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Couple caught in crossfire of attempted mall robbery

NICOLA MILTZ

A young couple attempted to flee the scene of a botched armed robbery at Melrose Arch on Easter Monday, only to get caught in a hail of bullets.

Today, Brandon Regenbaum, 27, lies in hospital in a serious but stable condition under heavy sedation following a five-hour long operation to reconstruct his jaw and repair his mouth. He was shot in the face after robbers hastily fled the upmarket lifestyle mall where they had tried unsuccessfully to rob Elegance Jewellers.

His girlfriend of three years, Lorian Blechman, 25, witnessed the whole scene and luckily escaped unharmed.

The couple, who were due to leave for a holiday in Umhlanga Rocks that day, met for breakfast at Tashas. They left the mall in separate vehicles and found themselves unwittingly in the middle of a gun battle between fleeing suspects and the mall's security guards.

"The robbers were running towards the Virgin Active Gym. We quickly took a different exit to avoid them, it was scary," said Blechman.

They beckoned to each other to take an alternative exit near the Daytona shop in a bid to dodge the fleeing suspects. To their horror, they were then confronted by the robbers – who had made it to their escape vehicles – further down the road on Athol/Oaklands Drive in the direction of the N1 highway.

The couple could see the suspects' vehicles in their review mirrors, so they instinctively swerved out of the way to allow them to speed past. There were loud gunshots, after which Blechman noticed Regenbaum wasn't driving. She frantically called him to ask why.

He told her, "Babe I love you, but I've been

shot and I'm going to die."

Traumatized and still in shock, Blechman told the *SA Jewish Report* that she jumped out of her car and ran to him.

Speaking from hospital, she said, "There was blood and glass everywhere, and he was in a lot

to get my keys," she said.

Blechman called her father, who was already in Harrismith en route to Umhlanga Rocks where they were supposed to meet later.

Regenbaum's father, Clifford, was in

honestly believe they tried to kill him," he said.

"It has been a stressful, worrying time. He will recover, but it will take time. I'm angry at this senseless shooting of innocent people. My son could have died. These robbers have no respect for human life. I don't know what there is to learn from this."

Gauteng police spokesperson Kay Makhubele told the *SA Jewish Report*, "Police are investigating a case of attempted business robbery and attempted murder which occurred at Melrose Arch.

"It is alleged that an unknown number of suspects driving in two cars, an Audi Q7 and a

Ford Ranger, were in a shootout with security guards after they were intercepted before the business robbery," Makhubele said. "A man who was driving his car [Regenbaum] was shot and injured during the incident. Nothing was taken from the shop."

While doctors have told the family the operation was successful, Regenbaum will have his jaw wired for seven weeks, and won't be able to talk or eat solid food.

"It will be a long road to recovery," said Blechman.

"It's a miracle Brandon

survived. It's also freaky that we were in separate cars. If I had been with him on the passenger side of the car, I might not be here today. I was running late. Brandon needed to fetch his siddur and tefillin to assist my father with a *minyan* on holiday, as he is saying kaddish for my zaida who passed away last year. I believe my zaida was watching over us," she said.

Police ask that anyone with information contact 0860 010 111.



Brandon Regenbaum

of pain. He told me he was dying. I remember pulling up his hand brake," she said.

A young Jewish couple walking their baby immediately called Hatzolah, which arrived a few minutes later. While waiting for the ambulance to arrive, another witness helped Blechman to make several calls to family. She told Blechman to keep talking to Regenbaum.

"I told Brandon that help was on the way. I told him his mother and brother were coming. I asked him where I could find his Discovery medical card. I told him general things like he was going to be okay, to stay with me, to stay awake. I told him to count how long it would take me in seconds to run to my car 10m away

Plettenberg Bay on holiday when he received the call telling him his son had been shot.

"I was shocked," he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

He believes his son was shot by the robbers who may have mistaken him for a security guard in hot pursuit.

"He drives a bakkie with our company name on the side which looks like a security vehicle and even has hazard lights. The robbers had already seen him leaving Melrose Arch, and I think believed him to be a security guard. I



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Mogoeng comes out swinging against apology ruling

TALI FEINBERG

Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng came out swinging in his appeal against Judge Phineas Mojapelo’s judgment ordering him to apologise for comments made about Israel.

Mogoeng criticised Mojapelo at every turn, describing his reasoning as “flawed and disturbingly superficial”. He said “the learned judge failed to deal with the constitutional right to freedom of expression and freedom of belief, thought, and opinion”.

In his 38-page appeal submitted to the Judicial Service Commission on 2 April 2021, Mogoeng reiterated why he had the right to express his support for both Israel and the Palestinians during a webinar hosted by the *Jerusalem Post* last year.

His appeal was in response to the Judicial Conduct Committee’s ruling on 4 March 2021 that he had 10 days to apologise for comments he made about Israel in the webinar. At the time, he said South Africa had a role to play in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that he supported both peoples, and as a Christian, he had an obligation to pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Africa4Palestine, the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions South Africa (BDS SA) coalition, and the Women’s Cultural Group laid complaints against Mogoeng, saying he had flouted rules regarding judicial ethics. The matter was adjudicated by Mojapelo.

One of Mogoeng’s most pertinent points was that “several precautions need to be sounded to avoid the trap that His Lordship Mr Justice Mojapelo unreflectingly allowed himself to fall into”. According to the chief justice, this includes the fact that “it’s necessary to distinguish between official government policy and the policies of lobby groups and non-government organisations. And it’s necessary for decision-maker[s] to tell the difference between politics and policy, which his lordship failed to do.”

He also insisted that the judge’s “insinuation that I was possibly involved in some conspiracy with the Israeli government and ‘timed’ the webinar in such a way to undermine international law or United Nations conventions/resolutions ... is a material misdirection”.

Mogoeng said there was no difference between what he said and the South African government’s approach to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. “After a thorough search, I vouch for the fact that there is no official policy of the South African government that contradicts any part of what I actually said. Even the two agreements signed by President Mandela

and President Mbeki with Israel don’t contradict anything I have said. I was therefore found guilty of five complaints or counts of misconduct that turn on a non-existent official policy of the South African government towards Israel.”

He emphasised that “the supremacy of the constitution and the entitlement of all citizens, including judges and magistrates, to enjoy fundamental rights cannot be wished away. Where these rights are limited by legislation or the code, a proper explanation is called for. Judges have the constitutional right to freedom of expression,



Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng

“... the learned judge failed to deal with the constitutional right to freedom of expression and freedom of belief, thought, and opinion”

association, and religion, belief, thought, and opinion. As is the case with other citizens, these rights may be limited. But the limitations must, broadly speaking, be reasonable and justifiable. They cannot be arbitrary or whimsical.”

He went on to describe how other judges had waded into political waters, including Mojapelo himself. He also described how “my brother

Dennis Davis hosted speakers, including politicians, on his then *Judge for Yourself* eNCA television programme about the Israeli-Palestinian political situation and a range of political controversies to which leaders of political parties were invited and participated. He was exercising his constitutional right to free expression although different views might be expressed about being a regular anchor or host of a TV programme.”

Mogoeng described how other judges had involved themselves in political controversies in Fiji, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho, “And my dear brother Cameron J [Justice Edwin Cameron] essentially said what I said on the Israeli-Palestinian situation, the real difference being, unlike me, he didn’t rely on the Bible.” Yet, none of these men were hauled over the coals for their comments or actions.

A senior member of the legal profession, speaking on condition of anonymity, said, “The grounds of appeal make some sharp points against a senior retired and respected judge. It’s most unfortunate for judges to have such a public and divisive difference – both judges firing heavy ammunition at each other as to how the other has misconstrued the law. It doesn’t do much for confidence in the law and judiciary by the public generally.” He pointed out, however, that the chief justice “makes some powerful points, which need to be taken seriously”.

Torah Thought

Finding faith in the hippo

This week’s parsha details the laws of kashrus. The Torah makes a brave statement by enumerating the one and only animal that has split hooves but doesn’t chew the cud. It’s a “brave” statement, because if a human being wrote the Torah, how would they know that the pig is the only one on the “face of the planet” with this characteristic?

Moses was born in Egypt, spent some time as a fugitive in Ethiopia, and died somewhere near modern-day Jordan. If we presume that he was the author of the Five Books without any divine inspiration, and he sucked the whole thing out of his left thumb, then how could he be so confident that there wasn’t a marsupial or wallaby in the furthest corners of

the planet that didn’t have at least one of these characteristics? This was almost 3 000 years before anyone even knew there was an Australia. If he was inventing the whole religion, he would have taken the more prudent course of being rather vague. He wouldn’t have blatantly listed the only four exceptions “from all the animals on the earth”.

With this great piece of Torah veracity in my mind, my faith was shaken when, on a trip to London’s Natural History Museum, (I know, it’s a pretty nerdy thing to do), I discovered that there was a hoofed animal, classified by zoology, that seemed to be an exception “overlooked” by the Torah – the hippo. It’s classified as an “ungulate”, a split-hoofed animal without a ruminant stomach

that isn’t listed in the Torah as another exception!

I thought about this problem for a while, and then the solution came to me. Why should we allow zoology to dictate the classification of animals? The more I thought about it, the more I realised that hippos don’t have hooves like a pig or cow, they have toes (like camels). I know it’s more fancy to talk about ungulates, phylum, and genus. It even makes us look clever, but if we are really honest with ourselves, we won’t let zoological classifications stand in the way of our *emunah* in Hashem and His Torah.

Shabbat shalom

**Rabbi Ryan Goldstein,
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ISIS attack hits close to home

TALI FEINBERG

For most of the world, the late March attack on the coastal town of Palma may have been just another terror attack in the faraway province of Cabo Delgado, Mozambique. But for one family, it was very personal.

