, and then slice thinly using a serrated knife. Reduce the oven temperature to 120 degrees, and bake the biscotti for 30 minutes turning them midway.

Beef koftas

Makes 14 and 3/4

Ingredients

- 15 wooden skewers soaked for an hour or two in water so they don't burn on the braai
- 1kg beef mince
- 2 tbsp cumin
- 2 tbsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp salt
- ½ tsp ground black pepper
- 1 clove garlic, crushed
- 1 tbsp onion powder
- 1 tbsp chopped parsley
- 1 tbsp chopped coriander

Method

- Mix all the ingredients together. Shape into 14 sausages. If you are madly pedantic like me, they will weigh around 75g each. Place each sausage on a wooden skewer and braai until they are crispy on the outside and cooked through on the inside
- Vegetarian tip: I'm obsessed with *Somebody Feed Phil*, and dream about the sabich he eats on his Tel Aviv episode.
- Instead of the beef, you could add the following to your pita sandwich, or you could stuff these in with the beef koftas
- 2 aubergines sliced to about 1cm thick
- Olive oil
- 1 tsp cumin
- Sprinkle of chilli flakes (if you wish)
- Salt

Method

- Slice the aubergines. Lay them flat, and sprinkle with salt. Rinse them well, and dry them with paper towel. Brush them with olive oil. Sprinkle on the seasoning, and bake at 180 degrees centigrade until they are crisp.



Pita

It's quicker to make your own, but it's the holidays! So, if it's easier buy the humus, *pita* and Israeli salad that accompanies the koftas, do so. Don't do anything that will detract from your enjoyment of the dish. Toast the store-bought *pita* though. It enhances the dish.

Ingredients

- 500g flour
- 10g dry yeast
- 10g salt
- 10g sugar
- 300ml lukewarm water

Method

Mix the dry ingredients together. You can use a stand mixer with a dough hook or muscle power for this. Add the water and knead the dough until it is smooth. Cover and let it rise for 30 minutes. Knead again for a few minutes, and then let it rise for another 20 minutes. Divide the dough into 10 balls. Cover them, and let them rise for 20 minutes. Flatten each ball into a round using your hands or a rolling pin. Heat a frying pan, and when it's hot, place the round on the heated pan (no oil). Flip when it browns or puffs up.

MOST SA JEWS (BOTH OF ASHKENAZI AND SEPHARDI HERITAGE) ARE ELIGIBLE TO REINSTATE EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AND, ACCORDINGLY, AN EU PASSPORT.

A common misconception is that European citizenship and EU passports can only be obtained if one has documents providing his/her lineage. The fact is that not having any documents proving lineage, doesn't lead to disqualification of eligibility. Jews of Ashkenazi heritage can rely on documents obtained in Lithuania or Poland.

Jews of Sephardi heritage need no proof at all!

In his experience, the majority of South African Jews are descendants of Jews whose European citizenship was illegally deprived, and therefore they are entitled to reinstate it, and accordingly obtain an EU passport.



Adv. Horesh has been operating in SA market with the Jewish community since March 2018. He arrives regularly to South Africa, and can meet in person with Jews who are interested to do so.

Ashkenazi: This ad refers to Jews of Polish & Lithuanian heritage only.

The most important thing is the understanding that prior to the end of WW-I, the European map was very different than the one we know today.

Countries like Poland and Lithuania did not exist as independent countries, and until 1918 these territories were only known as Lithuanian or Polish regions/counties of the Great Russian Empire who ruled all of north eastern Europe. Accordingly, until 1918, residents of these territories were Russian citizens, as Polish and Lithuanian citizenships didn't exist. Therefore, since applications for reinstatement of these citizenships can only be based on whether one's ancestor was a Polish or Lithuanian citizen, whoever is a descendant of an ancestor who left Europe prior to 1918 will not be eligible.

In addition, it is highly important to remember that since borders in Europe were shifted once again during and after WW-II, one's eligibility for Polish or Lithuanian citizenship depends on the city from which his/her ancestor hailed. Horesh explains: Shifted borders resulted in cities changing nationalities, and that the resultant effect for descendants of Jews left Vilnius is that their application for Lithuanian citizenship will be declined whereas a similar



Adv. Avi Horesh is an Israeli attorney, who lived in Poland for seven years.

Horesh is recognised in Israel as one of the leading lawyers in the field of reinstatement of European citizenship.

application for reinstatement of Polish citizenship may very well be approved! Horesh has an in-depth knowledge and a full understanding of European immigration laws.

Sephardi: This ad refers to all Jews of Sephardi heritage – Jews who arrived from North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia, as well as many descendants of Jews who arrived from Holland and the UK.

Most descendants of Sephardi Jews (who were exiled 500 years ago) are eligible to reinstate Portuguese citizenship and, accordingly, an EU passport. If applicable, Adv. Horesh will apply for (on behalf of the applicant) an official certificate confirming such eligibility, on the basis of which, an application for Portuguese citizenship is most likely to be approved.

Adv. Horesh closely collaborates with professionals who assist him in tracing documentation in Europe required for successful applications of reinstatement EU citizenships.

*Due to Corona virus, I'm not sure when will I visit SA again. However, I do plan & hope to arrive by the end of 2020
You are most welcome to contact me on adv.avi.n.horesh@gmail.com or whatsapp +48783953223*

The light of betwixt and between

OPINION

ADINA ROTH



Last year Chanukah time, we lit candles and shared dinner with friends as we strummed guitars into the night, mask free, carefree, and oblivious that these kinds of gatherings with people outside our family unit would become a rare and even dangerous undertaking.

This year, we will be lighting Chanukah candles with our immediate family. If we do connect with friends or family, it will be with caution. The one common thread that connects our lighting pre-COVID-19 to now, is that our chanukiah will still be placed at a window, at the outermost edge of our home. Yet, robbed of a social ease that we all took for granted, we might want to consider that even before COVID-19, many of us lived in bubbles – racial bubbles, political echo-chambers, and socio-economic comfort zones.

Chanukah as a holiday is about a dance between public, communal space and the space of the home. While some *mitzvot* in Judaism require the community, other *mitzvot* thrive in the private domicile of home and hearth. Chanukah is one of those few *mitzvot* which we might say is a practice at the border between the community and the home. We light candles in our home, but we light them at that fine edge so that the outsider can peep in and see the candles of Chanukah. For this reason, we are supposed to place the chanukiah on the window ledge that overlooks the street, sharing our story with the world, lighting inside for those outside.

