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■ Volume 25 – Number 03 ■ 29 January 2021 ■ 16 Shevat 5781

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A life-saving friendship that lives on after death

NICOLA MILTZ

A Johannesburg doctor is battling to come to terms with the tragic passing of his esteemed colleagues who died in a fatal helicopter crash last week. Had he not been attending the funeral of a close friend and patient who died of COVID-19, he could have been on that rescue flight. He had participated in so many of those flights before.



Netcare colleagues and members of the victims' families attended a moving ceremony at the Netcare 911 helicopter crash site on Wednesday

Dr Ronald Hockman's longstanding friend, Ian Shapiro, 69, was laid to rest at Westpark Cemetery last Thursday, 21 January, at the exact time his colleagues left Johannesburg on board a Netcare 911 helicopter. He had cared for Shapiro night and day for three weeks as he battled the virus, managing to save his life on two separate occasions. Hockman was distraught when Shapiro, in spite of a monumental effort to try to save him, slipped away, unable to "turn the corner and get over the hump".

Hockman's colleague with whom he worked side by side, Dr Kgopotso Rudolph Mononyane, and two other respected co-workers, cardiothoracic surgeon Dr Curnick Siyabonga (Sia) Mahlangu, and specialist cardiothoracic and transplant theatre nurse Mpho Xaba were on the fatal flight. They were en route to a hospital in Hillcrest, west of Durban, to transfer a critically ill patient to Netcare Milpark Hospital in Johannesburg for specialised care.

Filled with mixed emotions, a devastated Hockman said, "I could have been on that flight."

He was one of four (sadly now only three) cardiothoracic anaesthetists that could have been called on the rescue mission. The close-knit team take care of COVID-19 patients needing critical intubation and ventilation procedures in the intensive-care unit at Netcare Milpark Hospital.

Two of his colleagues were in theatre at the time, which left him and Dr Rudolph, as he was affectionately called.

Now Hockman and two of his colleagues are finding it unfathomably hard living with the heavy burden of survivor's guilt.

This week, as Hockman together with Netcare Chief Executive Dr Richard Friedland stood at the crash site alongside members of the victims' families during a special memorial ceremony, he wondered why he was spared.

"I almost wish it had happened to me," Hockman told the *SA Jewish Report*. "The pain of losing a dear friend on the one hand who I battled to save, and dear colleagues whose death I cannot make sense of, is unbearable."

"We are all walking around in mourning. Some of us have survivors' guilt," he said.

His friendship with Shapiro started when the two were at Greenside High School many years ago. "We became close during our bi-weekly *gemara shiurim*, which we attended for more than 35 years."

"Ian was the star of the *shiur*. He had such an inquiring mind. He was a remarkable person. I cannot imagine the *shiur* without

him, in the same way I cannot imagine surgery without Drs Rudolph, Sia, and sister Mpho," he said.

Shapiro's son, Daniel, said his father's relationship with Hockman was special. "Dr Hockman saved my father twice. He is an exceptional doctor who would work tirelessly until the early hours of the morning, keeping us informed of his condition, which helped so much. I only hope that by him coming to my father's funeral he will have the chance to save countless more lives. This is a small comfort."

Shapiro was this week described by friends and family as a "warm and caring true *mensh*", who treated everyone equally and never "uttered a bad word about anyone".

The longstanding attorney was the father of three sons and the grandfather of six, and an avid Arsenal Football Club supporter. He had a love of Yiddishkeit, and many varied hobbies including music, history, and sport.

He and his wife, Anne-Louise, contracted

COVID-19 while holidaying in Cape Town.

Hatzolah Medical Rescue advised them to drive home, which they did, going via Beaufort West. When they reached Beaufort West, Ian's condition started to deteriorate, which set in motion a mammoth 36-hour emergency operation to get the couple back home as fast as possible after Ian's overnight stay in a government facility.

Hatzolah helped to facilitate an ambulance transfer for Ian to Bloemfontein, while Anne-Louise drove ahead in the rented car. In a dramatic twist, the ambulance experienced a blown tyre which delayed its arrival by several hours. In the meantime, Hatzolah volunteers Josh Green and Netanel Azzizolahoff travelled by ambulance to fetch Ian upon his arrival in Bloemfontein. They travelled through the night.

"Hatzolah was incredible," said Daniel.

They got my dad to hospital, and checked in with my mom several times a day as she remained in quarantine.

"Volunteers even offered to do her dishes and sit with her in full PPE [personal protective equipment] to keep her company. They are on another level."

Hockman said it was a traumatic time for the Shapiro family, who are picking up the pieces of losing Ian, and for his medical colleagues after the crash.

The helicopter crash sent shock waves through the medical community, which is still reeling from the tragedy.

The aircraft crashed near Bergville in northern KwaZulu-Natal, claiming the lives of all on board including Sinjin Joshua Farrance, an advanced life-support paramedic at Netcare 911, and pilot Mark Stoxreiter, who worked for National Airways Corporation.

"All this takes its toll, but you have to carry on. I feel desperately sad for the families left behind. These people were loved by everybody. They were the cream of the crop. I feel profoundly sad and vulnerable."



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

The right to demonstrate, even during lockdown

ILAN OSSENDRYVER

Israelis are being allowed out of their homes in full lockdown to call for the resignation of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Bibi), who is viewed by many on both sides of the political spectrum as corrupt.

This freedom in a lockdown which ordinarily limits you to being no more than one kilometre from your house is based on the country's constitutional right to protest. On bridges, at junctions, and outside Bibi's house in Jerusalem, daily protests occur, resuming after Shabbat goes out on Saturday night.

"Lech! Lech!" (Go!) is shouted loudly – which is also the name for the movement against Netanyahu.

There are some staunch Likud followers who scream, "Arafat and Rabin sold out the country," prompting laughter amongst some demonstrators, who point out that their

arguments are old and outdated. Demonstrators including doctors, lawyers, pilots, accountants, and students point out that this isn't about the Israel-Palestine issue, it's not about being leftist or rightist, but about ethics and bringing to justice an allegedly corrupt prime minister.

The protestors are passionate, some defying orders not to camp outside Bibi's residence. At 21:30, police order the drums, trumpets, and whistles to cease. The protestors obey, but continue to demonstrate quietly, so as not to disturb the Jerusalem neighbourhood.

Then, at about 23:00, carrying Israeli flags in blue and white and others in red and white, the protestors pack up and go home to lockdown.

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18:15	20:01	Port Elizabeth
18:15	19:49	East London

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2 SA JEWISH REPORT

Antwerp mayor warns rule flouting triggers antisemitism

The mayor of Antwerp, a city in Belgium where about 15 000 haredi Orthodox Jews live, warned that their failure to comply with COVID-19 measures has triggered some antisemitism, and it could turn into a wave.

“In the Jewish community, not everyone realises this, they have their own logic, but the backlash of public opinion that I see in my inbox, it’s terrible,” Bart De Wever, a right-wing politician who has enjoyed good relations with his city’s Jewish community, told the ATV station on Sunday, 24 January. “If we really want to move towards a wave of antisemitism, this is the way to go.”

His statement followed the two-week shutdown of a Belz synagogue by the Hasidic sect’s leaders in Antwerp. Police had determined that the shul on Van Spangen Street was twice in violation of emergency measures that forbid group prayer but allow individual worship.

Antwerp police have tolerated *minyans*, but have intervened when they were exceeded.

Legislators criticise Israel for not vaccinating Palestinians

Joaquin Castro, a top foreign policy Democrat in the United States House of Representatives, has joined a handful of other Democrats in criticising Israel for not supplying Palestinians with the coronavirus vaccine.

“I commend Israel for leading the world on vaccinating its people, but I’m disappointed and concerned by its government’s exclusion of Palestinians living under Israeli occupation from these vaccination efforts, despite making COVID-19 vaccines available to Israeli settlers in the West Bank,” Castrol, of Texas, told *Ha’aretz* this week.

A number of other Democrats, including Rashida Tlaib of Michigan, Jamaal Bowman of New York, and Marie Newman of Illinois have also criticised Israel for excluding the Palestinians.

Israel says it isn’t required to vaccinate West Bank Palestinians under international law and prior agreements with the Palestinians.

Israeli museum accused of smuggling artifacts out of Warsaw



Photo courtesy of Shem Olam Faith & the Holocaust Institute for Education, Documentation & Research

10 sets of tefillin that the Shem Olam Holocaust museum said were found in Warsaw, Poland

The City of Warsaw has accused an Israeli Holocaust museum of smuggling Jewish prayer artifacts out of Poland that the museum said were found inside an old bunker in the Polish capital.

The Shem Olam museum near Hadera announced this week that it had obtained 10 sets of tefillin found by construction workers in Warsaw near the entrance to a bunker dug by Jewish fighters in preparation for the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

The City of Warsaw has no knowledge of the find, said spokesperson Karolina Gałęcka. If Shem Olam was telling the truth about what it obtained and where, “a crime has occurred” because Poland requires anyone who finds archaeological items to report their discovery to the authorities.

Rabbi Avraham Krieger, Shem Olam’s director, said Judaica artifacts, including from the Warsaw Ghetto, are widely available for sale in Polish antique stores and online.

Torah Thought

The vaccine for spiritual complacency

The news that the Moderna vaccine is at least somewhat effective against the South African strain of coronavirus was met with some sense of relief and restoration of hope that an end is in sight even if not as quickly as we had originally thought.

But we need to remain vigilant because, as our doctors continuously remind us, whether it’s from China, South Africa, the United Kingdom or whatever other mutation it takes on, this virus, in any and every form, will kill unless it itself is killed.

Perhaps this clear and unambiguous guidance might also be a model we could start applying a little more forcefully to our own sense of divine purpose and living.

As we hope and pray and follow all the rules so that with Hashem’s help, we’ll soon be redeemed from the slavery of COVID-19, we would do well to take lessons from our first story of lockdown, slavery, and fatal oppression, not from a deadly virus, but an evil Pharaoh.

This week and Shabbat, we read the story of the Jewish people taking the plunge into the sea of the unknown ahead of them, and finally celebrating the crushing defeat of the virus of Egyptian tyranny.

The virus of this first mutation of antisemitism was also deadly, unpredictable, and – most terrifyingly – constantly changing to adapt to the different forms of resistance that Moshe, through the word of Hashem, inspired in the people.