"The entire international community is to blame. The cousin of my very close family member was killed yesterday by ISIS [Islamic State]. Why? Because he went to build houses there as he lost his job due to COVID-19. No one came to help. Why am I posting here? Because no one even knows," wrote Michal Gaziel on the "South Africans Living in Israel" Facebook group.

Gaziel was writing on 27 March 2021, as possibly the deadliest attack in the region unfolded. The assault started on 24 March 2021, with local militants linked to ISIS storming the area. "The attack is one of the most brutal since the insurgency began in 2017. At least a hundred fighters attacked Palma, showing the jihadis getting stronger and more brazen," says Steven Gruzd, political analyst at the South African Institute of International Affairs.

Gaziel's sister-in-law, Rachel Gaziel, is the cousin of the South African who was killed, Adrian Nel. Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Tel Aviv, she (Rachel) described a "traumatic" few days as her family waited to hear about the safety of Nel, his stepfather, and his brother. "They were abandoned by the military. Two hundred people were left to die," she says.

Nel took a job in Palma, Mozambique, to build workers' accommodation for the Total LNG Project. Local militants who have pledged allegiance to ISIS have staged a number of attacks including capturing the town of Mocimboa da Praia, which still remains out of government hands. The violence has killed more than 2 600 people, half of them civilians. It has also forced almost 700 000 people from their homes.

From what Gaziel has heard, her cousin and others decided they had to escape. They had been hiding in the Amarula Hotel, but decided to make a break for it at nightfall, as "there was no one there to protect them". They went in a convoy of 17 cars, and Adrian was in the first car, leading the convoy. They aimed to get to the beach. But as soon as they left the hotel, they were attacked. He was shot by terrorists.

"My cousin didn't die quickly. He bled out. His stepfather and brother hid in the bush with his body. The place was overrun with terrorists – a lot of people were killed or captured. Many are unaccounted for," Gaziel says.

She says military company Dyck Advisory Group (DAG) was in contact with her aunt, and informed her that her son had been killed, but that her husband and son had escaped. "I think they got to the beach and then were rescued by helicopter or boat. My aunt is distraught, but she thought they would all be dead. She's grateful, but devastated."

Gaziel says her cousin would have been 41 on

1 April. He leaves behind a wife and three young children. "His wife is distraught. How can she tell them their father is dead? He died trying to save people. We want others to know his story, and to pressurise the international community to do something. No one seems to care because it's in Africa. We don't want him to have died in vain."

The Southern African Development Community said it would hold a two-day summit in Maputo on 8 and 9 April to deliberate how to address terrorism in Mozambique. President Cyril Ramaphosa will attend, accompanied by international relations and cooperation minister Naledi Pandor, defence and military veterans minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula and state security minister Ayanda Dlodlo. Meanwhile, DAG's contract with the Mozambican police expired on Tuesday, 6 April.



Adrian Nel

"Any country that directly or indirectly fights against ISIS is immediately seen as the enemy, and thus a legitimate target," says Jevon Greenblatt of the Community Security Organisation. It makes no

difference whether it's the South African military or a private military group such as DAG. They see it as South Africa fighting against Islam and a justification for 'self-defence'.

"This was made clear by ISIS' warning in 2020 that South Africa shouldn't get involved or it would open up a 'fighting front' in our country. When it talks about a 'fighting front', at this stage, it doesn't necessarily mean an insurgency like that taking place in Cabo Delgado, but will more likely be acts of terrorism similar to what we have seen in the United States and Europe.

"There are a number of cells and individuals, whether they be active adherents or loosely connected supporters, already present in South Africa, and we have already seen some of them commit acts of terror or crime in the name of ISIS," says Greenblatt.

"In addition, there are a number of South Africans



The Mozambican army taking control of Palma

who have travelled to Mozambique over the past few years to join the insurgents, at least one of whom was involved in the 2016 Thulsi plot to attack Jewish targets. ISIS encourages adherents and supporters to attack Jews around the world, and as such, if they do decide to open a 'fighting front' in South Africa, it's not inconceivable that the Jewish community could be selected as one of those targets."

Should we be concerned for our safety? "Menachem Begin [former prime minister of Israel] said, 'If an enemy of our people says he seeks to destroy us,

viable option to establish an Islamic state. I believe it to be true that the new international status of this insurgency will embolden it to expand into other regions, with Mozambique's Cabo Delgado being just the beginning."

Says Gruzd, "This is right on South Africa's doorstep, and it has to be taken seriously. We may start to see people fleeing to South Africa, and such instability is bad for the region. The violence is getting closer to offshore gas fields in Cabo Delgado, and is already affecting the operations of major players such as Total,

which has suspended work again." He says extreme violence, such as beheadings, continues to occur in the area.

Asked if the attack is a major event, Gruzd says, "It's hard to tell if this is a turning point in real time. It certainly was a daring attack, and shows the rebels getting stronger and better armed. It also coincides with military training initiatives by Portugal and the United States. Only hindsight will tell if this is a turning point. What's for sure is that the problem won't just quietly go away."

Terror expert Jasmine Opperman of ACLED (the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project) told the *SA Jewish Report* that this attack was expected by those watching the rising insurgency, but "what

surprised most analysts was the sophistication and refinement of the guerrilla warfare, and how they executed the attack. And yet, no action was taken to prevent it.

"Why is it relevant to South Africa? The region is becoming destabilised with a human catastrophe that we haven't seen before. It's a calamity of which we will never know the actual extent," Opperman says. Meanwhile, "for ISIS to propagate a leadership position is quite easy, and that message will transcend borders. It will reach ISIS-sympathisers, and we don't know how they will respond.

"The insurgency is still in control, the government remains defensive," she says. "It's an insurgency that is evolving and growing, and yet, the counter-punch seems not to be forthcoming. That leaves the region vulnerable."

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Tony Leon shrugs off attack from anti-Israel lobby

NICOLA MILTZ

It has been a busy time for Tony Leon, the erstwhile leader of the Democratic Alliance (DA), but one he takes in his stride.

Leon has faced a barrage of criticism from numerous quarters for his recent pro-Israel comments, and for saying in a *News24* interview that former DA leader Mmusi Maimane was “an experiment that went wrong”.

The two aren't related but coincide with the release of his fifth book, *Future Tense: Reflections on My Troubled Land*.

The outspoken and bold politician-turned-diplomat-turned-communications specialist caused waves among the anti-Israel lobby with his recent controversial views on South Africa's foreign policy – or lack thereof – and its anti-Israel fixation.

In an opinion piece in the *Sunday Times* on 28 March titled: “Israel a handy alibi for SA's poor foreign policy”, Leon berates the government's numerous dubious foreign policy decisions, notably its silence on serious global issues compared to its vocal condemnation and criticism of the state of Israel.

This “fervour” of anti-Israel sentiment, he said, was “infectious” noting the “swift condemnation” by the Judicial Services Commission (JSC) of Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng for his pro-Israel comments in a webinar held in June last year.

Leon said the speed it took for the Judicial Conduct Committee (of the JSC) to find Mogoeng guilty of contravening articles of the code of judicial conduct and ordering him to apologise was “breathtaking”, pointing out how other judges' cases have taken years. He accused the JSC of being “hypocritical, lax, and dilatory in its core tasks”.

Leon lauded Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's vaccination programme, which has resulted in 70% of the country being vaccinated, leading the world in this regard.

In his piece he said, “To the extent that South Africa has a foreign policy at all, beyond a series of outdated impulses and struggle-retro gestures, Israel is the one place where President Cyril Ramaphosa, International Relations Minister Naledi Pandor, and Pretoria's paladins can shine their human-rights credentials.”

He cited examples of some

of the government's regretful decisions, including “Silence on the slaughter in Syria; assent to concentration camps for China's Uighurs; no entry here for His Highness the Dalai Lama; no censure for Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea; and heralding stolen elections across the continent from Congo to Uganda,” and added that “at least Israel and its violations of the rights of Palestinians provides a handy alibi and a lonely exception to our generous support everywhere else in the world for ‘tyrannical leaders hated by their own populations’”.

Leon's comments have elicited a seething-mad reaction from the anti-Israel chamber, which responded a week later in a burst of opinion pieces and letters in the Sunday paper.

One opined that Leon's criticism of the country's foreign policy and judiciary was “an attempt to defend Israel and its supporters in South Africa”. The writer said Leon used the “well-worn pro-Israeli tactic of ‘whataboutery’, deflecting attention from Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. Another

accused him of resorting to a “misleading narrative of virtue and victimhood”.

Leon this week shrugged off the attacks, telling the *SA Jewish Report*, “My view on the selectivity and myopia of current South African foreign policy is well founded and impeccably documented, as is the success of Israel vaccine rollout, whatever Netanyahu's

motives for it might have been. I hardly expected my view to go

unchallenged, and I have no problem at all with the voluble and inevitable expression of a contrary view as contained in *Sunday Times* last week”.

Leon is executive chair of Resolve Communications, an advocacy company for reputational management and strategic communication. He is married to an Israeli woman, Michal.

The attacks on Leon come as no surprise to political commentator Daniel Silke, who said the African National Congress (ANC) and members of the anti-Israel lobby weren't ready to take a giant leap into a more balanced environment regarding Israel.

“Israel is a useful rallying cry for the ruling party, which continues to beat Israel instead of having to confront tough foreign policy and global issues. This is a comfortable foreign policy angle for the ANC to employ, and plays into the old anger of Israel co-operating with the apartheid regime.”

Silke said it showed how the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement) had largely influenced and infiltrated the higher echelons of foreign policy in South Africa.

“South Africa is increasingly out of touch with the changing dynamics *vis a vis* Israel's relationship with not only Gulf states but also a number of African countries. South Africa is becoming an outlier in terms of its blanket condemnation of Israel. She is isolated on the continent as far as Israel is concerned, and she will have to live with the consequences.”

He said the anti-Israel lobby faced “a crisis of credibility” by continuing to propagate a particular message that was no longer the consensus in the Middle East.