In 2020, the border between inside and outside acquired renewed significance. As infection rates peaked in South Africa, a doorway became a potent type of crossing over from the safe space of the home to the potentially contagious outside world. On returning home, we left our shoes, our outside clothes, and our shopping bags at the door, and rushed inside to wash hands and decontaminate.

In ancient mythologies and even in Jewish practice, the space on the border between the inside and the outside is regarded as liminal, an in-between space. We place *mezuzot* on our doors to cultivate awareness of G-d as we transition through space. During a time of pandemic, this space between the inside and outside resounds more deeply. The people on the “inside” of our “pod” might feel safer, and the further we move into the world, the more at risk we become of exposure. We become scrupulous about mask-wearing out in the world and conversely, relax a little more at home.

While many of us bemoan the new normal and the loss of what was, we might want to challenge ourselves to think about the ways in which prior to COVID-19, we already lived in confined spaces and limited our interactions with others – those who felt different from us, those with whom we nursed a *ferrible* (grudge).

The rabbis in *Tractate Shabbat* seemed to have an acute awareness of how the world of outside and inside are inextricably linked to each other. In a discussion of how long Chanukah candles should remain alight, an ancient source teaches that the Chanukah candles need to be lit from the time the sun goes down until “all foot traffic had returned home from the market”. In a further explication of this, Rabbah bar bar Channah says it wasn't just until the market place had closed, but until the last of the last, the *tarmudai* had gone home from the market. Rashi, the 11th century exegete, explains that the *tarmudai* were a (non-Jewish) people who sold wood at the market. They were the very last to leave, says Rashi, because people would return from their day and on wanting to light a fire in their homes, would find they were out of wood! Just as we might send our partner to the garage shop to buy some matches late at night, people would leave their homes a second time to buy wood from the *tarmudai*, who deliberately tarried at the market knowing they would be able to catch these later-night shoppers.

The very time during which candles should be lit is described in spatial terms: your candles should be lit while the public space is still peopled. The African adage of *ubuntu* reminds us that I'm a person because of others. In the world of tractate Chanukah, my Chanukah lighting inside is determined by the whereabouts of people outside.

This focus on lighting inside for people outside changed during the time of the Ba'al Ha'tosfot. In their 13th century commentary on the Talmud, they wrote, “Nowadays, there is no concern about when to light, since we don't have an awareness except for the



world was dangerous and their consciousness was attuned within. Yet, in spite of the Tosfot's experience, Chanukah as a *chag* evolved along the lines of the Talmud, holding a subtle balance between the domains of inside and outside. But perhaps in times of pandemic, we are more like the 13th century Tosafists. Our consciousness has become attuned toward the safety of “inside”. Yet, an ethical and healthy society needs more permeable borders between inside and out.

Chanukah lies on this axis between the *tarmudai*, the foreign folk who live among us who are the later stragglers on the street, and our most intimates, the *b'nei habayit*, those living in our homes. As our chanukiah sits

people inside the home (*livnei habayit*), since we are lighting inside.” It's possible that the Tosfot, living in France and Germany in the Middle Ages, didn't orient their lighting towards the outside world because of Christian antisemitism. For these rabbis, the outside

before this foreign invading governor, sacrificing me to him?” Her brothers, the Maccabees and company, realised it was time to go off and kill the ruling governor. She got herself fancy and had herself escorted with dancers and musicians straight to the governor's palace. Seeing the priestly family all caught up in this pseudo-wedding, the egomaniac governor let them right in, imagining they were handing off their daughter with voluntary joy. They utilised the opportunity to behead him and all his servants, which eventually helped bring the Maccabees to victory. The power of this woman's vulnerability, honesty, and using her voice at just the right time is a fascinating tradition that we celebrate on this night.

Jewish feminism lives on in North African Chanukah tradition

RISHE GRONER - JTA

When it comes to celebrating Chanukah, you probably think about lighting the menorah, playing dreidel (or maybe not, does anyone actually play dreidel?) and eating so many latkes that your stomach burns in sweet agony.

But did you know that there's a special Chanukah tradition – Eid Al Bnat (the Festival of Daughters, in Judeo-Arabic) or Chag HaBanut (in Hebrew) – that women and girls from North Africa's Jewish communities have been celebrating for centuries?

In Jerusalem last year, I joined a group of women of Middle Eastern and North African background who gather regularly to study their heritage with an organisation called Arevot, and we held an inspiring Eid Al Bnat celebration, with a focus on how to bring it back into our own communities.

It's a beautiful tradition that more people should know about, so let me break it down:

Origins of the holiday

Celebrated on the Rosh Chodesh (New Moon) of Tevet (one of the Hebrew months where Chanukah takes place) in communities in North Africa and elsewhere, particularly the islands of Djerba and Tunis in Tunisia, Algeria, Salonika in Greece, and Kushta (Istanbul) in Turkey, this day is filled with historic connection to powerful Jewish women. The festival takes the form of ceremonial gatherings featuring symbolic rituals, delicious treats, and traditional songs, all focusing on bringing together generations of mothers, daughters, aunts, sisters, and the extended community.

The stories of Chanukah and the ladies therein are often retold only as the story of Judith, the brave widow who fake-seduced the Greek-Syrian general Holofernes, fed him salty cheese, and got him drunk on wine, then calmly beheaded him. The soldiers freaked out, the Maccabees won the battle, and the rest is quite literally history.

But there's another, lesser known story of a brave woman not named except as “the daughter of the Hasmonean, Yohanan the High Priest”, who lived in Judea (aka modern-day Israel) during the time of the Maccabees. Among the anti-Jewish edicts of the time, the invading governor insisted on sleeping with every virgin woman the night before her marriage, and this carried on for almost four years. On the night of the high priest's daughter's marriage, as she was about to be carted off to the governor's chamber for the night, she uncovered her hair, ripped open her clothes, and exposed herself to all.

Amid cries of “Send her off to be burned!” she turned to the crowd and said something along the lines of, “Are you kidding me? You think this is me being exposed before my brothers and friends, but it doesn't bother you that I'm about to be exposed

know everyone, so pull out your best summer-camp ice-breakers and find creative ways to put everyone at ease. It's beautiful to encourage every woman to name their mothers and grandmothers as well, lighting a candle for each one in the centre of the table, bringing our personal histories into the circle.

A communal Batmitzvah
One awesome tradition is the presentation of the Batmitzvah girls of the year. Consider it our very own debutante ball, but this time, it's up to the moms and aunts to cheer, bless, and generally love up these young girls as newcomers to the women's circle. It's also traditional to prepare foods together, like the North African favourite, *sfenj* – think jelly doughnuts meet churros drizzled with honey – or honey cakes and cookies, or a potluck dinner. *Mishloach manot* – gifting packages of food and treats – is also part of the Eid Al Bnat tradition, so the Jewish mom Tupperware buffet is a must at this party!