Rashi quotes the great sage Rabbi Shimon who asks: where did the horses come from for the cavalry that Pharaoh led towards the sea? Weren’t they all killed in the plague? He answers that sadly, it was the “G-d-fearing” Egyptians who had hidden their horses during the plagues who now put them at Pharaoh’s disposal. Why? Because even the “best” of the evil Egyptians bore an inner sinister hatred of the Hebrews, and therefore needed to be crushed as well.

29 January – 5 February 2021

Leifer finally extradited to Australia

Malka Leifer has boarded a plane from Israel en route to Australia where she faces 74 charges of child sexual abuse.

Leifer fled to Israel from Australia in 2008 amid allegations that she had sexually abused students when she was the principal at the Adass Yisroel School in Melbourne. In 2014, Australia filed a formal extradition request, but Israeli authorities deemed her unstable and unfit for extradition.

After an investigation showed she was living a normal life, she was rearrested in 2018, and last year, an Israeli panel cleared her for extradition.

Leifer’s departure from Israel’s Ben Gurion Airport came shortly before the country was due to ground all flights for at least a week to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Israelis torch bus in protest against COVID-19 restrictions

A mob of Orthodox Jews torched a bus in Israel after beating the bus driver amid ongoing riots protesting the country’s COVID-19 restrictions.

Police officers in other cities were also injured during riots in Orthodox neighbourhoods, where COVID-19 rates have spiked but residents object to lockdown restrictions.

The bus burning in Bnei Brak on Sunday, 24 January, a largely haredi or ultra-Orthodox city near Tel Aviv, came days after rioters there injured seven police officers in clashes last week. Police have sought to close haredi schools and other institutions, which has sparked a violent backlash from protesters.

• *All briefs supplied by JTA*

Rabbi Asher Deren,
Chabad of the West
Coast, Cape Town

Today, the threat of the Egyptians is but a footnote to our glorious history. But the danger of our “inner” Egyptian virus, the egocentric pull towards a g-dless pursuit of materialistic pleasure and an illusory freedom from purpose (and slavery to societal conformity) is threatening to destroy us.

The beautiful, generation-old “traditional South African Judaism” comes with a potentially viral complacency that in today’s rapidly progressive world can lead to a fatal irrelevance of our sacred heritage and its vital message to the world today.

We have a choice – kill it, or be destroyed by it.

We must obliterate that acceptance of mediocrity, and replace it with our absolute commitment to and engagement with a dynamic, compelling, and consistent celebration of our faith and our Judaism. That’s our only vaccine. Will we use it?

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• Subscriptions Avusa Publishing (Pty) Ltd. Tel: 0860 525 200 • Board of Directors Howard Sackstein (Chairperson), Dina Diamond, Herschel Jawitz, Shaun Matisonn, Benjy Porter. • Advertisements and editorial copy do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, staff and board of directors. Tel: 011 430 1980.

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Families of patients can get ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’

TALI FEINBERG

Sigal Josselowitz never got to say goodbye to her father after he was admitted to hospital with COVID-19 at the beginning of December 2020. During their last conversation, he was complaining about having to wear an oxygen mask, and she gently encouraged him to use his energy to heal instead of arguing with those trying to help him. Shortly afterwards, he was put on a ventilator, and two weeks later, he passed away.

“Watching family members being admitted to hospital with COVID-19 can lead to trauma,” says clinical psychologist Daniel Rabinowitz from Cape Town Psychologists in Sea Point. “The definition of post-traumatic stress disorder in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* is that if you even witness somebody that’s going through some sort of threat to their lives, then that’s considered a trauma in itself. So it doesn’t only have to be the individual themselves who experiences the trauma, [it can also be] those who witness it.”

Paul Rubinstein didn’t have contact with his wife, Liza, for about a week after she was admitted to hospital with COVID-19 pneumonia in the early hours of 16 July 2020. “COVID-19 is a devastatingly lonely virus. It’s one thing to not be able to visit a loved one, it’s another to not have any contact whatsoever with them,” he says.

“With hospital staff being so overwhelmed during this time, we were unable to get much feedback about her condition. We called the hospital daily, but couldn’t get much information other than through nurses who would tell us that Liza was ‘okay’ and ‘stable’. They were doing their best, but it was all a bit vague and of little comfort. I did receive a call late one evening in that first week from Liza’s treating doctor at the time. I don’t recall exactly what he said, but it was something to the effect that she was stable but still in a very fragile condition. It was all very surreal, and we didn’t know what to think.” Eventually, when Dr Anton Meyberg and Dr Carron Zinman took over her case, communication improved.

“With the help of Liza’s physiotherapist, Darryn Edinburg, we were able to get her cell phone to her and other personal things. She was then able to text us after about a week. We could see from her texts that she was very disorientated and clearly not in a happy state of mind. She was also very uncomfortable wearing the oxygen mask,” says Rubinstein.

“Liza actually has no recollection of the morning she was admitted and the first few days thereafter. I can only imagine what must

have been going through her mind when she woke up in a strange place not knowing what was going on, no means to contact anyone, and with no family around to comfort her,” he says. While she recovered enough to be discharged, she remained on oxygen and was closely monitored. The trauma of her time in hospital is one that nobody in the family will forget.

“There was a 2019 study that found that if a family member is hospitalised unexpectedly and other family members are left to wonder about the family member that is admitted, they experience a whole heap of anxiety and distress,” says Rabinowitz. “Many family members are left feeling as though they have lost control, and it then interferes with all kinds of decision-making on the part of the family and has an impact on how much power the patient has themselves. Eventually families do habituate [get used to the situation], but it takes a while. The family can experience what we call trauma, post-trauma, or post-intensive-care trauma.”

Andrea Berzen has endured the

“Even if a person hasn’t been personally affected by the pandemic, he/she can develop vicarious trauma by repeatedly watching others suffer.”

rollercoaster ride of having both her parents in hospital, with both rapidly deteriorating, and not being able to do anything to help them. “We live six kilometres away from the hospital, but we might as well have been 6 000 kilometres away,” says Berzen. The sole benefit of being close was the ability to send letters and balloons to celebrate her father’s birthday to both parents, but “my mom was in such a bad way, she doesn’t recall the balloons being there”.

Her mother, who is 79, was admitted on 1 January, and her father, 81, was admitted on 4 January. They were in two separate wards at Linksfeld Clinic, and “Dr Zinman did her best to give me reports every day.



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She said to remember that ‘no news is good news’.

“But then, my mom took a turn for the worst and was admitted to the intensive-care unit (ICU). I remember Dr Zinman calling me at 22:30 that night as it was the first time she got to the phone. When my dad heard that my mom was in ICU, he also suddenly deteriorated. For a day or so, they didn’t know what was going on with him, but then they found he had COVID-19 pneumonia.”

Her mother struggled emotionally. “She didn’t want to go on. At one point, she was


at 10:00 to say she’s never seen such a connection between two people, and both parents had just turned the corner. That was on 12 January, and every day there has been improvement. My mother was discharged on Tuesday [26 January], and we hope my dad will also be discharged this week, but they will need recuperative care. You never know what can happen with COVID-19, and we don’t know if they’ll ever go back to how they were.”

“What’s hard [about COVID hospitalisation] is not only the lack of contact, but the feelings of powerlessness, passivity, and distress caused by uncertainty,” says Cape Town clinical psychologist Ilana Edelstein. It’s compounded by people being disconnected not only from the person in hospital, but also from family and friends who would ordinarily provide support. Even if a person hasn’t been personally affected by the pandemic, he/she can develop vicarious trauma by repeatedly watching others suffer.

However, there are ways to empower ourselves. “Over the past year, it has become apparent that all of us are vulnerable to contracting the virus and once infected, the trajectory of the illness is unpredictable. The uncertainty of COVID-19 necessitates that we make changes in our lives,” says Edelstein. “It highlights the urgency for us to try as much as possible to get our emotional affairs in order, much as we may try to get financial matters in order.

“We need to take every opportunity to validate our loved ones in action and in words. We need to communicate openly and transparently. Trauma in this way becomes a powerful force for positive change – for stronger relationships and deepening appreciation of life,” she says.

“Avoid regret and potential guilt. Don’t take your loved ones for granted. Communicate frequently, and make time for those who matter in your life. And treasure each day and try to cultivate gratitude. If your relationships are good, the process will be less complicated than if you are struggling with a lot of unresolved issues.”




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Dispatches from the frontlines of the COVID-19 war

TALI FEINBERG

The war against the second wave of COVID-19 raged in the Western Cape in December, and many of those hard hit were either local community members or on holiday. Many of the frontline warriors in the battle wearing PPE (personal protective equipment) were volunteers from the Community Security Organisation (CSO) in Cape Town.

“The vast majority of these people are doing this not only for free, but on their own dime. Our paramedics are quite literally putting their lives on the line to be there for the community,” says CSO Director Loren Raize. “This is the most heroic thing I’ve witnessed in my life, and being the mother of two kids, I can’t imagine that it’s easy for them. I have admiration and respect for this selfless *mitzvah*.”

After a long and tough year, even the paid staff at CSO “had no down time this December. No holiday time at all. Anyone that took leave ultimately worked through it, and some of the staff worked long hours even while infected with COVID-19,” Raize says.

Capetonian Jackie Levitt will be forever grateful to the CSO. “They saved my husband, Marc’s, life. Thanks to them, we realised he was in danger. Without the oximeter they gave us, he would have died,” she says.