“The broader macro issues of how to deal with the Abraham Accords has made life difficult for an organisation like BDS. It's undermined by the broader diplomatic events taking place. These developments are making it difficult for the anti-Israel lobby to continue to lambast Israel when any number of Arab nations have decided to take a more co-operative stance with Jerusalem. In future, it will either have to take a more radical line which will totally exclude it from the changes, or [engage in] a more pragmatic, constructive engagement with Israel.”

Meanwhile One South Africa Movement leader Maimane hit back at Leon for telling *News24* at the weekend that he was “an experiment that went wrong”, calling the statement dehumanising.

In an interview with *Newzroom Afrika*, Leon said the statement was made in an interview with *News24* about his book, where he said “Mmusi was an experiment that went wrong as he had never committed to the party's ideals before he joined it.”



Tony Leon

Albie Sachs on the handshake that shook him

MIRAH LANGER

Justice Albie Sachs felt a real sense of liberation after encountering the man who orchestrated the car bombing in which he lost an arm and the sight in one eye.

Sachs told the Temple Israel Passover Freedom online event last week that his “heart [was] beating very, very fast” when apartheid soldier Henry van der Westhuizen asked to see him for the first time.

At the time, in 1996, Sachs was serving as a judge at the Constitutional Court, and the man called at reception, Sachs told the audience of the Hillbrow-based shul's talk.

“I open the security gate, and there is this man, tall and thin like me, although younger. He is looking at me, and I'm looking at him. In his eyes, I can see [reflecting] this is the man I tried to kill and, in my eyes, you can see [reflecting] this is the man who tried to kill me. We didn't know each other, we hadn't fought [personally]. He was just on that side, I was on this side, and he tried to kill me.”

The men spoke extensively during a meeting in his chambers, with Van der Westhuizen boasting about his own educational success and then rise in the ranks of the army “as if he wanted a pat on the back for that”.

At the end of the meeting, Sachs told Van der Westhuizen, “Henry, normally, when I say goodbye to somebody. I shake that person's hand, but I can't shake your hand. Go to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and tell them what you know. Maybe we'll meet one day.”

Although Van der Westhuizen jauntily strode in, he “shuffled” out.

Sachs said he forgot about the incident until sometime later when he was attending a party in Johannesburg. He heard someone calling his name, and it was Van der Westhuizen. Again, he asked to speak to Sachs.

“We went into a corner so I could hear him over the music, and he said, ‘I spoke to the TRC and I told them everything I know’. I put out my hand, and I shook his. I almost fainted. He went away beaming.

“I heard afterwards that he suddenly left the party and he went home and cried for two weeks. I don't know if it's true. I want to leave it as a possibility.

“For me it was more important that this former killer ... can now cry because of what he did. It was liberating.

“I wanted him to enter into the new South Africa and accept [new] norms and standards. The door would be open for him now to tell the truth and become a more dignified human being, and he walked through that door.”

Sachs went on to speak about the plight of refugees, speaking of his own experience in exile in England. He described how he was first “a psychological wreck”



Justice Albie Sachs

when he went there after being tortured in prison, and then after the car bombing, he was there as a “physical wreck”.

From the British nurses who cared for him, literally picking the shrapnel out his chest, he learnt that refugees need more help than just safety and survival. “The nurses, washing my body, that laying on of hands, gave me a sense of connection with England I never had before. It was a kind of organised love.”

Sachs said this is what we as South Africans need to offer those seeking solace in fleeing their homes.

He told the audience that he had been reflecting recently on his Jewish identity and what it meant to be “a good Jew”.

Two events made him contemplate the topic.

First, he always remembered how the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris had spoken at former anti-apartheid activist Joe Slovo's funeral. “At the funeral, he said Joe was a good Jew. Now that surprised me: the head of

the Orthodox rabbinate is calling Joe a good Jew. It was on ethical grounds.”

The second incident was when he was visiting England at a time when there was a legal challenge to a Jewish school that had excluded the child of a converted woman. The court was asked to establish if this was in contravention of race-discrimination laws.

Then chief justice of England, Nick Phillips, asserted that he suddenly found himself in the position of having to “decide who is a Jew”.

Sachs remembers a member of the country's Jewish Board of Deputies being called as a witness, and asserting that there were three criteria to being Jewish: to have a mezuzah; to contribute to Jewish charities; and to go to shul for at least the high holy days.

“Joe didn't do these things – and I'll be exactly the same. So I don't know.”

Sachs said what was very pronounced for him was a “horror of antisemitism”.

He recalled visiting Bulgaria on holiday in 1968, and coming across two synagogues which had been hoarded by Nazis with looted memorabilia from other synagogues all over Europe as part of Hitler's plans to build a monument to an extinct race.

“I went back to the apartment, and wept,” he said.

Others questioned why he was overwrought, saying, everyone found it horrific. “I wept and said it was a decimation of my family, my aunts and uncles whom I had never known. It's something, in that sense, visceral for me, and very profound.”

He said his connection was in terms of Jewish experience, rather than doctrine. “It might be something to do with our grandparents living in the *shtetls*. The only book they would have had would be the Torah; the only school would be the *cheder*. [It showed] that ideas mattered.

“For those of us who were activists, ideas mattered, not just compassion, but ideas and a kind of rationality connected with justice. If that's part of the Jewish experience, then I'm imbued with that aspect.

“I'm a proud Jew and I'm proudly secular. I don't know what the connection is. It's between opposites.”

He has always been certain about one thing: “My auntie Rosie's taiglach that she made every Rosh Hashanah in a big round tin. She made the best taiglach in Cape Town!”

Enough vaccines to go round, say experts, but not for a while

NICOLA MILTZ

There is a widespread perception in the community that South Africa is lagging way behind in its vaccine rollout, but insiders say there will be enough vaccines to go round and herd immunity isn't a pipe dream.

Discovery Group Chief Executive Adrian Gore told the *SA Jewish Report* this week that South Africa had secured 51 million doses of vaccines. These include 31 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and 20 million doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. "Together, these should be sufficient to cover more than 40 million adults in South Africa, exceeding the population herd immunity target of 29 million people," he said.

He said cabinet had indicated an intention

chairs the Ministerial Advisory Committee on COVID-19 tasked with advising the government on vaccine-related matters, said there were a number of important things to remember about the rollout.

"First, many of the middle and lower-income countries have opted to roll out with vaccines which haven't yet been approved by what are called stringent regulatory authorities, for example the United States Food and Drug Administration," he said. "For example, vaccines from China and Russia, which may well be very good vaccines and are also undergoing review in South Africa, but haven't yet been approved by the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA)."

South Africa is "very fortunate" in having an excellent regulatory authority in SAHPRA, Schoub said, advised and supported by a

COVID-19 field, who can provide the most advanced scientific evaluation of the suitability of vaccines for the South African environment, especially given the dominance of the B.1.351 variant."

South Africa's vaccines are expected to start arriving in the middle of this month, according to Gore.

A total of 0.6 million Pfizer-BioNTech doses are scheduled for delivery this month, and a further 4.5 million Pfizer-BioNTech doses are scheduled for delivery in May and June, with the remaining 15 million doses scheduled for delivery in the third and fourth quarters of this year.

Gore, who has been working with the task team (chaired by Schoub) appointed by the health minister to support vaccine procurement, said 2.8 million Johnson & Johnson doses were scheduled for delivery from April to June, with the balance scheduled for delivery in the third and fourth quarters of this year.

He said Discovery had been working on detailed plans to ensure its medical-scheme members and clients were able to access vaccinations as soon as they were eligible according to national prioritisation criteria.

"In alignment with the national priority setting process and three-phase rollout, we have segmented and stratified our member base based on those at highest risk. Through this exercise, we have identified more than

550 000 clients and members as high-risk," he said. "The aim is to vaccinate this group as quickly as possible, then to go on to provide access to vaccination for the remaining 2.5 million members and clients as quickly as possible in the following phases of the rollout, ideally before the end of 2021."

He said Discovery was also preparing to help its members navigate the vaccination process. This includes how to register on the Electronic Vaccination Data System, how to locate accredited vaccination sites, providing follow-up reminders for second doses, and providing access to vaccination certificates.

"Discovery is participating in Business for South Africa workstreams that are planning the roll out of the national COVID-19 vaccination programme alongside the national department of health. We are contributing skills and expertise to support this national effort," Gore said.

He said Discovery remained in regular contact with vaccine manufacturers, while making every effort in co-ordination with the health department to speed up availability to members of the medical schemes it administers.

"Schemes administered by Discovery have ring-fenced funds for vaccination for all members. We are ready and waiting to disburse these funds pending the arrival of vaccines and official launch of the next phase of the rollout," he said.

According to the health department, the number of healthcare workers vaccinated under the Sisonke Protocol remains 269 102, a tiny figure compared with the United States, where a record four million people received a vaccine last Saturday alone.



to vaccinate all high-risk groups, including essential workers, people over the age of 60, and people living with multiple co-morbidities by the latest October 2021.

"Discovery, together with public and private-sector partners, is pushing hard to achieve this sooner, pending the available supply of vaccines."

Professor Barry Schoub, emeritus professor in virology at the University of the Witwatersrand and the former director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, agreed that there was a perception that the country was lagging behind.

However, Schoub said South Africa was lucky that the lag hadn't been too damaging, because of the low transmission rate of the virus. This, he said, was "unlike the continuing devastation in the northern hemisphere in spite of extensive vaccine rollouts in those countries".

"We do hope that there will be sufficient vaccination in good time for a large proportion of high-risk individuals to be covered before we experience our third wave and before winter," he said.

"Unfortunately, financially, we weren't able to race with the hounds and grab all the good vaccines, as most of the high-income countries have selfishly done, procuring far more than their populations needed."

Schoub, who also

team of excellent local scientists, in order to uphold high standards of safety and efficacy in approving vaccines for use in this country.