The power of women's circles
Since this festival is based on the stories of Judith and the daughter of Yohanan the Hasmonean, it's important to tell, read, or act out their stories, reflecting on the power of women. It's also a good time to share the history of the holiday, passing on wisdom from generation to generation and sharing customs across different cultures.

How to celebrate

Like every tradition that gets passed down from generation to generation, there's always a new flourish or nuance between how your grandma did it and how my aunt likes to do it.

In some communities, women visited the synagogue (not a thing that was usually done!), kissed the Torah scrolls, and were blessed by the rabbi; in others they cooked and baked a festive meal together, and then celebrated all night. Sweet traditional foods were prepared and gifted in baskets to mothers, daughters, or mothers-in-law, prayers were shared, and songs were sung. Overall, though, the key components always include lighting the Chanukah candles, lots of music and dancing, and the opportunity to create intimacy and community with women.

A song or *piyyut* often begins the night, followed by lighting the Chanukah candles. *Piyyutim* are liturgical poems written in Hebrew that are sung in incredibly complicated and deeply moving Arabic maqam (a system of melodic modes). For those of us without the ability to improvise our way through epic Hebrew poetry, you can pick out a song that's meaningful to you and that women can sing together. After that, the women traditionally recite a blessing of “*Mi Shebeirach Imoteinu*” or, “May the One who blessed our Mothers bless us.” It's a refreshing change from the often male-gendered liturgy, and a cool opportunity to improvise your own prayer and gratitude for the women who came before us.

Next comes the chance to go around and get to



Whether you share stories, get vulnerable, cook up a storm, or dance the night away, this night is for us all to celebrate the power of the ladies in our lives and the bonds that keep us strong in the face of struggle.

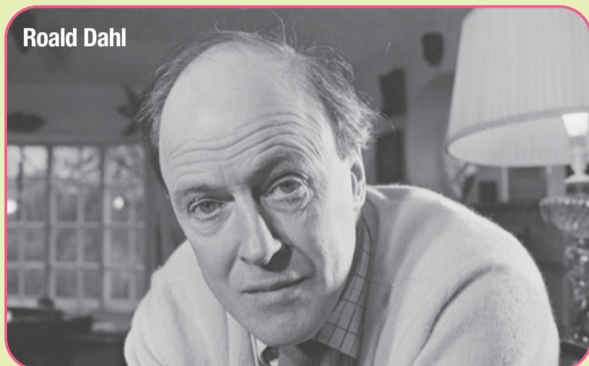
Recognising Roald Dahl – warts and all



INNER VOICE
Howard Feldman

rather than the mass murderer that he was. Clearly the magnitude of the genocide wasn't something that Dahl was too bothered by.

In the age of "cancel culture", Dahl's comments and prejudice should be simply handled. By all accounts of the 2020 view of history, Dahl himself should be cancelled, and his books removed or banned. What makes this approach problematic is that his writing is so darn good and engaging that we have chosen to ignore his racism so that we can continue to enjoy his work.



Roald Dahl

But we don't need to do that. Rather, we can acknowledge that his views are abhorrent and we can condemn his prejudice in the most vocal terms. We can do so while acknowledging that he is a genius, and that his writing is a gift. All this can be true at the same time.

It's commendable that the Dahl family has addressed his antisemitism in a public manner, and that it has taken ownership of his behaviour. It's important that it has not ignored it, but has acknowledged the failings of a man in whose shadow it now lives. It's important that we do the same. Perhaps, somewhat ironically, we could look to Dahl himself, heed his words when he says, "I understand what you're saying, and your comments are valuable, but I'm gonna ignore your advice."

A person who has good thoughts cannot ever be ugly. You can have a wonky nose and a crooked mouth, a double chin and stick-out teeth, but if you have good thoughts, they will shine out of your face like sunbeams, and you will always look lovely.

This is according to Roald Dahl, who I imagine would suggest that the corollary is also true in that no matter how beautiful you seem on the outside, if there is ugliness in your thoughts, you will look hideous.

Roald Dahl was ugly. Earlier in the week, Dahl's family apologised for the antisemitic views and statements expressed during his lifetime. It's hard to imagine that the man who brought so much joy into the world was at the same time a vocal and virulent antisemite.

"The Dahl family and the Roald Dahl Story Company deeply apologise for the lasting and understandable hurt caused by some of Roald Dahl's statements. Those prejudiced remarks are incomprehensible to us, and stand in marked contrast to the man we knew and to the values at the heart of Roald Dahl's stories, which have positively impacted young people for generations. We hope that, just as he did at his best, at his absolute worst, Roald Dahl can help remind us of the lasting impact of words."

And what words they were. In a famous interview with the *New Statesman* in 1983 soon after Israel's invasion of Lebanon, he was recorded as saying, "There is a trait in the Jewish character that does provoke animosity, maybe it's a kind of lack of generosity towards non-Jews. I mean, there's always a reason why anti-everything crops up anywhere; even a stinker like Hitler didn't just pick on them for no reason."

In essence, Dahl was suggesting that Jews were responsible for the Holocaust because we are annoying. Why else would a "stinker" like Hitler pick on us? Even the use of the word "stinker" reduces Hitler to the level of an unruly and naughty child,

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

A year of unprecedented challenge



ABOVE BOARD
Shaun Zagnoev

At the beginning of 2020, no-one could have predicted the unprecedented set of challenges that South African Jewry would shortly be confronted with, both to the lives and livelihoods of its members and the viability of its communal institutions. It was only in early March that the first official COVID-19 case was confirmed in the country, but thereafter, the infection rate began rising with frightening speed, turning the world as we knew it upside down and forcing us to adapt our personal and professional lives to the new reality.

As the community's representative body, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has striven to provide the responsible and forward-looking leadership that these troubled times so urgently require. On 11 March, the very day the first coronavirus case in our community was announced, we convened a meeting of the communal leadership from Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, and Cape Town to plan and co-ordinate our response together with experts in the field of infectious diseases. Thereafter, the forum met regularly to determine how to respond to ever-changing circumstances, making crucial decisions about such issues as when to open shuls and schools and how to educate the community in terms of safe practice.

Space doesn't allow me to list the many services, projects, and initiatives that the SAJBD, on the national and regional level, has since implemented. I limit myself to commenting on the phenomenal level of co-operation and coordination between all our organisations in meeting the crisis. To all those organisations, as well as the many individuals who contributed so much time and effort to serve the community, thank-you and *yasher koach*.