“His oxygen was 58, and his heart rate was 140. Our general practitioner said he needed urgent hospitalisation, so I carried him to my car on my back as he couldn’t walk and his body was shutting down. I drove like a wild woman to Cape Town Mediclinic, and he was admitted when a nurse read his saturation levels. The hospital was full, but she discharged another



A CSO Cape Town medic

patient to admit Marc.” He spent 11 days in the intensive-care unit on high-flow oxygen. Labour lawyer Michael Bagraim says, “COVID-19 arrived like a ghost. I couldn’t walk or go up the stairs. I was sleeping almost 20 hours a day. We were stuck at home the whole of December. It was a month of horror.” In those long weeks of isolation, it was the CSO which created a lifeline of human contact, care, and support for him and his wife, Patsy, who also tested positive but didn’t suffer as much as him. “They were there if we needed to go to hospital. They even offered to get us food or medicine – anything we needed. From a psychological point of view, it made us feel secure.” The Bagraims have since recovered. Recently, they passed a home with a CSO car outside, its lights flashing. “Patsy said to me,

“There are our angels.” Looking back on the numbers in December 2020, the CSO monitored 332 COVID-19-positive patients, including delivering 64 wellness packs to patients who were visiting Cape Town and the Western Cape. CSO even went on a special trip to the Garden Route to deliver wellness packs to Jewish holidaymakers from all over the country. The organisation responded to 180 incidents – part of 368 calls to its 24/7 emergency line. This was all done by only 31 volunteers, who also made 3 619 phone calls to patients on the CSO Cape Town Wellness Programme. Some of these volunteers agreed to speak to the *SA Jewish Report* about their experiences on condition of anonymity. A senior paramedic with the CSO Medical Response Unit says there is a wide array of patients in terms of demographics.

“One of the most challenging aspects has been the fear that patients and families have, especially of going to hospital and not coming home again. So many patients have refused to go to hospital out of sheer concern about what will happen to them once they get there. “Added to this is the challenge of treating patients in full PPE. The patient is no longer able to see our faces or our uniforms, and often can’t hear us properly through our masks. This makes compassion and care that much more important to try and allay some of their fears. “One of the added challenges is the lack of available hospital beds, and discussions with patients and family members about them not being able to go to the hospital of their choice. Another negative aspect is the denial of so many people about their potential exposure to COVID-19, and how many are adamant that they can’t possibly have the virus.” Even with all these difficulties, there have been uplifting moments. “The Wellness Programme is absolutely phenomenal in terms of community support and patient management. To be able to monitor our patients through this channel has been so gratifying.”

He says he keeps safe through the use of PPE. “It’s important that the patient understands why we need to take an extra few minutes to don our protective gear before entering a household. The limited number of healthcare workers means we need to protect ourselves at all costs, and the extra few minutes ensures our availability for someone else because all precautions were taken for each call.”

A wellness volunteer says, “At the beginning of December, a friend asked if

I’d like to monitor COVID-19 positive patients by calling them every day. As a retired nursing sister, I was interested, so applied to join, went on an online training course, and received the details of my first patients.” Armed with a pad of paper, a pencil, and questions, she made her first phone call. “By the end of the conversation, I knew that I was going to enjoy being back in my role as a caregiver. You engage in conversation and hear more than just the answers to the questions – a lot can be learned as you listen to the way the patient responds. You form a relationship.” She was in touch with patients ranging from 15 to 92 years of age. “Some were part of a family isolating on their own away from others, some family members all tested positive and went through the ordeal together, still others were in Cape Town on holiday and needed assistance with the delivery of groceries and medication. “Each call and patient has their own story to tell and their own fears. Some show bravado, accept their illness, and get on with recovering. Others are anxious, and need an ear to reassure and give advice. Still others require careful management as they don’t recover as quickly, and may require medical attention and sometimes hospitalisation. “Patients on their own find being ill with COVID-19 particularly difficult. Those with mild symptoms are frustrated by the boredom and loneliness, while patients who have more severe symptoms are more anxious and require more frequent calls. I feel privileged to be a part of this amazing programme, to exercise my nursing skills, and to be able to form relationships with people at a time when they are overwhelmed.” A paramedic with CSO Medical says that during the first wave, he mainly helped the elderly, but “this time round, we have treated young and old”. The work has had a big impact on all the volunteers and their families. “Our families worry about us, and with the growing numbers, you cannot leave your colleagues to pick up the pieces as the volume is just too high.” Protecting his family from the virus is “an ongoing issue – life was easier when the biggest threat was a criminal element that you could see and touch. We take every precaution.” He cannot wait to get the vaccine for himself and his family. Raize emphasises that “the CSO emergency line is exactly that – an emergency line for life-threatening situations”, and says the community must register online for the Wellness Programme or via the WhatsApp/SMS number. “In December, our systems came close to collapsing, and we had to put in major interventions to prevent this mainly because the community was calling the line to get onto the programme. It will be of great help if they follow the correct process.”



CSO volunteers and staff worked throughout the festive season to assist community members and holidaymakers affected by the second wave of COVID-19



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NICOLA MILTZ

When the second and more virulent COVID-19 wave came crashing down at the beginning of the holiday season, Hatzolah Medical Rescue went above and beyond the call of duty to make sure that “No yid gets left behind”.

"We will look after you wherever you are, whatever the circumstances, and make sure you are cared for," said Uriel Rosen, operations manager of the organisation's unique COVID Wellness Monitoring Programme.

"We do this because we care," he told the *SA Jewish Report* this week.

Faced with a pandemic surge that was bigger and broader than the first one, these death-dealing heroes of humanity shifted gear as the numbers of infections began to soar.

As hundreds of Johannesburg residents made their way to holiday destinations dotted around the country, Hatzolah collaborated and formed new partnerships with healthcare workers and communal leaders, providing an elaborate, intricate network of care.

Every COVID-19-positive patient from game reserves and mountains to far flung coastal seaside towns was kitted with a fingertip pulse oximeter and thermometer. They were then managed remotely by teams of dedicated volunteers whose voice several hundred kilometres away provided much needed comfort, care, and hope.

A family of six in Mozambique – all stricken with the virus – were successfully treated and cared for remotely, said Rosen.

Five critically ill patients were airlifted to hospitals from places in the Eastern and Western Cape.

“There are communal organisations and people in the community who will literally do anything, bend over backwards, to help someone in need.”

"All this involves mindboggling logistics," said Rosen, who this week touched on the colossal planning it took to care for patients during this particularly grueling period of the pandemic.

They facilitated brain-bending and intricately planned aeromedical and ground operations under intense pressure. These involved anything from arranging aeroplanes, ambulances, car rentals, special vehicle modifications (to separate COVID-19-positive patients from other passengers during long-haul transportation), last-minute hotel accommodation, complicated hospital admissions, and medical aid deliberations involving endless paperwork – all taken care of by a super-stretched and hyper-vigilant rescue team.

Hatzolah medical manager and advanced life support responder, Yudi Singer, said every day was unpredictable, and paramedics needed to act on their feet and rely on their advanced training.

"On one long-haul emergency call to fetch a critically ill COVID-19 patient, our guys were flagged down at an accident scene on the highway far from Johannesburg in bad weather. They had to provide emergency assistance to critically injured patients trapped in a vehicle which had rolled," he said.

"So even on the way to collect a COVID-19 patient in another province, they had to attend to an unexpected emergency."

Caring for patients outside the city was one thing, but making sure they travelled safely back home was another matter entirely, said Rosen.

When it became apparent that people were flying home presenting COVID-19 symptoms, Hatzolah urgently appealed to the community to contact the organisation to make alternative arrangements.

"If you have tested positive for COVID-19 or have symptoms and need to return home from holiday, you absolutely cannot fly in an aeroplane and put other people at life-threatening risk," it stated, pleading with people to call the Wellness Centre for advice.

In separate cases, Hatzolah arranged transport for critical patients from a seaside town south east of Cape Town, and from an arid area in the Karoo, with drivers sometimes travelling through the night.

"We arranged four critically ill patients to be airlifted out of Plettenberg Bay. Two of them weren't even feeling that sick when our monitoring teams established that their vital signs were critical. This is the nature of the disease. It can catch a patient off guard, sometimes too late," said Rosen."

The four patients and another critically ill patient in Port Elizabeth landed up in various intensive-care units on ventilators.

"All five are alive and have since been discharged," said Rosen.

The difference between the first and second waves has been "insane", he said.

In seven months from March to October last year, there were 115 hospital admissions and 72 patients who required oxygen at home. Whereas in just more than three months during the second wave, there have been 146 admissions and 85 patients requiring oxygen at home.

"During our second peak, there have been a lot more patients requiring active intense medical care at home and we are running anything up to 100 nurse rounds a day," said Rosen.

Executive General Manager Darren Kahn said there were 200 active patients at the time of going to print. Eleven nurses looked after the more unwell patients in conjunction with the patients' doctor. Many of these patients are on oxygen concentrators.

Hatzolah has completed more than 5 000 home-nurse visits. It has monitored and cared for 2 322 COVID-19 positive patients to date, according to Kahn.

"This has required a team of 65 people made up of full-time employees and volunteers who have made more than 42 100 calls to patients," he said.

The organisation has eight full-time drivers to transport nurses to the homes of COVID-19 positive patients who don't require an ambulance. They have made more than 5 265 trips to date, he said.

A team of dedicated dispatchers have fielded 10 000 phone calls since the start of COVID-19, and ambulances have responded to 4 458 medical emergencies. This is nearly double the call volume of prior years.

"The numbers speak for themselves. I cannot even begin to express the appreciation that our team deserves for its unbelievable bravery, commitment, and dedication over the past 10 months."

Singer said the past month had been "tremendously challenging", with multiple calls coming in at once.

"In the past two weeks, people have needed our help in the middle of the night because they have maybe fallen and cannot call a family member to help because of COVID-19 risks. You won't find another ambulance service doing this," he said.

"This pandemic has taught me a lot," said Rosen. "There are communal organisations and people in the community who will literally do anything, bend over backwards, to help someone in need. They live and breathe in order to protect and care for each other. We are the luckiest community in the world."

- COVID Home Wellness – 060 985 7030
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- Emotional Wellness line – 010 140 3270




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The best of us

We are certainly living in stressful times. It impacts on how we react to situations. So, when we would ordinarily – whatever that means now – take a particular set of circumstance with a pinch of salt and calmly deal with it, we may not deal so well with it now. We may look to blame someone or a group of people. We may accuse the wrong people of guilt when there isn’t necessarily any guilt – it’s just the circumstances that are unfortunate. Last week’s lead story about the wedding that caused so many people to contract COVID-19 was a case in point.