"Also, it's indeed fortunate that we didn't, in fact, like high-income countries, rush to buy large amounts of vaccines because of the dominance of the B.1.351 variant in South Africa. This variant is proving to be a major determinant of vaccine efficacy.

"We are also fortunate in this country to have a network of scientists which ranks amongst the top in the world in the



Professor Barry Schoub

Adrian Gore

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Getting my head around six million individuals

If ever you question the importance of commemorating Yom Hashoah, which we do this week, keep in mind that we're not talking about statistics, but the systematic annihilation of a huge percentage of our people.

In fact, before the Holocaust, 60% of all Jews lived in Europe. Two out of three of them were murdered during the war. In 1933, there were 9.5 million Jews in Europe and this number was down to 3.5 million in 1950.

This is hard to absorb, I know, but so often, people dismiss comparisons of the Holocaust with the behaviour of Israel or even with apartheid. The more I acknowledge what it means to murder six million Jews systematically, the more I realise that there is simply no comparison.

This year marks 80 years since the beginning of the mass annihilation of Jews and each year, fewer and fewer survivors remain. Many died this year of COVID-19. Their survival enabled us to understand what they lived through and how six million of their brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, cousins, aunts, uncles, and other family and friends were brutally murdered. The only reason for their death was because they were Jewish.

Until recently, the number six million was simply a very large number to me. Although I had seen the movies and read the books, I couldn't quite identify with it as being six million people like me and all those I love in this world. It really isn't easy to absorb and comprehend this number in terms of individuals who had a future, perhaps a degree or three, a wife or a beloved, and children. They had potential and lives yet to be lived, but their lives were stolen from them way before their time.

The Nazis took away their humanity, their individuality, and attempted to make them just a number, which they tattooed on their arms.

Every year, on Yom Hashoah, we observe a ceremony under the auspices of the president of Israel known as "Unto Every Person there is a Name", in which names of those who perished in the Holocaust are called out.

The point of this particular exercise is meaningful because an individual is given a name by their parents. And they and their families have a surname that they share. This makes every single person a unique individual. Each person has a name, a personality, a particular look, a way of walking, talking, and a way of being that is special to them. So, starting with a name we are given at birth, a person is individualised. And so every year on Yom Hashoah, we do our best around the world to individualise and humanise as many of the six million Jews who died as possible.

To date, Yad Vashem has recorded 4 800 000 names of Holocaust victims on its Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, with more than 2 750 000 names registered on Pages of Testimony.

Here's the thing: if we had all the names of the six million who were murdered, and could say each name, age, and place of death in one second, we could cover only 86 400 individual names in one 24-hour Yom Hashoah.

To read six million, we would need almost 70 days of 24-hour non-stop reading. If we recited names for only 12 hours a day, giving the reader time to sleep, eat, and have a few short breaks, we would need 138 days to cover the names of the six million Jews who were annihilated in the Holocaust. And that's if you can read all their vital details in one second.

This brings me a little closer to understanding what the number six million actually means in terms of individuals.

On the Yad Vashem site (YadVashem.org), you can find lists of these names. I went to look this week and found 23 people with the surname Krost who were victims of the Holocaust. I know of a handful. I wonder who the others were. Were they also family?

Then, I looked at the lists of children's names and there were literally hundreds of pages of names of children, some not even a year old. I couldn't help the tears as I read names, ages, and where and how they died. I felt quite sick. I couldn't help thinking that these littlies, who should have been playing and having fun without a care in the world, were brutally murdered because by chance they were born Jewish.

It was then that I decided that I was going to light the six commemorative candles with my sons this year. We will recite the *El Maleh Rachamim* prayer, and then start reading children's names and keep going until we can't anymore. I believe this will give us a better inkling of the massive horror of the millions who perished all because they were like us.

In this edition, there is a story about the Holocaust on page 12 that stands out for me. It's about the Wannsee Conference, where the decision was made by the Nazi leadership to murder Jews en masse. What really hit me was Holocaust educator Dr Matthias Haß's warning that it was because of the small incidents of antisemitism that the Wannsee House decision was made. It was the accumulation of decades of slowly building antisemitism that seeped into German society over years that eventually led to the dehumanisation of Jews, he said.

How often do we dismiss or not make a big deal about what seems to be minor incidents of antisemitism or racism? Sometimes it isn't always so clear and sometimes it is. But it's not easy to stick your neck out, especially when you are alone in a situation. And sometimes it might be cleverly disguised as anti-Israel sentiment.

The next time someone says to me, "Don't make a big deal about it" referring to antisemitism, I will remember how I tried to get my head around the systematic murder of six million Jews.

Shabbat Shalom!

Peta Krost Maunder
Editor



Is the US losing interest in the Middle East?

OPINION

HARRY JOFFE



The United States-Saudi Arabia relationship is a really interesting case study for those who watch Middle Eastern geopolitics closely. Some background to current events is necessary to set the context.

On the one hand, Saudi Arabia is a difficult ally. Its human-rights record is suspect, to say the least. It was clearly responsible for the killing of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi in 2018, which caused a worldwide outcry. It has also been involved in a war in Yemen that has created a humanitarian disaster, with high civilian casualties and hunger, malnutrition, and illness in that country.

On the other hand, it's a strategic US ally, and a stable, pro-Western country. It entered the war in Yemen for good reason – to prevent the Iranian-aligned Houthi forces from taking over the country. It was also the second biggest oil producer in the world in 2020.

President Joe Biden was left with a difficult choice. Heading up a Democratic administration, which supposedly prides itself on its support for human rights, he couldn't leave things as they were. On the other hand, he couldn't damage the US's vital strategic and national interests. To this end, he seems to have attempted to walk a fine line by taking the following actions:

He released a redacted intelligence report that blamed the crown prince for being behind the murder of the journalist, but took no further action. He has made it clear that the US no longer supports the operations of the Saudi coalition in Yemen, and has temporarily paused the sale of offensive arms to Saudi Arabia, but has allowed the continued sale of defensive arms.

the US was in fact a net exporter of oil and natural gas.

Second, the US has been involved in long and endless wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that have cost trillions of dollars and achieved very little.

Finally – and this has been the policy across three US presidents now – the US wants to pivot to Asia and focus much more on countering a rapidly growing and influential China. It wants to lighten its burdens in the Middle East, and instead focus its energies on what everyone believes will be the world's leading growth region of the 21st century.

This doesn't mean the US will withdraw totally. It still has troops all over the area, and has vital interests in preventing a nuclear arms race there and not allowing terrorist groups to grow and find sanctuary. However, given recent events, it seems clear that it will scale down its activities and no longer expend the time and energy it has in the past. Its military activities will be curtailed.

The effect of this clear signal from the US has been dramatic, and it no doubt played a major role in the Abraham Accords and signing of peace treaties between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. If and when the Saudis join the emerging Israel-Sunni rapprochement, it will no doubt also be due to the fear of less US involvement in the region and of therefore having to face their enemies alone.

While this development has been positive for Israel in that it now has new strategic allies in the region, bringing much more diplomatic strength and regional influence, in the long term, there must be concern.

The US moves towards Saudi Arabia are a portent for it becoming much less involved in the region, and clearly show its intention not to be

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, centre, meeting with US Defense Secretary James Mattis and his delegation in Saudi Arabia, 2017



More importantly, he didn't act when Saudi oilfields were once again attacked by Houthi missiles and drones on 7 March, which led to a spike in oil prices briefly above \$70 (R1 021) a barrel.

The US said on the Monday that its commitment to defend Saudi Arabia was "unwavering", and in a Twitter post, the US mission in Riyadh condemned the attacks, which it said demonstrated a "lack of respect for human life" and a "lack of interest in the pursuit of peace". However, the US took no further action.

The main issue, however, which is being brought to the fore by the awkward US-Saudi dance, is that the US is losing interest in the Middle East. The area is much less of a priority than it used to be.

There are a few reasons for this. First, the US no longer relies on imports of oil from the region. Last year, according to *The Economist*,

dragged into any more wars there.

While Israel now has a lot of new allies as a result, and it seems the friendships will be warm, none of the new allies are major military powers. Local regional alliances, useful as they are, cannot replace the world's main superpower, and an unstable region will surely become still more unstable without the US's active presence.

Israeli leaders have long suspected this, but the fact that the US hasn't responded militarily to the two recent attacks on the Saudi oilfields when in the past, under any president, there would have been a robust and strong response, shows how dramatically things have changed. The US can no longer be relied on as a military ally. Israel will be left to fend pretty much for itself if and when the next war breaks out in the Middle East.

• Harry Joffe is a Johannesburg tax and trust attorney.



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Labia Theatre's nine-year battle against anti-Israel film



TALI FEINBERG

It's been nine years since Labia Theatre owner Ludi Kraus was unwittingly caught up in a fight with the Palestinian Solidarity Campaign (PSC) over the screening at his theatre of a documentary which compares Israel to apartheid South Africa.

"This is a battle I didn't choose," he says in an exclusive interview with the *SA Jewish Report*. "I stood up for the rights of independent cinemas and in particular my theatre. It's been enormously stressful, but I didn't want my theatre to be used for an event that was central to something as divisive as the opening of Israel Apartheid Week (IAW). So, I stuck with those principles."

In a judgment delivered on 26 March 2021, Western Cape Judge Andre Le Grange of the Equality Court ruled that the Labia must screen the film *The Roadmap to Apartheid* within 60 days, and it was ordered to pay costs.

Kraus, who is Jewish, couldn't at the time of going to press share how he and his legal team would respond to the judgment, but he recalled how it all started. "I received a request from a publishing company to rent a cinema on a Sunday afternoon. It was called, somewhat innocuously, Workers World Media Productions.

"An arrangement regarding the screening of the film was made, and I was told to send an invoice to the PSC. I was puzzled because I thought it was a South African movie linked to apartheid. The publishing company hadn't mentioned the PSC at all. So I googled the film, and to my surprise, found that it was about comparing apartheid to Israel and the Palestinians. I didn't feel comfortable showing the film, especially when I found out that the screening at the Labia was to be a central part of the opening of IAW in 2012.