Throughout 2020, even during the hard-lockdown months, the SAJBD continued to fulfil its core mandate. Much of this work revolved around addressing antisemitic incidents that came to our attention. All such cases have been

thoroughly investigated and appropriately dealt with, whether through a process of conciliation and education or, in more serious cases, by instituting civil or criminal proceedings against those responsible. In the closing months of the year, we appeared in court three times, with successful outcomes on each occasion.

In a first-ever criminal conviction for antisemitism in South Africa, Matome Letsoalo was found guilty of *crimen injuria* and sentenced the following week for threatening comments tweeted in 2018. This was followed by the court granting a restraining order against Jan Lamprecht, against whom a *crimen injuria* charge lodged by the SAJBD is pending.

This year, we finally received an apology and public acknowledgement of guilt from former Western Cape Congress of South African Trade Union leader Tony Ehrenreich for his threats against the community in August 2014. This brought to a successful conclusion six years of working tirelessly with the Human Rights Commission to ensure that Ehrenreich was held accountable for his threats.

Normal life has largely been resumed but COVID-19 is still very much with us and hence various safety protocols and restrictions remain in place. In wishing our community a peaceful, safe, and restful end-of-year break, I urge everyone to be vigilant and act responsibly at all times so as to minimise risk to themselves and those around them until the pandemic is finally behind us.

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

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

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Take suicidal comments seriously and get help – experts

TALI FEINBERG

Three people committed suicide in the Johannesburg Jewish community in November, and four others since January, leaving families and friends questioning how to spot the signs and help anyone thinking of taking their own life.

This is especially important as the pandemic drags on and the festive season arrives – a time when many are more emotionally vulnerable.

For Sarah*, the loss of her friend to suicide, “was the greatest shock of my life. She was gorgeous, extrovert, smart, successful, financially secure, and well-loved. Lockdown isolation put a nail in her coffin. We believe that if COVID-19 hadn’t happened, she would still be with us. I had to identify her at the mortuary. No-one should ever have to do that. It has been traumatic.

“I don’t think that people considering suicide – and presumably they are among us – have any idea of the impact of their actions,” she says. “They do it believing that the world would be better off without them. They are so wrong. It leaves everyone reeling,” says Sarah.

“We are all obsessing about the signs we missed. It’s hard to hear a person ‘deeply’ at the moment when they say they feel anxious or depressed, because we all feel that way. It doesn’t stand out. How do you know when you need to worry? When do you need to intervene? I don’t have the answers.”

According to Chevrah Kadisha Funeral Director Philip Kalmanowitz, there have been five suicides in the Johannesburg Jewish community since lockdown began, and one unnatural death that may or may not have been a suicide. “No person who is a victim of suicide is treated differently to

anyone else in death. We see it as an illness. They are buried in the same way and the same place as others,” he says.

“With COVID-19 being so prolonged and so much financial strain, people don’t see an end in sight, which could lead to depression or thoughts of suicide,” says Johannesburg clinical psychologist Leanne Stillerman Zabow. “The risk over the holiday period is that there aren’t as many distractions; it’s a time of taking stock, and may be a reminder of everything we feel we may be lacking in life, which can bring up depressive feelings.”

“Suicide feels so counter-intuitive,” she says, “because in many ways, people strive for life. So, this idea of taking one’s own life – how one predicts that – is jarring. Often a person who commits suicide has so much going on internally that’s hidden from others. There’s often a sense of pain and anger turned against the self, rather

than being expressed outwards.

“It can also be ‘masked’. Someone can be a very high achiever, but have an enormous internal sense of worthlessness. Often someone will act out as a ‘cry for help’, especially teens. It could be subtle, so we really need to take heed. People have a fantasy that there is relief in suicide, and it can lure or tempt them, but the truth is, you’re not going to get another chance to resolve things. People may think ‘my family will be better off without me’, but in reality, suicide causes massive waves of trauma.”

Johannesburg psychiatrist Dr Shana Saffer says, “The person almost has a drumbeat in their head saying ‘you are of no value, your family will be better off without you, you don’t belong, get it over with’. The problem is others don’t regard that person in the same way – we may see a funny, talented, delightful person, and

we would be shocked to know what their inner ‘voice’ is repetitively saying”

She refers to suicide expert Dr Lisa Firestone, who says that people who talk about suicide often do go on to kill themselves. “We should take their communication seriously. They may allude to ‘not being around anymore’, yet when someone shows concern, they may quickly deny that they are in distress.

“This back-and-forth behaviour speaks to ambivalence in suicidal people; a part of them wants to die, but the other part wants to live up until the last moment. So it’s worthwhile for us to make an effort because many people are just waiting to be helped.”

Warning signs include having trouble sleeping, isolation, withdrawal from friends, family or social activities, loss of interest in hobbies, work, school, and in one’s personal appearance, giving away possessions, making out a will, having experienced a recent personal loss, taking unnecessary risks, and talking about suicide.

“Another risk is when we have admitted a patient to hospital for severe depression, around the time of discharge, the person may finally have the energy and planning ability to carry out a long-contemplated attempt. A person who had been very low but suddenly has a brighter mood could indicate a decision to carry out a suicide plan,” says Saffer.

Johannesburg clinical psychologist Yael O’Reilly says she sees two kinds of “suicidality” in her practice. “The one is a sense of life being so hard that ‘I wish I wasn’t around anymore’, but there’s no intent to actually hurt themselves. It isn’t so much about suicide as this person needing help to manage everyday life. If supportive elements are put in place, that person isn’t necessarily at risk for suicide.

“The other element is when they are actually suicidal, and it’s not just their representation of how hopeless, depressed, or lonely they feel. The questions we want to ask [to differentiate] are ‘do you have a plan’ or ‘is there intent to hurt yourself?’

“In the first category, they’ll say no, definitely not, I can’t do that to my family, or it’s against my values, or I can’t imagine leaving my child etcetera. But if you ask the second category of person, they will often cry, and say ‘yes I have thought about how I would do it.’ If someone falls into this category then “it’s considered a medical emergency, and that person needs to be admitted to hospital for suicide observation”, says O’Reilly.

The biggest way to help someone in these moments is by offering emotional support. “I can’t stress this enough. The more supported a person feels, the less likely they are to go through with it,” she says. “Support comes in so many different forms – psychotherapy, medication, a support system, or organisations. This is really what can pull a person through, especially in critical moments. If there are interventions, the person has a really good chance of coming out of that depressive episode and suicidal ideation.