While it’s true that at least one person mocked the law and what was expected of them in the country and by our community, most were just there to celebrate the union of two people. Weddings are meant to be joyful events – unique, memorable, and hopefully a once-in-a-lifetime occasion for a couple. They are generally planned well in advance, and to the last serviette and flower. So, while a lot of people criticised us – the messenger – for writing the story, there were those who said ugly things about those celebrating the wedding. As for those criticising us, I ask that you don’t “shoot the messenger”. We simply reported on an event that breached the law. And in doing so, we chose not to name and shame quite simply because we weren’t dealing with petty criminals or people who wanted to harm others. Instead, we were dealing with people who wanted to make a wedding special and not tainted by lockdown and this horrific pandemic. It’s unfortunate that in the process, they didn’t follow protocols and laws and so many contracted the coronavirus there. Therein lies the problem. We all have to play our part in avoiding spreading this virus. We all have do what we can to stay healthy and ensure that all those around us stay healthy too. We have to follow protocols and laws. This isn’t a time to mock and ignore laws – lives depend on it. This week, we have reason to highlight incredible angels in our midst – the very people who do the opposite of ignoring laws. They are the people who give up their personal lives and time to save others. They are the many selfless, caring, mostly volunteers at Hatzolah and the Community Security Organisation (CSO) in Cape Town.

While most of us did what we could to get some semblance of a holiday, these incredible folk were working around the clock to save those who contracted COVID-19. They were the lifeline for so many in our community who got sick. It’s astonishing to hear about the amazing way they looked after those who were sick. The fact that Hatzolah would find ways to get people in outlying coastal areas in the country or even Cape Town, Plettenberg Bay, or KwaZulu-Natal home to Johannesburg was unbelievable. They would drive ambulances for hundreds of kilometres to do this, and monitor people all the way home. I’m blown away by such kindness, selflessness and I – and everyone who has somehow been touched by these angels in PPE (personal protective equipment) – am filled with such gratitude and awe.

This coronavirus has really shown us what people are made of. We witness the incredible compassion and unstinting healthcare they perform. I wonder what it takes to be someone like that. They are heroes who don’t want the *kavod* we want to give them. They don’t want to be named or put on a pedestal. They just want to keep saving lives and making sure that those who are sick are carried caringly through their illness so that they can survive. As I have said before, this illness can be such a lonely and terrifying journey, but it’s one that the Hatzolah and CSO volunteers and staff take people through with such gentleness. It’s hard to imagine how we would manage without them. I must say I feel sad for those communities who don’t have angels like this in their midst. Almost a year ago, when I lost my mother literally a few weeks before lockdown began, I experienced just a taste of what these incredible human beings do. My mother wasn’t COVID-19-positive, she had broken her hip.

But the Hatzolah angels that came to her rescue were so gentle with her, and kept talking to her through a very painful ambulance ride to the hospital, trying to help her through the pain. The driver, who I sat next to, kept talking to me to try and keep me calm in the face of my fear and my mother’s obvious pain. I remember feeling like we were being held in cotton wool at such a frightening time. Those two men who came to our rescue on a Saturday when they could have been with their families or taking time out to relax showed me the best in humanity. It’s this that they and their colleagues continue to exude through this pandemic, albeit 100 fold. To be honest, *kavod* seems too small an honour to pay them. Do you remember years ago, some in our community used to call those who were *shomrei Shabbos* the “G-d squad”? Well, I believe Hatzolah and CSO are the true G-d squad – they are doing G-d’s work in saving many lives so selflessly. This week, as we continue the war against the COVID-19 pandemic, we remember those who died during the Holocaust on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. In the same way we don’t ever want to forget the many incredible people who have died of COVID-19, let’s find the name of a person who died at the hands of the Nazis, and find out about their lives. This way, we keep their memories alive.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor

No Biden time in pandemic presidency

OPINION

WAYNE SUSSMAN



I felt sorry for President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris on Inauguration Day. Instead of being sworn in in front of hundreds of thousands of Americans, they were greeted by a tiny, socially-distanced audience and bitterly cold weather. They also didn’t have the honour of going to all the celebratory balls, being able to reflect on their November victory, and imagining what the next four years might look like. There was some upside to this socially-distanced celebration. While the president and First Lady Jill Biden weren’t able to shuttle between glitzy balls, they were able to share their inauguration with the country through smart phones, televisions, car radios, and computers.



A star-studded cast performed in the Tom Hanks-hosted *Celebrating America* which replaced the balls. You got to see America at its finest for the duration of the concert as a diverse group of celebrities and an equally diverse group of ordinary Americans beamed into the nation’s devices for 90 minutes. The production was in stark contrast to the insurrection on the Capitol on 6 January. The America on display on Inauguration Day was also very different to the America on display on Inauguration Day in 2017 when Donald Trump became president. Biden’s celebration was about a cross section of musical genres and a broad swathe of the population. *Celebrating America* included multiple snippets of healthcare workers. Joe Biden’s first priority will be the fight against COVID-19 and getting as many Americans vaccinated as quickly as possible. He has set himself an ambitious target for the rollout of vaccines. He will hope for better leadership in dealing with this scourge, which has accounted for far too many people and has seen so many Americans lose businesses and jobs. Biden knows that he will probably be a one-term president and that he will have only four years in the Oval Office. As he and Jill Biden watched the impressive firework display from their balcony on 20 January, he must have thought about the days and months ahead, and how his handling of the pandemic will be what ultimately defines his presidential legacy. Biden’s other immediate priority is to use his slender control of Congress and his early new year’s gift of control of the Senate to his advantage. He knows he probably has only two years of control of the House of Representatives and the Senate. This is because the party which controls the White House typically gets punished in the mid-term elections every two years after the presidential elections. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu woke up in the early Jerusalem hours on 9 November 2016, rubbing his eyes and thinking how he would be working with Hilary Clinton for the next four years. He would have been stretching and thinking

that it’s not ideal, but at least Barack Obama is no longer going to be in the White House. It ended up a much better outcome for Netanyahu, as he and Donald Trump developed a special relationship and even if Trump’s off-script remarks might have made the Israeli prime minister cringe, Netanyahu knew that he would kibosh the Iranian nuclear deal. He also knew that the Democratic obsession with the two-state solution to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would be way down the priority list. It was a wonderful four years for Netanyahu. He witnessed United States Ambassador David Friedman opening a new American embassy in Jerusalem, recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and agreements penned between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain followed by normalisation ties with Morocco and Sudan. Netanyahu’s biggest concern will be Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken leading America back to negotiations with the Iranians and re-joining the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action deal. Biden and Blinken will believe that America will have better control over Iran’s military and nuclear aspirations by being part of the deal than being on the side lines. At the same time, Biden will understand Israel and many of the Gulf state nations’ concerns about Iran and the potential threat it poses. When Biden announced Blinken as his secretary of state, Blinken used the moment to recount the story of how his stepfather was one of the few Jewish children from his Polish school to survive the Holocaust, and how his stepfather was rescued by an African-American GI (general infantry) during a Death March. He told this story to illustrate how important America’s role in the world is, and how human rights must be the cornerstone of American foreign policy. This could well result in the American relationship with the Saudis taking some strain over the next four years. It will also result in America being less enamoured with strongmen and more concerned with democracy and stronger ties with governments who share the Biden-Harris administration’s emphasis on human rights. At the same time, America won’t work to weaken any of Israel’s new peace agreements, but also hope to improve ties between Israel and the Palestinians and Israel and its other neighbours. Ultimately, it’s of far more consequence for Israel and America for there to be closer ties with Jerusalem and Ramallah than Jerusalem and Rabat or Jerusalem and Abu Dhabi. I expect the new United States president to make few international trips over the next couple of years. His priority will be vaccines, the economy, and infrastructure improvement. Before making peace with Israel and its adversaries, he will focus on lowering the tempo in his country and bridging the gap between the rust belt, the bible belt, and the coastal elites. He knows time isn’t on his side, and he knows that his legacy is more likely to be defined by an injection in an arm than events in the Middle East.

• Wayne Sussman writes on elections for Daily Maverick, and presents regularly on American politics.

Bernie Sanders has his most viral week ever

GABE FRIEDMAN – JTA

Bernie Sanders was everywhere on James Corden's late night show set on Thursday, 21 January.

Life-sized cardboard cut-outs of the Jewish senator in his now famous inauguration ceremony pose – hands and legs crossed, slightly crumpled in his chair, wearing a pair of fawned-over mittens – sat behind a synthesiser next to the house band, behind the bar for guests, and scattered throughout the practically non-existent audience.

"Speaking of breakout stars of the inauguration, we have another one with us in the studio," Corden said, barely holding in his laughter.

It was a fitting indication of just how ubiquitous Sanders' image was in pop culture and for the eyeballs of social media this week. No regular Instagram or Twitter user could have scrolled through their feeds since the presidential inauguration on Wednesday, 20 January, without seeing the mittened Sanders, usually in meme form, with humorous accompanying text, often comparing him to cranky relatives and the like.

Many employed Jewish humour along the way.

Then came the photoshop phenomenon. Social media users began splicing the Sanders' silhouette into other photos of people and places all over the world, even into screen shots from movies and TV shows.

Our sister site *Alma*, not content with one long slideshow of Bernie memes on Instagram, posted three sets of Bernie photoshopped into everything from *Fiddler on the Roof* to *When Harry Met Sally*, to a Haim music video.

The meme deluge became so unrelenting, some were fatigued with the image by Friday.

An entire market of merchandise inspired by the image has quickly sprouted. The National Museum of Jewish History in Philadelphia is hawking "bundled up Bernie mugs" and more. Designers are incorporating it into their work on Etsy. Sanders' own online store is now selling a sweatshirt with the image, and donating all of the proceeds to Meals on Wheels Vermont. Even the progressive magazine *Jewish Currents* has its own "Bernie merch".

"The mug for a bris, a shiva, a long line at Zabar's, a protracted and infuriating call with your insurance provider. This isn't an endorsement of anything other than sitting like this," the magazine tweeted.

As with most random internet phenomena, there's no firm answer as to why the image went viral. Sanders has been a social media star before, most notably for the memes based on his December 2019 presidential campaign advert, in which the progressive legislator asks his supporters "once again" for donations.

But this photo seemed to capture the essence of Sanders' public persona as the nation's grumpy grandfather – and a Jewish one at that, with Ashkenazi features and an unmistakable Brooklyn accent. His homemade wool mittens, a symbol of Sanders' Vermont style and his repudiation of anything fancy, also fit just a little too perfectly with a senator known for his rants about income inequality. (The gloves have a heartwarming backstory involving a public-school teacher that only helped fuel the fire.)