"I was unhappy with the film and the event. I felt it wouldn't be popular with the majority of my patrons, especially considering the hundreds of other venues that could be used

to screen it instead. I phoned the publishing company, and told it that I didn't want to proceed. Communication was initially polite. They were understanding, and said they would discuss it with their colleagues.

"The next thing, I was by accident sent some in-house emails that weren't intended for me, in which one person said that they were happy to find an alternative venue, but others insisted that it be shown at the Labia, which would generate publicity for their cause.

"We were then subjected to emails, threats, boycotts, and pickets every Friday for a year. They got academics and the media involved. Meanwhile, the film was shown on UCT [the University of Cape Town] campus, and went on a national tour.

"They also got organisations to boycott us, and some of it did affect us. We were then approached by Right2Know (R2K), which said it was prepared to mediate. It culminated in our agreeing to a screening of the film on condition that the South African Zionist Federation [SAZF] be present to debate the film afterwards. We obviously wanted to try and have a balanced debate. But the SAZF pulled out. Because the condition hadn't been met, we cancelled the screening, which led to a further outcry.

"That was followed by both the PSC and R2K lodging complaints with the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC). The SAHRC found in favour of us.

"Unbeknown to us though, the PSC and R2K then appealed the SAHRC decision without notifying us that they were doing so," Kraus says. "This time, on appeal, the SAHRC overturned its initial decision, and found against us. The first we heard about the appeal ruling was a year after it had taken place. Yet, it's a legal principle that you can't rule against someone if you haven't given them the opportunity to hear their side of the story, as was the case here.

"So, we took the SAHRC's decision on review to the High Court, and we won that battle. But the Equality Court, in a separate matter brought by the PSC, ruled against us, ordering a

screening of the film."

Going forward, Kraus is most concerned about the ongoing funding of legal costs, especially if the case goes all the way to the Constitutional Court. The cinema has had a tough year financially as it was in lockdown for five months. It was then hit by the second wave during the holiday season – the only time it could have 'caught up'. Having now fought two high court cases, it simply doesn't have the resources to continue to fight with an appeal to the Supreme Court and then, if necessary, the Constitutional Court. Kraus says that even with his attorneys acting *pro bono*, the cost of driving these matters through the courts is still substantial for a small business.

"It's a struggle. Many of our patrons are older people who aren't ready to return to the cinema, even though we have COVID-19 safety protocols in place," says Kraus. The cinema is hoping to draw a younger audience with more

commercial titles. It has also launched a streaming service that is available anywhere in South Africa.

Kraus believes that the PSC and its supporters don't care much about the actual screening of the film at the Labia anymore. "For them, all these years later, it's more about the publicity that's being generated over the issue," he says.



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Helen Mirren to play Golda Meir in upcoming film

GABE FRIEDMAN – JTA

Academy Award winner Helen Mirren will portray Golda Meir, Israel's only female prime minister, in an upcoming biopic set during the Yom Kippur War.

Production *Golda* will begin later this year, according to *The Hollywood Reporter*.

The news follows the announcement last month of another star-powered production on Meir, a series titled *Lioness* led by Israeli actress Shira Haas of *Unorthodox* fame.

While *Lioness* will follow Meir from "her birth in Kiev to her American upbringing in Milwaukee, her role in the formation of Israel, and her rise to become the new nation's first and only female prime minister", according to a report in *Deadline*, *Golda* will focus on the turbulent Yom Kippur War period.

Along with the rest of Israel, Meir and her all-male cabinet were taken by surprise by the attack on the eve of

the holiday in 1973 by Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian forces. The ensuing bloody conflict – chronicled in the recent acclaimed Israeli production *Valley of Tears* on HBO Max – shattered the nation's growing sense of confidence at the time in an embattled region.

Golda will be directed by Israeli filmmaker Guy Nattiv, who won the 2018 Academy Award for best short for *Skin*, a film involving neo-Nazis that he later made into a feature.

"As someone who was born during the Yom Kippur War, I'm honoured to tell this fascinating story about the first and only woman to ever lead Israel," Nattiv said. "Nicholas Martin's brilliant script dives into Golda's final chapter as the country faces a deadly surprise attack during the holiest day of the year, a core of delusional generals undermining Golda's judgement.

"I couldn't be more excited to work with the legendary Miss Mirren to bring this epic, emotional, and complex story to life."

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From searching for Sugarman to seeking out a 'barmi boy'

TALI FEINBERG

Stephen 'Sugar' Segerman once successfully searched for Sugarman (also known as the musician Sixto Rodriguez) and found him, so what are the chances of him finding an equally evasive Barmitzvah boy?

As depicted in the Oscar-winning 2012 documentary, Segerman isn't one to give up. But he's now setting his sights on a mystery a little closer to home: the identity of a Barmitzvah boy who appears in a photograph he found at a market in Cape Town a few years ago.

Writing to the *SA Jewish Report*, Segerman explained how he came across the photo. "I'm originally from Johannesburg, but have been living in Cape Town for the past 25 years. Over the past few years, it has become a tradition for us to go to the Milnerton Market on a Sunday morning to browse through the many different stalls that comprise this huge weekend flea market. There, we can find records, books, magazines, curios, and many other weird and wonderful bric-a-brac and *tsatskes*, all at reasonable prices.

"One Sunday morning, I was browsing through a stall, and I saw a framed picture of a Barmitzvah boy, seemingly from around the time when I had my Barmitzvah (late 1960s to early 1970s) judging from the suit, thick tie, siddur, haircut, and so on. There weren't any other Jewish items at that stall so it was just sitting there on its own. I bought it for a few rand.

"It was still in good condition, but had no identifying features on it, apart from the name of the studio where the picture was taken, but the guy in the picture looked strangely familiar. I'm far more familiar with the Jewish community in Joburg, but I did mix with Cape Town Jewish children at Bnei Akiva machaneh, so maybe I had met this guy there.

"Anyway, we put the picture up on the unit in our dining room where all the other pictures of our family members are, and it fitted in perfectly. So much so, that over the years, whenever people came for a meal, they would ask who it was, and we would make up all kinds of different stories about who he was, and then we would tell them the story of how we found the picture. We gave him a few different names over the years. Someone once said he looked like a 'Milton', so that stuck for a while, but generally, he was known simply as 'the Barmitzvah boy'. We told people different stories, like he was a distant cousin or a friend of the family, it changed every time, but we always then told them how he came to be on our unit.

"But, more recently, it has been bothering us, and I decided to try and find out what his name is, where he is, and what his story is. But, in spite of putting the picture on various relevant websites and Facebook groups, I haven't had any success." He hopes the *SA Jewish Report* can help him with his search.

Segerman sees parallels between this search and the search for Rodriguez, "but, contrary to popular reports, I'm not nor have ever regarded myself as a 'musical detective' or any other kind of detective. How the Rodriguez story began and evolved is still a source of amazement to me as it wasn't planned or plotted, it just happened.

"I have always been naturally curious, and enjoy finding things like rare LPs, books, or tiny diamonds that accidentally dropped onto the floor of the jewellery factory in Johannesburg where I worked for many years with my father – but never missing people. But, may I add, that once I start looking for something, I don't usually stop until I find it,



The photograph of the barmi boy on the dining room unit

no matter how long it takes."

It was this natural curiosity that drew him to the market. "Since moving down to Cape Town, I always enjoyed browsing through Greenmarket Square and Greenpoint markets for music, books, and magazines for my own collection. But when I got involved with [his renowned Cape Town record store] Mabu Vinyl in 2003 [which has since closed down], I started looking around more seriously for second-hand LPs, 7-inch singles, CDs, books, and DVDs for our shop. Someone suggested that I try the Milnerton Market, and initially I went occasionally, but it soon grew into a regular Sunday morning tradition.

"Over the years, the market grew as more and more private sellers began to set up their little stores as a way to sell off spare stuff from home alongside regular stalls. Because a lot of people enjoy taking a stroll around



Photo of mysterious Barmitzvah boy

this large market, it's quite lucrative for these sellers, so they look for more and more stuff to sell. That's why one can find such a disparate range of stuff, like this picture."

So, although he's not sure if he has a greater or lesser chance of tracking down the barmi boy than Sugarman, "at least with Rodriguez, we had plenty of information and clues from his records. With the barmi boy, all we know is that he was probably from the Cape, and the name of the studio where this picture was taken, which is 'Brigda Studio'. But I can't find any reference to it on Google,

and even if I did, I doubt it would still be in existence. If it was, I doubt they would remember who this was after more than 50 years. So, that seems like a dead end, and I really have nothing else to go on apart from the fact that my son-in-law said that the siddur that the Barmitzvah boy is holding looks very similar to the one he was given for his Barmitzvah by his shul [in the 1990s].

"But, having said all that, I must admit that if we could find Rodriguez, then we can probably find anyone, including this barmi boy. I think it's fair to say that, for me, the thrill of the chase, or the challenge of the search, is as important and exciting as the joy of finding what one is looking for."

Leila Bloch of the South African Jewish Museum's (SAJM) Jewish Digital Archive Project (JDAP) says that the archive exists for exactly this kind of material to be preserved and hopefully to trace the boy in the photograph or his family. "In fact, we were once given a bunch of letters found at the Milnerton Market, and we traced them back to a famous fashion designer who had written them to his family while he was studying in London. His whole family came down from Israel, and as they pored over the letters, they were so emotional.

"There is so much potential in finding and sharing such material. We collect photographs, film, and other material that is often discarded, and it finds a home in the archive. That's the beauty of this ongoing archive – we are always discovering new connections. With enough time, we can try help trace the mystery Barmitzvah boy."