“While there have been massive strides in the realm of mental health and the availability of resources, there is still a stigma,” says O’Reilly. “It’s so important to realise that mental illness doesn’t discriminate. In this day and age, it should be second nature to know where and how we can access help. There needs to be an ongoing narrative, and everyone should know the warning signs. We still have a long way to go in normalising and acknowledging that this exists, particularly in our more insulated community.”

*Not her real name

Musical PTSD programme faces silencing from COVID-19

TALI FEINBERG

“I’m not supposed to be alive today,” says Dror Zicherman, aged 35. A personal trainer and gym owner, he seems like any other young Israeli.

But almost 15 years ago, he was critically injured when he prevented a suicide bombing with his own body.

He suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but a music rehabilitation programme called Soul Key has assisted his recovery. After five years of working with PTSD survivors, the programme is facing closure due to COVID-19 budget cuts.

Recalling the moment his life changed forever, Zicherman told the *SA Jewish Report*, “We received alerts about a terrorist’s intention to bomb a Chanukah event. We built a blockade, and while we were checking cars, a Palestinian taxi arrived with a suicide bomber inside. We removed the passengers and he detonated 30kg of explosives. It instantly killed my commander, and I was critically injured. There was a massive evacuation. Honestly, I’m not sure how I survived. When I arrived at the hospital, I had little to no blood left, my body was completely shattered, I went through clinical death. I was in a coma, and woke up on the eighth day of Chanukah.

“I’ve had about 32 surgeries so far, six months of rehabilitation in hospital, and 18 more months at home. It was excruciatingly painful. I was pretty happy at the time – I was constantly surrounded by people, they called me a hero, and I accepted that role. After six months, I walked out of the hospital and the doctors all clapped.”

Then the tough part began. “I started experiencing flashbacks, anxiety, and panic attacks as well as depression. Suddenly I became an angry person and I wasn’t sure why. Anything would set me off. I kept returning to that awful scene. I was isolating myself as I felt a great deal of shame. I didn’t want anyone to know. It was a huge blow to my ego and the persona of ‘the hero.’”

Exactly three years after the injury, Zicherman had a mental breakdown and was diagnosed with PTSD. “I was shocked. I thought people suffering from PTSD were freaks that were locked in psych wards. Suddenly, I realised that I had all the symptoms. Every day is another small step forward. For seven or eight years, I didn’t function at all. The switch began after Operation Protective Edge. I visited injured soldiers, people who were mentally broken, while everyone was calling them heroes. I decided to deal with my issues head on. I was going to help save people in similar positions to mine.”

The Soul Key programme helped him to rebuild his life. “I used to be anti-institutional, however this programme uplifts, supports, and helps me. It makes me believe in myself, my ability to succeed, the feeling that you are doing something that’s good for you, something that constantly picks you up.”

Yifat Greenwald-Cohen, the founder of Soul Key, is a clinical psychologist who treats PTSD at the Sheba Medical Center. She was injured during Tze’elim Disaster A on 16 July 1990. Five reserve soldiers were killed and 10 injured,

including three seriously, when an artillery shell exploded during a training exercise. “I remember lying in hospital. I was listening to music and I started crying. Through the music, I was able to process the mental pain and connect to it,” she says.

“I felt the need to create a rehabilitation and reintegration platform outside of hospitals. We chose the musical path, since music allows us to make the emotional connection

Photo: Eyal Hirsch, Shomrony-Ben Zeev



Yifat Greenwald-Cohen

when words simply aren’t enough. Music allows participants to let their souls relax, as well as momentarily disconnect from society and gather their mental resources.”

Post-trauma is a breaking point in life, she says, “due to an event or series of events that a person experiences that their soul can’t fully comprehend. The person keeps living their trauma, displaying symptoms which make it difficult for them to be with others. This in turn leads to isolation.”

While the defence department funds PTSD treatment in hospitals, Soul Key fills a gap in that it’s a “normal, non-stigmatised environment”, as opposed to a hospital or clinic. It’s hosted at the prestigious Israeli Conservatory for Music in Tel Aviv, which gives even further impetus to survivors to attend, feeling pride instead of shame. Soldiers come to the programme with a referral from experts in the field, and it has a waiting list.

The changes in PTSD survivors taking part are dramatic. “Many participants were unable to leave their home for years, unable to deal with themselves as well as society, and couldn’t take on any challenges or responsibilities. We have witnessed some amazing transformations in which people are able to regain control of their lives,” Greenwald-Cohen says.

“Often these successes lead to more successes: they

begin enjoying their musical process, suddenly they are able to work, wake up in the morning, use public transport, even go out on dates. We are talking about significant behavioural change. And at home, they have their constant trustee and ‘mental anchor’ – their musical instrument. As one participant once said, ‘Soul Key is like a medicine. If you take it away, the participants will experience regression and prejudice.’”

The programme costs \$3 000 (R45 562) a year per participant, and donations are sorely needed. But even if one can’t contribute financially, there are other ways to help. “Now more than ever, it’s important to raise awareness, to shatter prejudice, and look around, perhaps even find another person with a similar condition that needs your help,” says Greenwald-Cohen. Her dream is to open similar programmes around the world.

Another participant in the programme is Avihai Hollender, aged 28, who was injured in Operation Protective Edge. His new song, *Why father can’t find peace*, has just been released and is a haunting and heartbreaking look at the effects of PTSD on children and families. It can be found on YouTube. Yoav De Paz is 40 years old and learning to play the flute. Throughout his service as a combat soldier, he was exposed to harsh scenes around Gaza and Ramallah, where his friend’s throat was slit, and he was diagnosed with PTSD.

Eyal Atzmon is 34 years old and learning to play the saxophone. He was injured in the second Lebanon War, and after his friend died in front of him, he was diagnosed with PTSD. Ofra Yitzhaki is 55 years old and a former military police officer. She was recently hospitalised in a mental institute during the day, and is learning to play the drums.

For Zicherman, who works as a mentor and lecturer and is soon to release a book, “Everything I do is still connected to PTSD, though not in a sense of surrendering. I’m writing

a song about Ori, my commander who was killed. It’s a song about my experiences with him, not necessarily his memory. I admit that I’m not in touch with Ori’s family, and I’d rather stay away from that because it brings up a lot of demons within me ... about the fact that those who die get treated with respect, which they

truly deserve. However, no one thinks about those suffering from PTSD, those who were left behind and continue to carry the burden. In the song, I’m able to combine both these worlds – that of the trauma, and that of the mourning. I want to continue to spread that message – we are alive and we deserve to be, and more so, that we have nothing to be sorry for.”