The intensity of the political moment, charged into a new gear after the deadly insurrection at the Capitol – especially for Jews, newly frightened by the display of antisemitism at the right-wing riot – probably had something to do with it too. The country, one could argue, was primed for a feel-good meme sensation. As a *Refinery29* writer put it, the inauguration was, for the majority of liberal-leaning America, a "sigh of relief".

Alma's Emily Burack wrote, "As an Ashkenazi Jew with grandparents from Brooklyn, it's hard not to feel a kindred spirit in Bernie. And in a year – well, in the past four years, really – when we've dealt with a rise in antisemitism, the worst antisemitic attack in American history, and an emboldened faction of white supremacists, the undeniable grumpy Jewishness of Bernie offers a real sense of catharsis."

Writer Amanda Silberling tweeted that the memes "offered American Jews a chance to heal from the rampant antisemitism in the news cycle".

A large part of Sanders' appeal to his progressive fans has always been his stubborn focus on substantive policy debate and his impatience with the fluff of pop culture. As *Refinery29* continued, the cross-legged Sanders photo captured that ethic perfectly.

"He has things to do and places to be. His demeanour is unsentimental, unmoved, and largely unbothered," Michelle Santiago Cortes wrote.

Sanders' comic response to the phenomenon was a TikTok video that expressed just that. Its caption, "Fashion? Let's get to work." The video showed a clip of him responding to a question about the photo on a news show and what he had "in mind" at the time of the shot.

"Two thousand dollars per adult. That's what the Senate has got to do," he replies, referring to the debate over how much money the next COVID-19 stimulus relief should include.

But Sanders eventually did have some sense of humour about the whole thing. The timing of the shot, taken as the country watched Joe Biden become president, prompted inevitable musings as to whether Bernie truly was cranky about the event, especially after coming so close to winning the Democratic nomination last year. Sanders, a long-time friend of Biden's, dispelled those thoughts in an appearance on *Late Night With Seth Meyers* on Thursday night.

"I was just sitting there, trying to keep warm, paying attention to what's going on," he said to Meyers with a smile.

As the Biden era begins without the prospect of a President Sanders and subsequently no pressing need for Larry David to portray Sanders on *Saturday Night Live*, could this be the end of Sanders' pop culture stardom?

As one Twitter user wrote, "If @nbcnl doesn't have Larry David dressed as @SenSanders in the background of every skit this weekend ... then I don't want it."



The image of Senator Bernie Sanders sitting in the bleachers on Capitol Hill before Joe Biden was sworn in as president has gone viral

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Eric Samson

1938 - 2021



ERIC SAMSON

A HUMANITARIAN WITH THE STRENGTH OF STEEL WHO TOUCHED THE LIVES OF SO MANY

Eric Samson passed away on 19 January 2021, aged 82. Much more than one of South Africa's most successful businessman and steel magnates, the world has lost a true humanitarian icon.

A man who gave so much of his time selflessly and generously for the betterment of others, Eric was a generous philanthropist whose time and investments impacted and touched the lives of so many.

Eric Samson, fondly known as South Africa's Mr Steel, built the family business into one of the largest steel merchants in the country over five decades. Born on 10 October 1938 in Maitland, Cape Town, he joined his father's fencing and wiring business, Pan Africa Staalhandel in 1958. In 1965, he became managing director of the company and later founded Machanick Steel & Fencing, now known as Macsteel.

He went on to build Macsteel into an industrial empire across three continents. Before divesting the American operation, Macsteel was one of the largest privately owned companies in South Africa, manufacturing, merchandising and distributing carbon steel, special steel, stainless steel and aluminium products and value-add products. Today, Macsteel still provides employment to over 2500 people.

Eric built his business humbly and away from the public eye. South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, a former member of Macsteel Holdings' board said: "He has built a gigantic, world-class business without going public. No other South African businessman has done that. I can't think of a better businessman." What makes this story all the more remarkable is that he built it below the radar.

Speaking about his modest and private life in one of the few interviews he has done, Eric said:

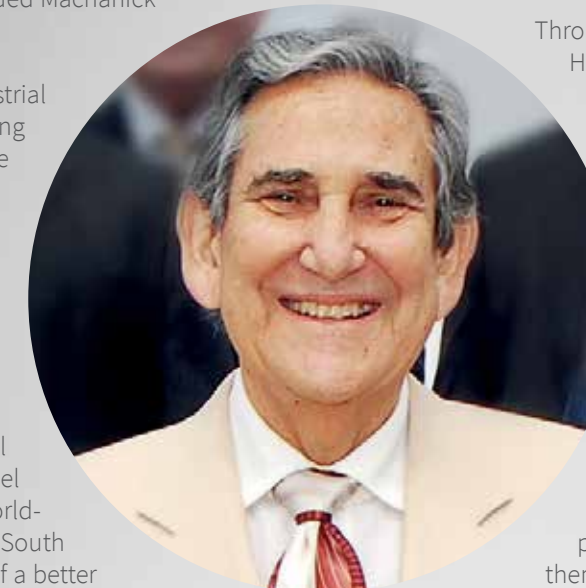
"This lack of exposure seems to have more to do with an aversion to the limelight than a dislike of the media. We've never needed the glorification. We have simply got on with our business."

This statement is a testament to the sincerity of his character, one of his many admirable traits.

Eric served on the board of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund as well as numerous Jewish communal boards. He and the late South African president Nelson Mandela's relationship grew over the years as the result of their joint philanthropic work. In 2005, Mandela said: "... Eric donated generously to the Nelson Mandela Foundation and has become a pillar of strength for us in achieving our goals to fight HIV/Aids and ensure that all our children receive the education they deserve. The Samsons and Macsteel have also become close friends to us and we trust they remain close to us in years to follow."

Exceedingly passionate about building a better future, this softly spoken man was compassionate and his generosity beyond exemplary. A true benefactor, he never shied away from any cause: from caring for the aged, sick and infirmed, to children at risk, adult education and rehabilitation centres for injured soldiers and the disabled. His gifts were often anonymous as he sought little recognition for doing good. Embodying the loftiest of values, compassion, sincerity and continuous acts of kindness, Eric distinguished himself through his many charitable endeavours. Eric was a visionary whose actions were as big as his thinking. Together

with his wife, Sheila, they set up the Eric and Sheila Samson Foundation and throughout their marriage gave back to the communities in which they lived. His life's mission was to empower people and make the world a better place for all.



Through a very close and meaningful relationship with Keren Hayesod, Israel's pre-eminent worldwide philanthropic fundraising organisation, the whole Samson family undertook numerous large-scale strategic initiatives that have changed the face of Israel and will resonate for generations.

Amongst these were:

- The prestigious Eric and Sheila Samson Prime Minister's Prize for Innovation in Alternative Fuels for Transportation
- The overall renovation of Independence Hall in Tel Aviv, a monumental project in cooperation with the Israeli Prime Minister's Office
- The Samson Assuta Ashdod University Hospital, building the very first public hospital to serve the people of Ashdod and the surrounding area, providing them with outstanding health care
- The Eric & Sheila Samson Surgical Hospital at Barzilai Medical Center, supporting the citizens of the south in a manner that has a direct and dramatic impact on the medical treatment provided to hundreds of thousands of citizens in the south.

These unparalleled projects are part of a long list of extraordinary philanthropic projects and activities to which the Foundation generously contributed, both in Israel and in South Africa, and symbolise his vision and dedication.

In recognition of this profound contribution to Israel as well as his humanitarian work in South Africa and his service to its Jewish community, Eric was made Honorary Life World Campaign Chairman of Keren Hayesod. Eric was described by Keren Hayesod World Chairman Sam Grundwerg and Chairman of the World Board of Trustees Steven Lowy, "...as a remarkable man, who was deeply devoted to his family, a great Jewish leader, a generous philanthropist, and without a doubt one of Keren Hayesod's most treasured friends. His impact on the State of Israel, the people of Israel and Jewish life in South Africa was immense, and his loss will be felt by tens of thousands of people whose lives he touched and impacted".

His beautiful life will forever be cherished by his wife, Sheila and children, Jeffrey and Elana, Dorothy and Leonard, Franki and Steven who have embraced the values of their parents and become considerate, prescient leaders in their own right and will continue their father's prodigious legacy.

The world has lost an exceptional human being, family man, businessman and philanthropist. He never stopped caring for the impoverished and the vulnerable and was a sterling example for the world to follow. His philanthropy and the immense value of his character enriched the world and his enduring legacy will live on.

Mick Davis
Chairman
GLOBAL S.À.R.L.B.V.



Experts take a stab at vaccine queries

JORDAN MOSHE

With the rollout of vaccines imminent in South Africa, a panel of local experts weighed in on the subject in a webinar hosted by the *SA Jewish Report* on Thursday, 21 January.

Aspen Pharmacare Group’s senior executive, Dr Stavros Nicolaou; the chairperson of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on the COVID-19 vaccine, Professor Barry Schoub; and the chief commercial officer of Discovery Health, Dr Ronald Whelan, answered questions posed by hundreds of viewers from around the world.

Q. What does vaccine efficacy mean?

A. Efficacy refers to the results in controlled trials. Volunteers are separated into groups of those who get the vaccine, and those who are given a placebo, and both groups are monitored to see whether the people given the vaccine are infected at a lower rate than those who get the placebo. If a vaccine is 90% effective, it means that if 100 people who were not previously infected by the coronavirus are given the vaccine, on average 90 of them won’t contract the virus.

Q. Will the vaccines be effective against the South African variant of the virus?

A. In spite of some concerns, at the moment it seems that the vaccine will most likely be effective. Some trial samples of post-vaccine blood haven’t neutralised the variant, while the Pfizer vaccine has been shown to effectively neutralise artificially constructed virus variants in studies conducted in the United States. According to the panel, this is a work in progress that may need to be studied closer at a later point but it won’t affect the rollout of vaccines in South Africa at the moment.

Q. What’s Aspen’s potential role in making vaccines in South Africa?

A. On the whole, there’s little vaccine manufacturing capability and capacity



A screenshot from the *SA Jewish Report* webinar

on the continent. Capacity for vaccine production is a rare and limited commodity in Africa, with rudimentary capability in Senegal and two facilities in South Africa, namely Aspen and BioVac. As part of its agreement with Johnson & Johnson (J&J), Aspen has repurposed some of its capacity for vaccine production (with capacity for 300 million doses a year). However, while

vaccine should become available to the global market in the second quarter of 2021.