SAJM director Gavin Morris adds: "The sad reality is that a large proportion of our community have left the country, in many cases leaving their parents behind. As their parents age and downsize, many of their treasured family memorabilia are discarded as the cost or hassle of sending it to their children abroad is prohibitive. These items find their way into all manner of junk shops, curio stores and markets.

"Stories of items such as this one are more common than you'd think. The SAJM is constantly contacted about some or other item of Judaica that has been unearthed. Unfortunately the museum is not in a position to purchase, or even safely store these items. For this reason we have launched our SAJMarchives.com website (which includes JDAP), so at least digital copies of these items will still exist for future generations."

- To share any information about the mystery Barmitzvah boy, email Stephen Segerman: sugar@sugarmusic.co.za
- To contact the Jewish Digital Archive Project, email info@sajewishmuseum.co.za

Polish Jews drive inaugural celebration of Holocaust survivors

MIRAH LANGER

An inaugural day to honour the lives and legacy of Holocaust survivors has been launched by the Jewish Community Centre (JCC) in Krakow, Poland, in collaboration with a range of other Jewish and Holocaust organisations.

“The lives of Holocaust survivors convey a universal message of the strength and the resilience of the human spirit; that people can go through something traumatic and then afterwards still be able to love, to appreciate beauty and to feel empathy after what they went through,” said Jonathan Ornstein, the executive director of the Krakow JCC, in explaining the rationale behind the day to be held for the first time on 26 June this year.

Ornstein launched the idea early last month, along with Professor Michael Berenbaum, the director of the Sigi Ziering Institute at the American Jewish University.

He said the idea had been “percolating” since the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in January 2020, which about 200 survivors attended. “It really got us thinking about the survivors and their effect on us. In the twilight of their lives, they deserve to be honoured.”

It also became clear during the coronavirus pandemic that communal assistance was needed by many survivors. An international Holocaust Survivor Day would hopefully assist in bringing awareness and practical support.

It’s believed there are about 400 000 survivors worldwide, of which it’s estimated that a quarter of them could be living in poverty.

“It’s a day of hope, optimism, story-telling, and education. It’s a day, most of all, for them



Polish survivor Marian Turski whose birthday has been chosen as the date of Holocaust Survivor Day to feel appreciated, and for them to understand how grateful we are for how much they have given and continue to give us.”

Each community should decide how best they want to commemorate the day, said Ornstein, but the hope was that it would involve interaction across generations, listening to survivors’ stories, and, if needed, fundraising for the well-being of survivors in that country.

The day is proposed as an addition to Yom Hashoah and the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust, which are held on 27 Nisan in the Jewish calendar, and 27 January respectively.

Having a separate day to these would allow us

to focus on the stories of the survivors, which many have so movingly offered to share with the world in spite of their pain.

“Their lives encapsulate the spirit of the Jewish people – this idea that we as a people have gone through such difficult times and experienced antisemitism over thousands of years, and yet we continue to lead Jewish lives, we continue to be involved. We don’t give up as Jews or as human beings. That’s the story of our people,” Ornstein said.

He said there had been a fantastic response to the idea. An international advisory committee steering the day now includes representatives from Holocaust-survivor organisations in Israel, the United States and Europe, as well as the USC Shoah Foundation, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Foundation, the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the General Compensation Fund for Victims of National Socialism, the Claims Conference, the World Jewish Congress, March of the Living, the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation, and various others.

The date selected for the commemoration

is the birthdate of Marian Turski, a Polish survivor of Auschwitz, and a historian and journalist, who will turn 95 on the day.

“He’s such a moral figure who has lived his life with exemplary Jewish values, and he’s just a warm, wonderful human being,” reflected Ornstein.

Most recently, Turski spoke at last year’s anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, discussing the idea of an eleventh commandment to the world: never be a bystander.

“Do not be indifferent,” he said at the time. “Do not be indifferent when you see historical lies; do not be indifferent when any minority is discriminated against; do not be indifferent when power violates a social contract.”

Tali Nates, the director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, said it was a good idea to celebrate the resilience and lives of survivors.

In South Africa, there are about 30 survivors left. These are defined as people whose lives were affected by the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945, and include refugees.

SA’s Yom Hashoah ceremony

Six Holocaust survivors will each light a memorial candle as part of the annual Holocaust Commemoration Day (Yom Hashoah) at 12:00 on Friday, 9 April.

Ella Blumenthal (Cape Town), Helene Sieff (Johannesburg), Marian Turski (Poland), Pinchas Gutter (Canada), Miriam Lichterman (Cape Town), and Oscar Langsam (Mauritius) will each give their testimony. They will also offer a message on how to continue the memory and lessons learned from the Holocaust.

The theme of this year’s ceremony is “Memory,

Resilience and Hope”. The six candles represent the six million Jews who perished at the hands of Nazi Germany and her collaborators during World War II.

Sadly, survivors of the genocide are dwindling (with 11 local survivors having passed away since the ceremony last year), making it even more important to hear the voices of those who remain.

The ceremony will take place online, and can be accessed via the South African Jewish Board of Deputies Facebook page or on the SAJBD YouTube channel.

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Beware of antisemitism in corona conspiracies, warns educator

MIRAH LANGER

The appropriation of antisemitic tropes, including by protestors against government policies to fight COVID-19, needs to be taken seriously, says Holocaust educator Dr Matthias Haß.

"When looking at our world today, don't look for the big, horrific crimes, look at the smaller events and the smaller crimes. That's why current forms of antisemitism and conspiracy narratives are so troubling," said Haß, who serves as the educational director of Wannsee House in Berlin. This estate is the location where Nazi officials met on 20 January 1942 to agree to the co-ordinated mass murder of European Jewry. It now serves as an educational centre.

Haß was speaking in an online webinar about this meeting and its relevance, hosted recently by the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre in partnership with the Memorial and Educational Site House of the Wannsee Conference.

He cited the example of recent demonstrations against anti-corona measures by the German government as containing troubling antisemitic elements.

"Some people, who feared mandatory vaccinations by the government opposed it by marking themselves with the yellow star [originally used by the Nazi regime to identify Jews]," said Haß, who is a political scientist by training. "The protestors added in the inscription



Dr Matthias Haß

'ungeimpft' [unvaccinated], very clearly minimising historical events by putting themselves in the role of the victim."

He mentioned another situation where an anti-lockdown protestor compared herself to Sophie Scholl – a German resistance fighter who was executed for her work against the Nazi regime.

"There have been other strange and disturbing comparisons. Something is going on here where current events are directly linked to the Nazi past. Antisemitism is at the ideological centre of many of these issues, no matter how constructed, absurd, and crazy the arguments are.

"To be honest, a few years ago, I would never have thought that the kind of antisemitism and conspiracy narratives that we are facing today still

existed."

It's a "painful learning experience" to see this reality, and contemplate what it means for the work of the Wannsee House centre, said Haß.

He said he had issued a warning about seemingly "small incidents" of antisemitism precisely because of the extreme outcome of the Wannsee House meeting. This outcome was possible only because of decades of antisemitic propaganda that had seeped into German society long before the Nazi regime came into power.

As crucial as what was discussed at the meeting was that which wasn't seen as necessary to debate. "There was no longer a need to argue why the Jews are the enemy. It was a common understanding at all levels of society. Clarity about hatred of Jews didn't come

suddenly or surprisingly, but grew over time, and was deeply engraved in the minds of these men [at the meeting] and in the minds of millions of ordinary Germans."

Haß evoked the chilling ordinariness of the proceedings, organised by the head of the Reich Main Security Office, Reinhard Heydrich, at the luxurious villa on the lake.

"Heydrich wanted to dominate the meeting. That's why he chose a place outside Berlin where he could show off. He served food; he served drink; it was a loose atmosphere."

At the time, the Nazis believe they were winning the war and as such, saw the need to plan for a "racial new order of Europe. It's not about finding compromise or a peaceful solution. [It was about] creating a new world," Haß said.

The 15 Nazi bureaucrats who gathered discussed mass murder as a "logistical issue".

"These weren't people on the political level of the regime, they were the permanent secretaries in the ministry, the ones who were competent and really running the show."

While mass shootings **An example of the yellow star appropriated by anti-covid vaccination protestors in Germany recently**



had already been carried out under their jurisdiction, the meeting was designed to co-ordinate these efforts into standardised practices.

"What filled their minds [when it comes to the killings] were issues of efficiency, money, time, the use of one bullet per person, the procedure after arrival [of deported Jews], and what to do with the bodies. The Nazis wanted the killings done in an orderly way.

"What do these men have in common?" pondered Haß, in detailing that the officials gathered had an average age of 42, that 10 of them had been to university, and eight had doctorates.

"What we saw was that they were pretty average, they were very young, they were well educated, and they were convinced of Nazi ideology. Other than that, there was nothing special about them."

A year and a half ago, it was also established that a secretary attended in order to take notes. "This gave us

insight into the fact that this entire procedure wasn't something completely different. It was a secret meeting but this wasn't so unusual. It was part of the

daily work routine." All in all, it took just 90 minutes for the officials to agree decisively to kill the 11 million Jews that they believed to be alive in Europe at the time.

"Everybody was willing to co-operate, nobody hesitated and looked for a way not to participate in the genocide."

Haß said that while they couldn't openly object to the "final solution" proposal, if they had any misgivings, they could have played on notions of a lack of capacity or overworked staff. Instead, "they were all happy to be part of this".

The language used by Adolf Eichmann in drawing up the final-protocol document of the meeting is "coded" in its euphemistic summary of the results of the discussion. Terms such as "parallelising procedures" are used in reference to extending mass murder across the continent and "natural reduction" when it comes to ensuring that they work the Jews to death.

It reflected how bureaucracies allowed perpetrators to distance themselves through language, suggested Haß. "Here, it was present in the most extreme way."

The use of language as a key tool of power, in the case of the Wannsee House meeting, ignited a genocide. Yet language, even in very different contemporary situations, continues to play a role in prejudice and oppression, said Haß.