To learn more and donate, visit <https://savesoul.icm.org.il/>



Photo: Eyal Hirsch

Yoav de Paz

Habonim honours Anstey, a 'superman without a cape'

DAVE BLOOM

The outgoing *manhig* (leader) of South African Habonim Dror, Errol Anstey, took his departure from the youth movement after 20 years of service in an online Zoom call with nearly 300 current and former members, friends, and family.

"I agreed to take the job for a year or two back in 2000, and never dreamt it would end up being 20 years of challenging but hugely satisfying work," Anstey said in an emotional speech to his audience from around the world.

In the late 1990s, the movement had dropped in numbers, finances were in a mess, and the well-known Onrust campsite was in bad shape, former shaliach Ronen Segall recalled. "Errol was the obvious choice for someone with deep knowledge of the movement, its workings, and its campsite. In my eyes, Errol became Habonim's true hero, a superman without a cape but full of capability."

In a short space of time, Anstey led a significant turnaround for Habonim along with the team of *shlichim* and Habonim leadership. His fundraising,

finance, and administration skills shone, and over his term as *manhig* an estimated R20 million has been raised and invested in the Onrust campsite to make it one of the most sought-after and valuable campsites in South Africa.

"This has enabled the movement not only to maintain the site to a high level, but the revenue has helped finance many of the movement's activities," Anstey proudly told his audience.

The traditional role of the *manhig* since the founding of SA Habonim Dror was always to be the "adult in the room" to act as a guide and mentor to the movement's young leadership. Former *mazkira klalit* (general secretary) of Habonim from 2005, Micaela Browde, paid tribute to Anstey saying, "You were really a stalwart for us, you fought for us, you had our backs, you made sure we were supported, guided, and you did so with strength, humility, and humour."

Anstey described some of the challenges during his stint including differences of opinion and sometimes open confrontation with mainstream Jewish community leadership when Habonim was critical of some of Israel's

actions. "It wasn't easy to be a lone voice for progressive, liberal thinking as South Africa's community became predominantly conservative," he said with his usual frankness.

Another *mazkir klali*, Daniel Sussman from 2019, described Anstey's catch phrase as "do everything, all the time, never sleep". This succinctly summed up for him the endless number of projects and activities which Anstey led over the past two decades on behalf of Habonim.

Stanley Bergman, originally from Port Elizabeth and now in New York, the national treasurer for Habonim in 1968, paid tribute to Anstey's enormous efforts to support several generations of Habonim members. He praised him for his ability to connect with graduates from the movement around the world and develop a donor community to support the Habonim Foundation which he initiated.

Anstey spoke of the erratic provision of Habonim *shlichim* from Israel over the years, and how he had additionally become a *shaliach* himself, which meant mentoring the leadership and members of the movement. He emphasised that he had "the privilege of working with the cream of South African Jewish youth" and said "there was nothing more fulfilling than working with inspired youth". Their activism had motivated him to run successfully for public office in 2011 as a member of the Democratic Alliance.

During the Zoom session, many participants showered praise on Anstey's term as *manhig* including Isaac Herzog, the chairperson of the Jewish Agency for Israel, who acknowledged the "outstanding contribution" that he had made to Habonim over so many years.

Wayne Sussman



Errol Anstey

Former *mazkir klali* in the early 1980s, Stephen Pincus, expressed his appreciation for Anstey's earlier roles as camp organiser at one of the largest Onrust camps ever, and later in spearheading the 50th anniversary celebrations of the movement.

"It was clear from those early years that Errol had that obvious aptitude for organisation along with a commitment to the movement," he said. "Little did we know that we unleashed a formidable force which reverberated in the movement for more than 40 years."

Anstey told the audience that his two children, Saul and Talia, had followed in his footsteps, having attended 12 Onrust camps

and later became his "eyes on the ground" regarding movement dynamics. He also noted that it was probably an unprecedented situation that they had actually left the movement before their father did.

Anstey warmly welcomed the new incoming *manhig*, Wayne Sussman, in his usual modest style saying how satisfying it was for him to hand over the mantle to "someone who will be better than me and will take Habonim to new heights".

Sussman responded in the session with his usual passionate style, describing the six previous *manhigim* who preceded him as "giants on whose shoulders we stand". He lamented the fact that the Habonim leadership was on a Zoom call and not at the annual Onrust camp, and how challenging it was going to be in 2021 without the lessons learned and experiences from machaneh.

"Our first task will be to assist the 2021 *bogrim* led by the new *mazkir*, Aaron Sher, to capture some of the magic which will be lost, but I'm confident we can do it," said Sussman.

WIZO and SAFI turn lives around



Ithembelihle School students in their wheelchairs

Twenty wheelchairs have been donated to underprivileged disabled children over the past three months by the WIZO's (the Women's International Zionist Organisation's) Wheelchairs of Hope initiative together with the South African Friends of Israel (SAFI). These are changing lives and cementing relationships with local Christian leaders, churches, and communities.

The colourful wheelchairs are designed in Israel specifically for children between the ages of five and nine, and give the gift of independence and motility, turning lives around.

Five wheelchairs were donated to the Kutullo Disability Centre in Letlhabile, Brits, on 8 October to parents excited and relieved after struggling for years to secure wheelchairs for their children. The centre expressed its gratitude to the Jewish community for its warm gesture of *tikkun olam* and *ubuntu*.

Fifteen more wheelchairs were donated on 2 December to Ithembelihle School in Primrose, Germiston. At the handover, co-ordinated by Pastor Jimmy Wright from the Mercy Foundation, Ithembelihle Principal Leonor Ngozi expressed her gratitude to WIZO and SAFI, highlighting the impact that Israel has made on her life ever since she visited the holy land.

The wheelchairs were presented by Bafana Modise, education manager at SAFI, and Johnson Mavhaga from WIZO Johannesburg, capped off by lunch because what's a party without food? Moved to tears by the gift, students, teachers, and therapists also expressed their gratitude to Israel.

Letters

SA minister should look in his own backyard before criticising Israel

Whilst I fiercely oppose Israel's settlement and occupation policy, Alvin Botes, the South African deputy minister of international affairs, chooses to use COVID-19 to accuse Israel of exploiting the pandemic by "accelerating its settlement colonisation and annexation schemes". If the minister had any knowledge of how Israel is managing her infection spread by assisting the Palestinian Authority, he might have found another platform to launch his attack.