Q. Will the J&J vaccine be a single or double-dose vaccine (the latter being the case with the Pfizer, Moderna, and AstraZeneca vaccines)? Does it matter?

A. J&J hasn’t released its data yet although

we expect it to do so by the end of January. There are indications from J&J that it will be a single-dose vaccine. This is important because it reduces challenges on the African continent given the dispersion of the population in more remote areas. The single dose has other benefits such as compliance, reducing the cost of transportation and storage. If 40 million South Africans – 70% of the

population – are to be vaccinated over 12 months, 170 000 vaccines would need to be administered per day (in a five-day working week), making a single dosage optimal.

Q. President Cyril Ramaphosa recently announced that South Africa has secured 30 million doses of the vaccine. What are they, and where are they coming from?

A. As reported, 1.5 million vaccine doses are expected over the next few weeks from the Serum Institute of India. There is a tranche coming from Covax (the international pool-procurement mechanism) which will provide about 12 million doses, along with a further 12 million doses secured from the African Union via Covax. J&J, too, has reportedly committed to supplying South Africa with nine million doses, bringing the total to about 34 million doses (a bouquet of AstraZeneca, Pfizer, and J&J vaccines). According to the panel, this is roughly half of the amount necessary in order to achieve herd immunity and bring the virus under control, though it won’t eliminate it.

Q. In what order will the population be vaccinated?

A. The first phase will vaccinate 1.3 million healthcare and allied workers (receptionists at medical practises, cleaners, and so on.) In quarter one 2021 (January to March), those who are in regular contact with patients precede those who aren’t. In phase two, the elderly, key personnel (including

police and possibly teachers) and patients with comorbidities (roughly 21 million people in total) will be vaccinated through quarters two and three (April 2021 to September 2021). The final phase (which will probably extend into 2022) targets the broader public, and will last until roughly half the population (40 million) has been vaccinated. We will probably vaccinate only people over the age of 18.

Q. What system is in place for the vaccine rollout? How will people register for their shot?

A. Planning is in place to identify healthcare workers in the private and public sectors. The process is being headed up by the department of health, and Discovery has offered to assist with gathering the details of frontline healthcare workers for the first phase of vaccination. Communication is expected to go out in the next few days asking doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and other frontline healthcare workers to submit their names and those of all workers in their practises to a database. This information will be fed into the vaccination planning system. A vaccine management and registration system for the broader public is also being developed along the same lines, prioritising patients based on their risk category and informing them when they can make a booking.

Q. Does it make a difference if I mix my vaccines and get shots from different suppliers?

A. Mixing them isn’t recommended. If your first dose is Pfizer, for example, the second shot should be as well. Mixing hasn’t been validated in any trial, and isn’t registered as a treatment.

Q. Are there any people who shouldn’t have the vaccine?

A. There are very few, rare contraindications that mean a person should avoid the vaccine. This includes people who are allergic to the constituent parts which make up the vaccine. Pregnant and nursing women are being advised to wait (depending on how pressing the need may be), but data hasn’t shown any impact of the vaccine on fertility. The vaccine is currently approved only for adults over 18, meaning children aren’t yet included in the vaccination programme.

Q. Vaccines have been tested, approved, and produced extremely rapidly. Does this mean that shortcuts have been taken where safety is concerned?

A. Coronaviruses aren’t new, and the technology that is being used in combatting them today has been developed over decades. The years of research mean that new products can be brought to the market faster than in the past. Moreover, all clinical data is reviewed by independent drug regulatory agencies for safety, and the panels of experts have no vested interest in the product directly. In fact, major pharmaceutical companies GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi have delayed their vaccine to the end of the year because their results weren’t good enough and warranted some improvement.

When asked whether the panellists themselves would take the vaccine, each said they wanted to be first in line. A poll taken during the webinar indicated that 95% of viewers wanted the vaccine, 4% were unsure, and only 1% said they would decline it.

It’s believed that the first vaccines have already arrived in South Africa, and are undergoing quality testing before distribution.



Photo: Ilan Ossendryver

An Israeli woman receives her vaccination

it can formulate, fill, package, and label vials of the vaccine, it can’t create the active ingredient essential for the vaccine.

Q. Can the vaccine be purchased from Aspen?

A. After the trial process, only J&J can supply the vaccine. The decision about where the vaccine will be allocated remains that of J&J, which has estimated that the

Discovery launches platform for vaccination registration

South African healthcare workers can now register for their COVID-19 vaccination using a platform launched by Discovery this week.

Information captured will be fed into the group’s central database of healthcare workers and practice staff. It will support the health department in rolling out the vaccine and will expedite distribution. The information supplied will also expedite necessary consent for the vaccine.

A portal has been set up on Discovery’s HP Zone at www.discovery.co.za where healthcare professionals and associated practice staff can upload the information required. The registration of a practice is needed to ensure data security, and

professionals and staff associated with the practice must provide their details to ensure access to the vaccine.

A number of organisations are volunteering to support the effort. The information collected will be pooled and managed by the health department. If healthcare workers have uploaded their details on another channel, it isn’t necessary to complete registration through Discovery.

All data gathered won’t be shared or used for any other purpose other than to register for the COVID-19 vaccine.

Healthcare workers can use this link for more information and to complete the registration: <https://www.discovery.co.za/corporate/covid-19-vaccine-for-healthcare-professionals>



Without support, COVID-19 V2 would have broken me

PERSONAL STORY

SHEENA KRETZMER



My beloved Jonathan, our two boys, our household staff, and I battled the COVID-19 V2 variant. Of all of us, it hit me the hardest. I knew it would, and I was grateful, because my youngest is asthmatic, so rather me than him.

Jon went down first with a few days of exhaustion and aches. His breathing and oxygen stayed strong. The boys were so mild, it barely registered. Thank goodness!

It hit me the following Friday night, exactly seven days from a positive confirmation. All of a sudden, I had a chest cough, tough breathing, and my oxygen levels dropped from 98 to 94, to 93. I started “proning [moving onto my stomach to assist breathing]” more often than not, slept the entire weekend away, and didn’t leave the bedroom.

On Monday, Jon woke me up to take my readings, and my temperature was so bad, I didn’t know where/who/how I was. My oxygen was at 83, and nothing would bring it up. My GP insisted that I be hospitalised.

In the basement of the hospital parking lot, I waited alone for hours on oxygen after Jon and the boys had to leave. All around me there were gasping patients, screaming patients, crying patients. I gritted my teeth and squeezed my eyes closed, had a private conversation with G-d about the world, life, growth, and gratitude.

Once I got a trauma bed, I waited many hours between disposable COVID-19 hospital curtains hearing healthcare workers running up and down – having idle chit chat in between wasn’t a possibility. Three patients came in while I was there. Two of them died on either side of me.

The healthcare workers barely took a minute to breathe before moving to the next emergency. They didn’t attempt to resuscitate. They couldn’t. The patients were too far gone.

As much as I wanted the medical attention, I could see others were more desperate, and so



I waited longer, patiently, grateful to have any medical support at all.

The second lot of tests came back, saying my clotting factor was higher, as were the infectious markers. It was deemed that I was at risk for a pulmonary embolus. But there weren’t enough beds for me, and the other patients were in worse condition.

So, I was injected with something to thin out my blood, my oxygen was stabilised, and I was sent packing at 02:00 with a nod and a very sincere “Good luck, come back if you can’t breathe again. Until then, we can’t help you”.

There were no Ubers available – or at least none accepting my request from a hospital in the middle of the night – so Jon had to leave our boys home alone in bed and race to

fetch me. We had no other choice. Luckily the hospital was only three kilometres away.

At home, through the night, my family and friends got together to help. My mom (with the help of all the extended family arranging solutions) dropped off oxygen. Other precious people fed us for days, or sent care packs and flowers. Still other people we love shipped at least a quarter of a Woolies over to us, which we will probably still be eating for weeks to come. We had so many people checking in on us all the time, wanting to know if we were okay.

I’ve been on bedrest, taking lots of strong steroids, cortisone, and blood thinners. I’m exhausted all the time, but I’ve stopped writing out childcare instructions for after my death. I genuinely thought I was going to die. But, G-d-willing, I’m not going anywhere yet.

The third set of blood results, received this morning, show that the infection markers are down, and clotting isn’t as risky as it was. I was on and off oxygen, but mostly breathing alone after that. I’m nowhere near what I was pre-COVID-19, but I know this will take some time. I’m far better than I was last week.

Poor Jon, who had barely recovered, was once again (the third time in our six-year marriage thus far) forced into looking after

me while I had to be on bed rest and was totally useless. He looked after the children, arranged meals, meds, teas, steams, and communication with our worried loved ones. He did it all with no complaints, just very early bedtimes and lots of love. He is truly an amazing husband and father.

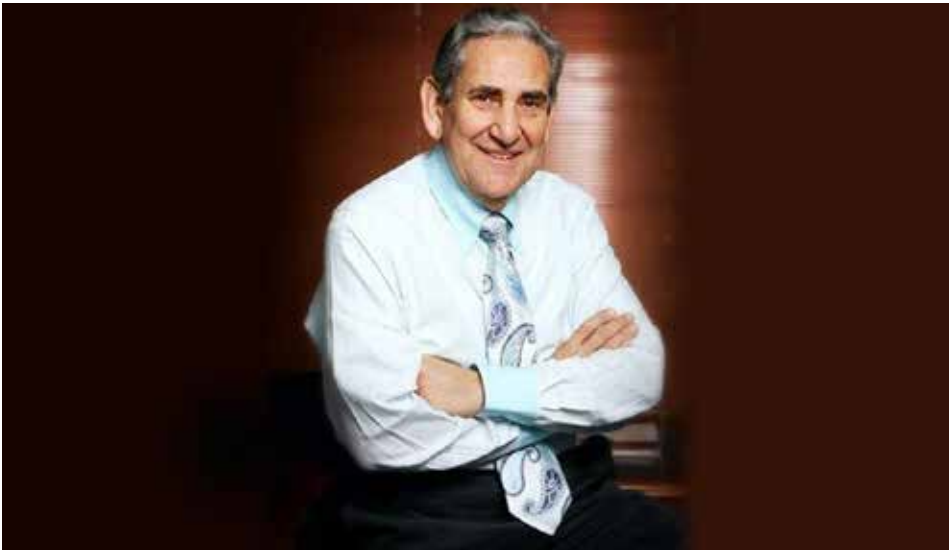
I can see why anxiety plays a hand in these COVID-19 deaths. I would have been broken without the reassurance, support, love, and daily check-ins from our shul friends, Hatzolah Medical Rescue Johannesburg’s extended Umhlanga team, our wonderful doctor who WhatsApped me through to 01:00 some nights, our family, and friends.