"Words matter. Public discourse matters. The few that start spreading hatred and lies need bystanders and enablers – those who remain silent. If nobody speaks out, their ideology can spread and conspiracy narratives gain ground.

"To engage in public debate; to call out the liars' ideology cannot start early enough. It's not enough to call them fools and lies. As we see in our world, there is a risk of the nonsense, the hatred, divisions, and violence becoming powerful forces in our societies."

Focus on Yom Hashoah turns to family

YOSEF KAUFMANN

There is a new international initiative to start a family tradition on Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day), in which families will gather to light six memorial candles and recite a pertinent poem and prayer to remember the 6 000 000.

This initiative, called "Generations light the way", encourages families to recite the traditional mourner's prayer, *Kel Maleh Rahamim*, and/or the poem, *Nizkor – Let us Remember*, by Holocaust survivor Abba Kovner, to impart the memory of the *Shoah* to the next generation. It is a collaboration between Yad Vashem and Tzohar Rabbinical Association.

"Today, we find ourselves at a crossroads," said acting Yad Vashem chairperson Ronen Plot. "As the last generation to be personally acquainted with Holocaust survivors, we have a great responsibility to ensure that what we saw, what we heard, and what we learned is passed on to future generations."

"The Shoah shows us how important every Jew is," said Rabbi David Stav, the founder and director of Tzohar Rabbinical Association.

He recalled an incident when an entire unit of Nazi soldiers stayed on a small Greek island for more than two weeks just to find one Jewish family.

"We need to realise how precious a Jewish life is.

So much of our history has been forgotten. From the crusades to the pogroms of 1648 to 1649, to the Spanish Inquisition," he said.

"We cannot let that happen with the Holocaust. It's not just because the Holocaust is recent history, it's important to remember because it teaches us that it doesn't matter how you label yourself, we are all *am echad* (one people)."

Tali Nates, the director of the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, agrees. "We need to be aware of the past and how evil is allowed to grow if we hope to prevent more atrocities. And we need to recognise it quicker," she said.

"The radicalisation of Nazi Germany didn't happen in a vacuum. The world was facing an unprecedented economic crisis. Europe was still picking up the pieces of World War

I. People were suffering and looking for easy answers to difficult questions. Extremism is born out of crisis.

"When people are suffering, they start looking for someone to blame. More often than not, blame falls on the Jews," said Nates. "Today, we face another unprecedented world crisis. COVID-19 has turned the world upside down. We are facing a global economic and health crisis that we have never seen before. Again, born out of this crisis, we are



seeing an alarming growth of extremism around the world. The open rise of nationalism and white supremacy is now leading to an increase in violence against those that look and sound different."

Nates said there were many lessons to take from the Holocaust. "Remembering the *Shoah* is so important. Starting from our young generation and going beyond just the Jewish community, to all of humanity, it has a huge educational value.

"It's a warning for us all to be vigilant and recognise the warning signs," she said. "When words of hate turn into discrimination, racism, xenophobia, and violence, it ends with mass murder and genocide. The first thing is education – to connect the dots and try to prevent it from happening again.

"You have to make sure you fight antisemitism, racism, and xenophobia. These are the first signs. We need to educate about the dangers of those words and actions.

We need to start with ourselves, on a personal level, to be consistent when we are with our friends, family, and neighbours. We need to educate each other that racism, however casual, isn't acceptable. And we need to be active to avoid the same mistakes made during the Holocaust and other genocides, which unfortunately are still taking place today.

"Because we are in South Africa, we should focus on how

we as South Africans can remember the Holocaust," said Nates. "I would love South Africans to spend time thinking about their own families. A lot of them come from Latvia and Lithuania, certainly they have relatives who were murdered. I would like for the Jewish community to really think about where they come from and what happened to their relatives who couldn't come here.

"We need to try and collect those names so they won't be lost forever. Yad Vashem has only four million out of six million names. We need to ensure the other two million names don't become lost forever. The Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre together with the

South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the Memorial & Information Centre in Mauritius have called on our communities to collect the names by sending in the names of family members that don't have a grave. For us, that's a start."

Said Stav, "The only way to ensure that we pass this on to our children is to talk about it often. I speak about the *Shoah* with my family and community at least once a month.

"Evil doesn't care what we look or sound like. We have passed on the torch of faith, resilience, and morality for more than 3 000 years. The story of the Holocaust is the story of the Jewish people. We have been murdered, prosecuted, and expelled from our homes. And yet, through it all, we managed to survive. We always find a way to come out stronger. Those of us who know a survivor personally have experienced this first hand. Rebirth and resilience is our story. It's up to us to pass this torch to our children so they can continue to light the way."

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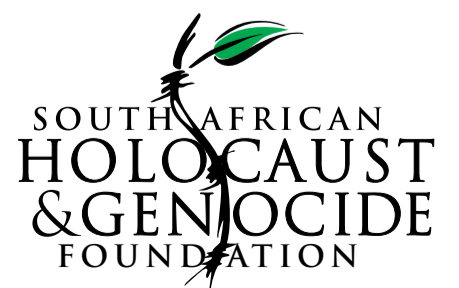


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Photos reveal Africa's Jewish tapestry

"My photographs try to weave together the complex tapestry of the Jewish African peoples segregated by historical, cultural, linguistic, and regional divides yet united by a faith in Hashem."

So says Jono David, a British-born photographer living in Japan who has travelled the globe to amass what is perhaps the most extensive archive of contemporary images of Jewish heritage and heritage sites in the world.

Included in his growing compendium of more than 120 000 photographs from 116 countries and territories is his collection of photographs of Jews in Africa from 30 countries on the continent. The best of these photographs are in a book titled, *The Jews of Africa: Lost Tribes, Found Communities, Emerging Faiths* that includes essays by scholars, rabbis, and African Jews.

"Between August 2012 and April 2016, I embarked upon eight unique Jewish Africa photo tours comprised of about 60 total weeks of travel to 30 countries and territories," David writes. "Ultimately, I archived about 65 000 Jewish Africa photographs, and I did so with the aim of answering one primary question: who are the Jews of Africa?"

"I was particularly interested in the

emerging black Jewish communities in places such as Uganda, Kenya, Ghana, Madagascar, Gabon, and Cameroon. Over the past 20 or so years, the phenomenon of religious renouncement and self-conversion to Judaism has, in some cases, as in Ghana,



Upshernish Johannesburg, South Africa

Cameroon, and Gabon, grown with the rise of internet connection there. Real-time connection is weaving a black Jewish tapestry across the continent," David writes in his book.

"So far, these small but fervent communities remain largely ignored by official entities in Israel and in the mainstream Jewish world. The century-old Abayudaya community in Uganda is officially recognised by Conservative Judaism, but that's an exception. Connections with outside Jewish organisations and rabbis are increasing,



Hiloula of Rabbi Isaac Ben Walid, Tetouan, Morocco

however, and official Jewish recognition remains an important aim.

"In my travels, these communities held a particular fascination, but I was equally mindful of the European-rooted congregations. I was curious not merely about their history, but about their manifestations of Jewish life in comparison to familiar ways in Europe.

"Today, while Jewish communities of the southern African region shrink and ancient ones of the Maghreb cling on [notably in Morocco and Tunisia], black Jewish groups are growing in number, in location, and in commitment," David concludes. "Following subjugation over the centuries by invaders both political and religious, motivating factors for this Jewish awakening are rooted in a quest for truth and identity, truth rooted in the tenants of Judaism and the Torah, an identity founded in self-determination."



Kiddush, Shacharit (morning) service, Beit HaTefilah Israel. Antananarivo, Madagascar



Hatikvah Jewish Community. Gondar, Ethiopia



Jono David at Jewish Pioneers' Memorial Museum (formerly, Raleigh Street Synagogue). Port Elizabeth, South Africa



Beth Yeshourun Jewish community spiritual leader Serge Etele (L) inspects a new mezuzah. Douala, Cameroon

B"H

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Eric's life and legacy continue to inspire us all to celebrate life, keep our traditions and spread the light with love and kindness.

See more of Jono David's Jewish work at JewishPhotoLibrary.com

Mental health at work needs more than 'tea and tissues'

TALI FEINBERG

Prioritising mental and emotional health in the workplace is good for business, but few companies have formal strategies to deal with these challenges.

Professor Karen Milner and psychologist Judith Ancer believe it's so important, they wrote a book about it.

Beyond Tea and Tissues: Protecting and Promoting Mental Health at Work looks at how to optimise employee well-being and manage distress, trauma, and mental illness in the workplace. They recently launched the book via an online webinar.

Milner, an associate professor of psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand, says she was motivated to write the book when she was consulting in a corporate environment a few years ago. "I bumped into a quite senior human resources manager who was very distressed. She had been talking to a colleague who had come to her for help – the colleague was extremely depressed and cried in her office. She described how she found it really difficult as she didn't have the tools to help her, saying, 'All I could offer was tea and tissues.' She felt inadequate and unhappy that she couldn't do more."

Milner teamed up with Ancer, and they started writing the book before the pandemic, but the way the workplace has been overturned in the past year makes their book even more

urgent.

Ancer, a clinical psychologist in private practice, says she was motivated to write the book because "my concern is that often clinical practitioners both in public service and private practice don't always understand the interface with the workplace. We hope this book will help them navigate it. And there is a lack of understanding from the workplace too.

"Mental-health policies aren't just a 'nice to have,'" says Milner. "We make a strong business case that depression can be extremely costly to companies. Businesses can't afford to lose skilled staff because of mental-health crises.

"Not only are the costs associated with poor mental health significant, but positive mental health, manifested as employee engagement and other positive mental-health states, has been found to play a key role in organisational success."

Ancer says the area they tried to cover is vast, and while it uses a lot of statistics and data, it's not only for academics or analysts but all people working with other people. She says in the South African workplace, mental-health conditions are particularly prominent as people battle with many social ills in their home lives.