If one country chooses to castigate another, it should be from a standpoint of not being guilty of the same "offence". Look first in your own backyard. What is South Africa doing to assist her neighbours in the region in combatting the pandemic? In fact, what is South Africa doing to assist her neighbours in any other field of medicine? The public healthcare system is in the most abysmal state, as is education and policing. In fact, almost every organ of state is collapsing and dysfunctional, as is every state-owned enterprise, yet the "pot calls the kettle black". Naturally, the minister wouldn't tell his audience that world-class hospitals and medical services

treat hundreds of thousands of Palestinians annually.

What is the African National Congress (ANC) doing to assist its African brothers starving just to the north in Zimbabwe, let alone any medical assistance? No, hapless Zimbabwe visitors are subject to brutal xenophobic attacks, as witnessed by the current violence visited on truck drivers. The minister should at least have some moral compass before criticising another country by fixing things at home first, where more than 23 000 innocent citizens are murdered per year.

When listening to the Zondo Commission of Inquiry into State Capture, one simply cannot believe the scale of corruption and blatant theft by high ranking ANC cadres with no accountability, while the poorest of the poor continue to suffer from the state's dysfunction. Dear Mr Deputy Minister, get your own house in order before criticising others. If you do see fit to reprimand others, why single out only one country when there are a host of other nations guilty of far worse human-rights abuses than Israel?

- Allan Wolman, Israel

Disclaimer: The letters page is intended to provide an opportunity for a range of views on any given topic to be expressed. Opinions articulated in the letters are those of the writers and do not reflect the views of the *SA Jewish Report*. The editor is not obliged to use every letter and will not publish vitriolic statements or any letters with inappropriate content. Letters will be edited and – if need be – shortened. **Guidelines:** Letters are limited to 400 words. Provide your full name, place of residence, and daytime phone number. Letters should be emailed to editorial@sajewishreport.co.za

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What to do with your children during the holidays

This year, many of us are staying home or looking for activities for our children that will be COVID-19-safe. While we can't list all the activities in and around South Africa, here are some to help out.

YOUTH MOVEMENTS

Camp Gan Yisrael: Day camp for children aged 3 to 12 years old. From 7 to 18 December. With the motto, "Making Jewish kids happier, and happy kids Jewish", Camp Gan Yisrael is more than a break from the school routine or an opportunity for mom to breathe during the holidays, it runs a comprehensive programme aimed at strengthening body and soul, providing your child with a stimulating holiday of fun and excitement along with friendship and meaningful educational experiences. Due to COVID-19-prevention guidelines, Camp Gan Yisrael has to limit its intake. For more information, visit www.cgijoburg.co.za or email camp@chabad.org.za

Betar hike: 10 and 20 December, Linksfeld Ridge, 08:00 to 12:00. Join Betar for a guided tour of Linksfeld Ridge. Includes free hand sanitiser, snacks, and beverages. All ages welcome, including beginners. Call 082 857 9169 or email info@betarsa.co.za

Netzer day camps: Offering programmes

and outings in and around Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, as well as some online programming to bring its regions and internationals together. The machaneh experience includes components of fun adventurous outings, Netzer programming, Netzer *ma'amadim*/services, online programming and services, as well as daily educational content. All programming and outings will be carried out in open, outdoor, and/or well ventilated spaces. Everyone will be required to keep a social distance

and wear masks at all times. Temperatures will be taken on arrival, and sanitiser will be distributed and will be available at all times. Go to <http://www.netzer.org.za/summer-machaneh/> to sign-up and to get more information.

Habonim summer day camps: In Johannesburg from 14 to 18 December, and in Cape Town from 21 to 24 December. Our week-long activities promise to be the most fun, educational, and safe way to spend your December holidays. Habonim is excited to be able to host meaningful programming for our *chaverim* this December in spite of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Johannesburg day camps take place at King David Linksfeld Primary School and in Cape Town at the Glen Green Point Sports Centre. Themes relating to Israel and South Africa are explored in depth as hundreds of children gain a sense of self and Jewish identity coupled with a more critical and pro-active look at the challenges facing us and our surroundings. Children return home every day with a strengthened value system, a stronger belief in themselves, and as confident young adults. Email nina@habo.org.za, or call our Johannesburg office on 011 786 7046.

JOHANNESBURG

Festival of Lights Joburg Zoo 2020:

22 November 2020 to 3 January 2021. Joburg Theatre in association with the City of Johannesburg's Joburg Zoo, City Parks, and City Power present the second annual Festival of Lights featuring an enchanting collection of illuminated life-size animal characters and classical entertainment, food, and a craft night market for visitors to the Joburg Zoo. Patrons can enjoy a tranquil walk in the zoo on a designated lit route away from the animals under trees decorated in enchanting lights. The Joburg Zoo Festival of Lights offers patrons entertainment and a night out at the zoo for all ages.

Happy Island Waterworld: 27 November 2020 to 31 January 2021. South Africa's largest water park is packed with fast-paced slides, rubber tube rides for all ages, and features the biggest wave pool in Africa. The family-friendly venue offers world-class water entertainment such as the exhilarating gravity loop, rainbow slide, and typhoon rides. The lazy river and massage pools offer a more relaxing water activity. The

enormous wave pool measures a colossal 20 000m², equipped with hydraulics that generate ocean-like waves at regular intervals. Lifeguards are constantly on duty to ensure the safety of visitors. Venue: Happy Island Waterworld, 106 Lake View Drive, Muldersdrift. Time: 09:00 to 18:00. Cost: various.

Roald Dahl's Fantastic Mr Fox: 28 November 2020 to 23 December 2020. On at the National Children's Theatre's new outdoor theatre with all COVID-19 protocols observed. This show is suitable for children aged three and up. Bring along sunscreen, a sun hat, umbrella, picnic basket, and a blanket. Venue: National Children's Theatre, 3 Junction Avenue, Parktown, Johannesburg. Time: 09:30 daily Tuesday to Sunday, and 16:00 on Fridays and Saturdays. Cost: R120.

White-water rafting on the Vaal River near Johannesburg: Ready to take on the raging white-water rapids of the mighty Vaal? Trips ideal for beginners, family outings, and adrenalin junkies. For more information: bookings@realadventures.co.za or call 082 924 4060.