Without them, this would have broken me mentally, like it has so many others lost to COVID-19. It’s been so scary.



• Sheena Kretzmer is a mom of two boys and managing director of a social media agency. She and her family relocated from Johannesburg to Umhlanga a few weeks before lockdown and COVID-19 hit South Africa.

Please be careful, even on shared property home ground or at the office with the people you see daily. Treat everyone as a risk. Don’t let your guard down. Wear your mask!



Eric Samson
(1938 – 2021)

It was my great privilege to have known and worked for and with Eric Samson since 1991. Eric was an astute visionary who created significant and sustainable local and global businesses, the profits of which he used to generously support various causes in Israel, South Africa and the USA. One of his many legacies is the fact that these businesses continue to successfully operate for the benefit of their employees, their suppliers, the Samson Family and numerous causes around the world.

By his words and actions, Eric taught me how to care, not only about family and friendship, employees, the Jewish Community, and the cause of Zionism, but also about our broader society and its needs.

My sincere condolences to his wife, Sheila and their children.

May his legacy long continue
and may his memory be an inspiration to us all.

Michael Honiball





Eric Samson (1938-2021)

With deep sadness, Werksmans mourns the passing of Eric Samson, a dear friend and long standing client of unsurpassed generosity. A great loss not only attributed to his business success but more so, his extraordinary record in his philanthropic work. He not only contributed to the South African Jewish community and the state of Israel, but for the people of South Africa.

Eric and his wife, Sheila, set up the Eric and Sheila Samson Foundation supporting many causes in South Africa. Among many other positions held, Eric served on the board of the Nelson Mandela Children’s Fund for two decades, and every July arranged for donations for significant amounts to it in honour of Mandela’s birthday. He was responsible for bringing the Nelson Mandela Children’s Hospital project in Johannesburg to reality after pledging a generous amount at a time when the organisation faced much difficulty.

Eric Samson, a man of noble character, leaves a memorable legacy. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family during this difficult time.

Businesses (locked) down, but not out

TALI FEINBERG

As the second wave of COVID-19 hits the country, so did the trifecta of curfew, an alcohol ban, and the closure of beaches. These all had devastating effects on businesses already battling to survive under lockdown and loadshedding.

For Malcolm Katz in Plettenberg Bay, the moment he heard the president say that he was closing beaches at the height of the festive season, it felt like a devastating “sign from G-d” that his budding business might have to remain just a dream for now.

It’s something he has worked on for four to five years, but from one day to the next, it was stopped in its tracks.

“The idea was to develop beach lockers to store your valuables, with a USB charger, surveillance cameras, and Wi-Fi hotspots, which would all be solar charged and allow for branding and the selling of advertising.”

After conceptualising the idea, Katz couldn’t find anything similar available, so he designed his own. These would be in a circular shape – aesthetically pleasing in an environment where that’s a crucial factor, and they would be able to withstand the elements.

He wanted to offer it as a free service to municipalities, but “all I got was resistance to the idea”. Eventually, he got a permit to construct them in Plettenberg Bay, and secured branding from a business in the area. “We were ready to go. We put the last one up on a Friday, and on the Monday, the

beaches were closed.”

He held out hope that the beach ban would last only three weeks, but it was extended. “Now the advertiser won’t go ahead because no one is seeing them. To say it’s been demoralising is putting it mildly.” However, he’s not ready to give up just yet, and hopes to continue rolling out his revolutionary concept when restrictions ease.

For Grant Isaacs, the owner of Salushi Express, a sushi restaurant in Claremont, Cape Town, the curfew, alcohol ban, and wild card of loadshedding, are the biggest obstacles to the survival of his eleven-and-a-half-year-old business. Recent customers include Springbok rugby captain Siya Kolisi, and his wife, Rachel, and the restaurant is known for its loyal patrons.

But, “having to close our doors at 20:00 means we have to squeeze our ordinary dinner trade [two sittings] into the space of 90 minutes. This includes sit down, take-out, and delivery orders,” he

says. “It can be mayhem, and we feel like service sometimes get compromised having to do it all in an hour, clean, and get our staff home.

“We used to split trade between lunch and dinner, but since lockdown started, many corporates in the area have moved out, which has diminished the lunch trade. And then if load shedding hits, there’s nothing we can do, we can’t even print a bill. Our hands are tied behind our backs.

“Meanwhile, we used to allow customers to bring their own drinks, and they loved it. To stop doing that in 24 hours was also tough. And then there are other things – many more people are ordering takeaways, which don’t really work well with sushi as it’s all about presentation and experience.”

He’s grateful that he moved to smaller premises in March, and that his landlord gave him a rent holiday for the first four months of lockdown and a reduced rent since.

“That saved us. We’ve also learnt lessons: keep it simple,



Liberty Lockers on Central Beach, Plett

Taking the hardship out of being a lone soldier

TALI FEINBERG

Leaving behind the things you take for granted – family, home comforts, and understanding the language – to serve in the army of another country isn’t something many of us would volunteer to do, but for some, it’s a calling.

The youngsters who do this are called “lone soldiers” because they have no close family in the country that they have chosen to defend. David* is a lone soldier from South Africa who made aliyah at the age of 19.

He served in an elite Israel Defense Forces (IDF) combat anti-tank unit for three years. He says he became a lone soldier because of his Zionism and as a way to integrate fully into Israeli society.

“Zionism still exists in the modern age. Whether you’re religious or not, you feel something in Israel that connects everyone,” David says. “And that thing is the army. It’s about playing your part and giving back. Also, in every job interview, every social interaction, the first question is ‘where did you serve in the army?’. So it’s also about integrating, making friends, and being part of Israeli society.”

When he first arrived in Israel, he went to a kibbutz where he learned Hebrew. He was then drafted into the special missile anti-tank unit of the Nahal Brigade. Over three years, he became part of a brotherhood of friends as depicted in television series like *Fauda* and *When Heroes Fly*.

“We were in an incredibly tense situation during the 2014 Gaza War, and our training took a year and a half,” he says. “The United States Marines take only six months. We were training for the ‘real deal’.”

While the language barrier and other subtle cultural differences were difficult at times, he was helped by his fellow soldiers, and also had to learn to ask for help.

One of the things he’s most proud of is serving on the Syrian border, securing the safe extraction of injured civilians – mostly children. “Every night we would see them carried across on stretchers with terrifying shrapnel wounds. This went on non-stop for the full four to five months while I was there.”

He says being a lone soldier is “definitely the hardest thing I’ve ever done, because there are so many hidden difficulties that you don’t know about until you’re in it. It’s not just the language and not having family, it’s so many other small things. But it also gives you a brotherhood and a deep understanding of yourself. It changes your life.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly tough on soldiers as they haven’t been allowed to leave their bases for weeks at a time. Others have had to quarantine at special facilities instead of the comfort of their own homes. “It’s no joke. The organisations that assist lone soldiers really have our backs, and their support is felt by us. Even small things that they give to us feel incredibly supportive. They show us we’re not alone.”

Yahad – United for Israel’s Soldiers is one such organisation that works to make the lives of lone soldiers easier, in gratitude for the sacrifices they make.

“There are more than 6 000 lone soldiers serving in the IDF,” says Yael Kedem Golan, foreign affairs co-ordinator at Yahad. “They come from all over the world to defend Israel and they share a love and concern for Israel and the Jewish people.”

Kedem Golan has a personal connection to South African Jewry as many of her family members made their way there as immigrants from Lithuania. “I recently found out that my grandfather’s cousin used to work for the welfare of Israeli soldiers from South Africa. So I’m doing what he did 50 years ago,” she says.

She says 100% of donations to Yahad go towards the soldiers’ needs. “If there is a need in the field, we can respond immediately, thanks to donations. Because we fall under the defense ministry, all operational costs are covered by it.”

And soldiers’ needs are many. “We especially assist lone soldiers who have no family to depend on in Israel, soldiers who come from families with incomes below the minimum wage, and soldiers who come from sectors of the population that don’t usually join the military, like the haredi.”

The organisation’s flagship project is Warm Homes, which rents and furnishes apartments for lone soldiers. Three or four soldiers occupy these apartments throughout their term of service. “It’s very special for them to have their own room and a place to call home, as they would otherwise stay in a hostel when they’re off duty,” she says.

“Every Friday from 10:00 to 15:00, our volunteers distribute Shabbat meals to lone soldiers, and [before the pandemic] we set them up with host Israeli families for Shabbat, should they desire it. We also assist them with food and other expenses. Donors are kept up to date about how their contribution assists individual soldiers.”

Yahad also offers support to lone soldiers once they have completed their service, “so they don’t just get dropped into civilian life and start at zero”, says Kedem Golan. “We assist with the bureaucratic labyrinth, civilian and military, and help find employment on discharge.

“We also have a programme called Uniform to University, in which we offer a full university scholarship to combat soldiers and lone soldiers on discharge. This gives them a head start academically. They have uprooted themselves to volunteer, or have put their lives at risk for Israel, so we fund a full academic degree in whatever they choose to study. Even if it’s a medical degree, we will fund the full seven years.”

David is grateful to benefit from this particular programme. “I’m excited to be studying, and as a combat soldier, every shekel counts. It’s a huge burden off my shoulders,” he says.

Yahad also establishes recreational facilities or “clubhouses” on bases as a space for soldiers to relax and socialise. And it pays for a free flight home for a lone soldier during their service and ensures that they’re paid for their leave during the time they’re away.

Before the pandemic, it hosted “fun days” and weeks away for lone soldiers and combat soldiers at special army hotels, where they get to relax and boost their morale. But with COVID-19, these army hotels have been turned into quarantine facilities and military hospitals for soldiers needing to isolate or be treated.

Under COVID-19, “Soldiers have been locked down much longer than civilians. Yahad has provided hygiene kits, hospital equipment, ventilators, and ambulances,” she says.

“Some soldiers and their families have been affected economically – for example they may have had a job as a waiter, but have now been retrenched. They’re now totally reliant on the IDF and Yahad to keep their head above water.”

The organisation has “friends of Yahad” branches all over the world, and Kedem Golan hopes to establish a branch in South Africa. Volunteers of all ages contribute to the organisation in different ways. “Israelis really understand the need. These soldiers do it without thinking twice, so we really have to remember how they’re keeping us safe – not just Israel, but the whole Jewish world. Giving back to them is just a small percentage of what they give to us.”

*Not his real name

streamlined and lean. You don’t need a huge restaurant – those days are gone. Keep your customers informed every step of the way. Our customers are like family, so they empathised and are brand ambassadors for us. Boost your online presence. Nowadays there is so much more competition as anyone can make and deliver takeaways from their kitchen. We encourage people to call and collect directly from us by giving them 10% off if they do so. You have to be innovative and think on your feet.”

Jerome Alter’s tourism and airport-transfer business battled enormous obstacles as lockdown took hold. “Almost all the airport transfers that were booked have been cancelled. Most of these were local flights. This shows how local travel has also been affected. With the ban on international travel, my entire business came to a standstill. No tourists meant no airport transfers or tours, and no weddings meant no wedding transfers,” he says.

He has had to look at alternate ways to bring in income. “I do shopping for people and assist with lifts to appointments and school. I’m a one-man business, so have not had to retrench staff. I do, however, work closely with a range of drivers and tour guides who understandably also haven’t had work. My family keeps me going. I can’t just throw in the towel as my business is my livelihood.”

Andrea Bonalumi is the manager and owner of Visa Box, a travel-visa consultancy. “Because the bread and butter of my business is travellers, the lockdown and travel restrictions that came with it have pretty much brought that to a halt. I estimate it’s going to take another year at least to start improving,” she says.

While the different lockdown levels don’t affect the business specifically, when the lockdown disallowed international travel completely, it was tough. “And in an indirect way, the current level three affects my business, as those with businesses that rely on alcohol sales, tourism etcetera are now short of money which means there’s even less chance of travel happening.”

On the other hand, “The way our government has dealt with this pandemic has increased interest in immigration, which is another facet of my business,” says Bonalumi. “Many people with British passports are also making sure they are keeping their passports valid, which is something we assist with. The immigration and British passport aspects are keeping us alive, but it’s not enough. We have also managed to get by with UIF TERS (the Unemployment Insurance Fund Temporary Employer/Employee Relief Scheme), with me personally taking no salary at all, as well as mitigating other expenses like rent, utilities.”

All this means she is in the process of retrenching some staff – “two to start with, and we’ll see how we go from there”. This is one of the most devastating results of lockdown for her and the business.

“But I have never wanted to throw in the towel. My husband and I both work at Visa Box, so if we lose it, we lose everything, not to mention my staff and their families, who rely on me. It’s going to take more than a pandemic to get me down.”

The sentiment in her industry is that it’s bleak, “But it’s also a time to rethink how you do business, and the relationship with your clients. It may be time to give your business an overhaul, and it’s definitely a time to market and advertise. There’s a lot you can do on little to no budget. Jews are known for triumphing in difficult times, and this is no exception. If anything, this whole pandemic has taught me that as long as you have your family and a roof over your head, you have everything. The rest is frivolous.”



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Index cards of Dutch Holocaust victims to be made public

CNAAN LIPSHIZ – JTA

Sonja Levy was a positive person who made an excellent first impression and whose important position exempted her from deportation, according to the personal card that the Jewish Council of Amsterdam made for her during the Nazi occupation. But the accolades on the card weren't enough to save Levy, a kindergarten teacher who was in her early 20s when the Germans invaded. Like more than 100 000 Dutch Jews, she was eventually put on a train to the death camps in occupied Poland, and murdered there in a gas chamber.

Photo courtesy of the Jewish Cultural Quarter of Amsterdam



The Jewish Council of Amsterdam was set up by the Nazis to have Jews oversee preparations for the extermination of their own minority throughout the Netherlands during World War II.

On Monday, the ownership of her personal card – it turned out to be her first epitaph – was handed over to the main museum of the community to which she belonged. Ahead of International Holocaust Remembrance Day on Wednesday, 27 January, the Netherlands branch of the Red Cross has transferred to the Jewish Cultural Quarter of Amsterdam ownership of more than 140 000 personal cards of Dutch Jews that are to be displayed to the public for the first time. The Jewish Cultural Quarter is an umbrella organisation of several Jewish institutions including the National Holocaust Museum of the Netherlands.

The entire index of the Jewish Council of Amsterdam, a body that the Nazis set up to have Jews oversee preparations for the extermination of their own minority throughout the Netherlands, is among the most comprehensive and best-kept registries of its kind anywhere in Europe.

It's unusual in that it includes references to status and personal traits, reflecting how this registry, unlike most other Nazi lists, was made by for Jews by Jews. In more than 75% of the cards, the Red Cross after World War II added the date of deportation in red ink, a rare tangible reminder of how in the Netherlands, the Nazis achieved their highest death rate anywhere in occupied Western Europe. Of about 110 000 Jews deported, only a few thousand survived.

The Red Cross has transferred its entire wartime archives to the Dutch National Archives, except for the Jewish Council's index card archive. On Monday, the Red Cross transferred ownership of the archive to the National Holocaust Museum, which is undergoing renovations. The index will go on display next year when the museum reopens, the Red Cross said. The index "is of great value not only as an archive, but also as a museum monument and a tangible reminder of the Holocaust", the Red Cross wrote. The cards were digitised in 2012, and made available for viewing online upon request for a name or other identifying details. But browsing the cards hasn't been possible. The National Holocaust Museum of the Netherlands is now designing the cards' display ahead of the reopening, but they will be visible for all to see, according to Emile Schrijver, the director of the Jewish Cultural Quarter. "It is of the utmost importance that we can show the physical memory of all the Jews who were murdered," he said. The cards' display will add to the picture of Dutch victims that other archives have sketched out. According to the National Holocaust Museum, Sonja Levy was

deported in 1944 to Auschwitz-Birkenau and murdered there. She died just weeks after her 25th birthday. The Jewish Monument, a website that includes the names of most Dutch Holocaust victims, said her husband, a blind architect named Alfred, died there, too. The Red Cross' action comes amid major admissions of guilt in the Netherlands over the fate of the country's Jews. In 2017, the Netherlands Red Cross apologised for "making things too easy" for the Nazis, and failing to speak up for Jews due to "lack of courage", as the Dutch branch's chairperson, Inge Brakman, phrased it. Last year, Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte apologised for the first time for how the Dutch government in exile and authorities in service of the

Germans had "failed in its responsibility as a provider of justice and security" for Dutch Jews. For decades, Rutte and his predecessors had declined calls by Jewish groups for them to apologise. Rutte's apology came more than 15 years after those by leaders of neighbouring countries, including France and Belgium. Also in 2020, King Willem-Alexander for the first time acknowledged how many Dutch Jews felt forsaken by his great-grandmother, Wilhelmina, who escaped to the United Kingdom when the Germans invaded. "Fellow human beings felt abandoned, insufficiently heard, insufficiently supported, even with words," Willem-Alexander said at a ceremony for World War II and Holocaust victims. "Also from London by my great-grandmother, despite her steadfast resistance [to the Nazis]. It's something that won't let go of me."

Tu Bishvat – a reminder of the environment's value



JNF SA plants a tree on Linksfield Ridge. From left: Michael Kransdorff, JNF; Joni Kowensky, Betar; Benji Shulman, JNF; Galya Raff, SAUJS; Ariel Kahanowitz, Bnei Akiva; Megan Michalow, SAUJS; and Bev Schneider, JNF

The Jewish National Fund's (JNF's) nationwide Tu Bishvat celebrations this week conveyed the message that protecting the environment is more important than ever. "The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the world the consequences of not managing the interactions between humans and nature in a responsible and sustainable manner," said JNF South Africa chairperson Michael Kransdorff. The pandemic limited the organisation's ability to have large crowds plant trees in South Africa and Israel, traditionally the focal point of this holiday. Instead, JNF-SA opted for more COVID-19-safe events. The main event was a virtual tour of the south of Israel to witness how the desert is blooming thanks to the work of the JNF, including the planting of trees, deployment of water-saving technology, and support of kibbutzim. This is all the more remarkable given the constant rocket attacks that communities in the south face. "We wanted to give our supporters a sense of what it's like to live in and build these communities," said Kransdorff. "Most South Africans, even those who visit Israel regularly, don't have the chance to see the work that goes into the building of the south, an extraordinary story that more people should know about." Following the tour, a meaningful Tu Bishvat seder and special tree planting ceremony was held in

the South Africa Forest in Israel. In South Africa, trees and food security were a central theme of this year's celebrations. The JNF held a socially distant tree planting ceremony at the municipal reserve on Linksfield Ridge with Betar, the South African Union of Jewish Students (SAUJS), and Bnei Akiva. The tree chosen by JNF committee member Joni Kowensky was the Moringa tree, popularly known in African culture as the "tree of life" for its many nutritional and medicinal qualities. Very appropriate for current circumstances! In Cape Town, JNF members gave a donation to the Seeds of Hope Programme, while in Mamelodi, east of Pretoria, a small group of volunteers assisted with the upkeep of food gardens at the JNF-Walter Sisulu Environmental Centre. The JNF in Durban donated trees to Jewish schools in the community and held a Tu Bishvat seder with the Umhlanga Jewish Centre. It also maintains an environmental centre in Hammarsdale for the education of local school children on green issues. Bev Schneider, the director of JNF-SA, said that normally, the organisation would have held events at schools to mark the occasion, however this year, opted to send a video message instead. She encouraged people to plant vegetable gardens on their pavements for those who are hungry, or if they aren't able to, to contact the JNF about planting trees in Israel or supporting the organisation's projects in South Africa.

KDL appoints mini city councillors



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