CAPE TOWN

Noordhoek Farm Village: There is so much on offer for families at Noordhoek Farm Village, made up of the Foodbarn (one of the only fine-dining restaurants in town that welcomes kids), Café Roux, the Toad in the Village restaurant, two pubs, and a fantastic children's playground. There are large open spaces for children to run around while adults relax and enjoy a great meal or do some shopping at the funky shops. Website: thefarmvillage.co.za

The Company's Gardens: Children love the Company's Gardens and it's easy to see why. There are so many open spaces for them to run around in, and they get to feed the squirrels! Even most adults get a kick out of the adorable creatures. Buy a bag of peanuts for the squirrels from the vendors at the entrance, take a leisurely stroll through the gardens, and end it off with something to eat and drink at the great Company's Garden restaurant. Website: thecompanysgarden.com

The Palms Market: Every Saturday, there's another Woodstock market that unfolds (the other – more popular – one being the Neighbourgoods Market) which offers a variety of things to see, do, and eat for the whole family. The idea is that it's a platteland atmosphere within urban Cape Town. There's a great variety of food (think homemade pies, marmalades, gourmet mushrooms, gourmet sandwiches, and much more) and often some live music taking the stage. The kids will love the unpretentious, relaxed set-up of everything, while the older ones will enjoy the variety on offer. Website: [facebook.com](https://www.facebook.com).

Go karting: Kenilworth Karting has been around for quite some time and is the perfect spot for those who want some friendly petrolhead competition. Older kids in the family can challenge their folks to see who can set the fastest lap time or who can complete the most amount of laps in a set amount of time. There is also a track at Century City. Website: karting.co.za

The Clay Café: Get the whole family together for this one! At the Clay Café in Hout Bay, children and parents get to spend the day painting crockery that you can take home. The staff at the Clay Café will be



Dive: With nothing but the Xpanda cage between you and the sharks, you can test your courage by enduring a close encounter with Ragged Tooth sharks circling your cage and enjoy seeing Brindle bass at close range. The Oceanwalker Experience: uShaka Marine World is the only place in South Africa where you can walk among the sea's beautiful creatures using the innovative Oceanwalker device. The Open Ocean Tank has magnificent marine life such as rays, sand sharks, tuna, and pompano, and

on hand to help everyone with techniques so that everyone creates their very own masterpiece. The restaurant serves up delicious meals throughout the day. Website: claycafe.co.za

DURBAN

Aerial cable trail – Karkloof Canopy Tours: Karkloof Canopy Tours offers the unequalled experience of ziplining in the indigenous Karkloof Forest. Safely harnessed in mountaineering equipment and under the close supervision of a professional team of guides, prepare yourself for a Tarzan and Jane adventure that will take you among the birds and monkeys of this magnificent forest. Call 033 330 3415.

uShaka Marine World – aquarium diving and scuba diving: uShaka Marine World offers adventurers three unforgettable experiences. The Snorkel Experience: see myriad silvery fish flash only millimetres from your face as you float lazily around the snorkel lagoon, or dive through the Phantom Ship, where you will be able to spot the long-lost treasures from the cargo ship wreck, including a Willy's Jeep believed to be from World War II, but beware, you may come face to face with a shark! Bring only your swimwear and a towel, as we provide you with a buoyancy vest, mask and snorkel. The Xpanda Shark

to think you don't need a diving qualification to enjoy a walk inside uShaka Marine World's largest exhibit! Guests aged 12 years and above welcome, from Wednesday to Sunday throughout the year. Contact: 031 328 8000.

Beach Horse Rides: Spend a morning on a Beach Horse Ride in Durban and you will know exactly what we are talking about! We offer exhilarating horseback beach adventures on the beautiful Reunion Beach in the south of Durban. From seven to 70 years old, and total novice to experienced riders can join us. Contact: 084 467 0752.

Kite surfing – Surfers Ballito Bay: At Surfers Ballito Bay we offer instruction by International Kiteboarding Organisation-qualified instructors, and whether you are eight or 88, our courses will provide you with the skills that you need to tackle the wind and waves. Contact: 032 946 0018.

KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board boat tour: While in Durban, why not stop by Umhlanga and join the KwaZulu-Natal Sharks Board crew for a boat tour on an early morning? Enjoy watching the safety system at play and learn about sharks, and you may even get to see dolphins, turtles, and rays. Contact: 031 566 0400.

Jumping off a cliff – and looking forward to it



SCHOOL SAVVY
Dani Sack

The night before 25 November was agonising. It was filled with messages from friends, all detailing the amazing things we'd be doing instead of studying because on that day at 11:30, we would all be free.

At 11:25 on that fateful Wednesday, the exam room was electrified. Legs were bouncing, stationery boxes were packed up, and anticipatory glances shot across the room. As each paper was collected at 11:31, students began spilling out of the room one by one, dancing to music that was being played outside, a celebration for us all.

Graduation hats were thrown, photographs were taken, uncontrollable smiles were hidden by masks, and all was well. We were done, finally.

A week later, I returned home from a celebratory trip to Umhlanga. I didn't attend Rage (thank G-d, in hindsight) but I did have a wonderfully fun, five-day escape from having to stare at my desk every night as I fell asleep.

The fact that I was finished school didn't hit me then, and it hasn't hit me now either. It's a bizarre feeling to wake up every morning without an alarm, not having to sit at my desk for hours on end. I've even started watching Netflix again!

I'm indulging in sweet treats and pool-side reading, staying up until 02:00 and relishing in the lack of stress about an upcoming exam. A huge weight has been lifted, there's no doubt about it.

However, in the words of my personal trainer,

"Let's add more weight." In less than two-months' time, I will embark on a gap year to Israel. During my matric year, especially under lockdown, I have become closer to and more dependent on my parents.

They fed me, cared for me, guided me, and supported me throughout a tough year, in spite of their own struggles. Therefore, when I step on the plane that will take me miles away from them, I will transition from a dependent child into an independent adult.

In Israel, I will have no choice but to be there for myself. Although my meals will be provided, it's my responsibility to ensure I'm eating them. Although I will have a bed, it's my responsibility to ensure I am in it at a reasonable hour. Although I will be surrounded by my friends and *madrichot*, it's my responsibility to ensure I stay safe and healthy.

Not that this wasn't my responsibility before, it's just that now I don't have my parents triple-checking on me. I won't lie, it's terrifying. It feels like jumping off a cliff, knowing that there is something to catch me underneath, but being unable to see it properly.

I can't imagine being without my family, yet I'm choosing to do so for a whole year. I'm nervous to become the legal adult that my recent 18th birthday made me, but I'm also excited to jump off that cliff, to see what lies ahead for me. I pray that my transition into adulthood is an easy one, and I'm so grateful to have my family guide me through it.

As they say, every good thing must come to an end. School was an amazing experience that equipped me well for life, but it's over. And while I'm scared about next year, I can't wait to see what it will bring, not only for myself, but for us all.

• Dani Sack is a Grade 12 pupil at Yeshiva College.

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