The book looks at everything from loneliness, bereavement, loss, addiction, bullying and harassment, to dealing with difficult people who struggle to be part of a team or cause conflict with others. It also considers cultural

issues when managing mental health at work, identifying and managing personality, mood, and anxiety disorders in the workplace, and early warning signs of mental-health difficulties. All this becomes even more prominent in the COVID-19 era.

"A recent study in California showed that anxiety most affected the mental health of those in the 18-25 age group, and those are the ages entering the workplace," says Ancer.

The authors also look at the wider environment, and how personalities, management style, or systems can exacerbate mental-health problems. "We look at what organisations need to do not only to protect mental health, but promote mental health. The continuum doesn't end when someone has a crisis and is then okay. We want to help people to thrive as engaged employees who get meaning from their jobs and are productive members of the team."

Milner says it's worrying how much stigma continues to surround mental health in the workplace, and it's likely that the statistics are underreported as people hold back on revealing their challenges.

"They often hide it, or try to present a more cheerful face. They fear being seen as less competent," she says. Organisational culture needs to allow people to be vulnerable and normalise talking about mental health while still respecting a person's privacy and dignity.

Ancer says workplaces have a "moral imperative to treat mental-health challenges early and seriously". Furthermore,

organisational culture should respect downtime, leave, family time, and sick leave. If a person is expected to be available all the time, it undermines their well-being.

Milner says the past year has been a "mass experiment in the workplace", and it has been tough for workplaces to replicate in-person connection at an online level. It's important to re-establish rituals lost online, and to work to build connections. Also, it's important for people to find ways of marking the end of the workday when they are working from home.

The book isn't intended just for human resources managers, but all managers. "In my experience, managers can't just shift mental health onto HR or outside the organisation," Milner says. She says it will be useful for employees themselves, and although it includes theory and research, it has been "translated" so that everyone can find it accessible and helpful, including psychologists, laypeople, managers, and employees.

"We are in a time of change, and it's important for everyone to tolerate imperfection, including companies and businesses," says Ancer. Often, a mental-health crisis is as serious as a broken leg, and needs to be treated as seriously, Milner says. Organisations need to have a plan in place in case of a mental-health emergency, and understand that an employee might need to take time off to heal.

They hope the book will spark a new approach to mental well-being at work, saying, "This is a long road to travel, and there is a lot of work to be done."



Judith Ancer



Karen Milner

Letters

ONLY THOSE ON THE FRONTLINE SHOULD BE VACCINATED

I read in dismay of doctors, often in private practice who never see a COVID-19-positive patient, who are rushing off with their wives and administration clerks to get to the front of the queue to be vaccinated. I see psychologists and other allied professionals flaunting the fact that they have been vaccinated or elbowing their way to the vaccine table.

While this happens, nearly a million health workers in the public sector who are actually dealing with COVID-19-positive patients in surgery, anaesthetics, intensive-care units, and emergency departments, treating patients with hands-on care, haven't yet received their vaccinations. These are the frontline workers who are at risk. These are the doctors, nurses,

and allied professionals who are dying. They aren't there for the glory or the large salary but because they are committed to making a difference, to healing, and to contributing to a better world.

I urge all of you who aren't dealing directly with patients who breathe, cough, or spit at you, who can treat patients while maintaining a social distance and wearing masks, not to rush to the front of the queue. Leave the limited supply of vaccines for the real frontline workers. Everyone will get a vaccine. You may have to wait a few more months, but in the meantime, you can take precautions and be safe.

– Diane Fine, social worker in private practice

LOOKING FOR DESCENDANTS OF LITHUANIAN GREAT-GRANDFATHER

I would be grateful for any information a reader may have as I search for descendants of my great-grandfather, Eliahu Zvi Bloch, a Kohen who lived in Anassisc/Anusshishok, Lithuania, near the Latvian border, from roughly 1820 to 1900.

My grandfather, Elchanon, the son of Eliahu Zvi and his third wife, Sarah Oralowich, who grew up in an orphanage, is the only one of the family who emigrated to the United States. I recall hearing that some of Elchanon's siblings or half-siblings emigrated to South Africa in the first half of the last century.

I know very little else. I believe the family migrated to Lithuania from Germany around 1750 or 1800, that Eliahu Zvi's father lived to be 100, and that Eliahu Zvi was 66 years old when my grandfather was born. It's possible that some family members migrated to Israel, either prior to statehood or after living in South Africa.

I would welcome any information, even if marginally related to my family, such as knowledge of life in Anassisc/Anusshishok. I live in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States, and can be reached at farrellbloch@aol.com – Farrell Bloch, USA

PROTEST NOT A CREATIVE SOLUTION TO EDUCATION FUNDING CRISIS

Regarding your editorial (*SA Jewish Report*, 19 March 2021), in which you support Gabi Farber and others in protesting against inadequate funding for tertiary education, I agree with you about the importance of education and your sympathy for those who have difficulty financing their aspirations. Furthermore, I commend Farber for all the effort she has put in to explore multiple avenues to assist these students.

The truth as you so clearly state is that South Africa finds itself in a very difficult financial reality for multiple unfortunate reasons. But, confronting this reality requires creative and innovative ideas rather than avoidance with protests, which almost always result in significant vandalism – though

I'm certain that was never Farber's intention. In addition, whenever the government has been intimidated into providing additional funding for students as a result of violent protest, it has almost always been to the disadvantage of other South Africans in greater need.

I don't deny that there are times when protest is the only option available, but this isn't such a time. In her op-ed, Farber insists that all alternatives were explored before resorting to protests. However, if thousands of our brightest young people are unable to find creative ways out of their present difficulty, it's unlikely South Africa will ever extricate itself from its present quagmire.

– Fortune Alhadeff, Cape Town



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Time for Israelis to pray for South Africa

For as long as I'm able to remember, we have always added a number of prayers into our Shabbat morning service.

Aside from what was prescribed by the rabbis of yesteryear, we have continued to add and add, but somehow never seem to remove any.

It wouldn't surprise me at all if in 70 years' time, the Shabbat morning service has so many additions that it becomes a full day affair. In this sense, I'm grateful that I won't be around to have to endure that.

Somewhere during the service, "the congregation will now rise" for a prayer for the sick, for the South African government, for the welfare of the state of Israel, and for missing soldiers. There might even be more.

I believe it's time to revisit this. Whereas there's no doubt that the sick could do with our prayers, as could missing soldiers, I'm wondering if we should still be intoning a prayer for the state of Israel. Especially considering that it is in a much better place than we are. So much so, that I believe that they should be praying for us and not the other way around.

Ahead of Yom Ha'atzmaut, it might be the perfect time to reconsider. Given the state of the state of South Africa, I recommend instead that communities in Israel start adding a prayer for us in this country sometimes during their Shabbat services.

We have certainly done our praying bit, and I believe that it's well time they returned the favour. This isn't to say that we aren't concerned for the welfare of both the Jewish state and her people, but I genuinely think that we have significantly more to worry about than they do.

The United Nations supports my

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



contention. In its World Happiness Report of 2021, it offers unequivocal support for my motion. According to said index, South Africa is listed as the 103rd most happy out of the index's total of 149 nations, whereas Israel came in at 12th place. That's an improvement of two spots, in spite of the survey being conducted before the country went to its fourth election in a matter of two years. And yet, we pray for them?

Consider the vaccine roll-out. At the time of writing, according to the *New York Times* vaccination index, 0.5 out of every 100 South Africans received the vaccine compared with 114 for every 100 in Israel (the Pfizer vaccine requires more than one dose). Or to put it more simply, 269 000 South Africans have been jabbed against the virus versus more than 10 million doses in Israel. It's us who need their prayers, not the other way around.

And the economy and unemployment? Indeed, it might be true that property is expensive in Israel and there are certain demographics who suffer the ills of poverty. However, compare the booming start-up nation with our struggling economy, and it's clear who should be praying for whom.

And that's without Eskom.

I concede that my motivation is perhaps more about time in synagogue than it is about the principle. But even given my disingenuous agenda, it's worth considering just how much prayers for South Africa are needed.

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KDVP holds *siyum* for firstborn boys



Rabbi Mendel Rabinowitz addresses a *siyum* session for firstborn boys at King David Victory Park

King David Victory Park held a *siyum* this year to celebrate the completion of a section of Talmud. Participation in the event, run for the first time at the school by Rabbi Ricky Seeff, general director of the South African Board of Jewish Education, is seen as a *seudat mitzvah*, which mitigates the need for firstborn sons to fast on *erev* Pesach.

The fast of the firstborn before Pesach, *Ta'anit Bechorim*, is a long-standing custom connected to the last of the 10 plagues – the slaying of the firstborn

– in which firstborn sons fast to show appreciation for being spared from this plague. However, it's considered a lenient fast, and if a person is able to participate in a *seudat mitzvah*, they aren't required to fast.

Other examples of *seudat mitzvah* would be attending a wedding or a bris. In the case of the *siyum*, all those at the event and not only the person who completed the section are considered participants, and therefore don't need to fast.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Join us for Yom Hashoah

This Friday at 12:00, our community comes together to observe Yom Hashoah, which once again will take the form of a single, united ceremony for the entire country. If you read this in time, join us on this solemn day of remembrance, click on the relevant link on the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' (SAJBD's) Facebook site.

Three quarters of a century later, only a handful of survivors remain in South Africa, making their testimony even more important. Accordingly, the emphasis this year will be on passing the torch of remembrance to the next generation. We are privileged to be able to present addresses by six survivors from South Africa, Poland, Canada, and Mauritius. Each presentation will focus on a particular theme of the *Shoah*. Their message will be directed specifically at our youth with a view to strengthening the sacred duty of perpetuating remembrance and education about the *Shoah* into the future. The ceremony will also include traditional Yom Hashoah events such as reading the names of Holocaust victims (commencing just before the main event at 11:50), the lighting of the memorial candles, and the singing of the *Partisan's Song* and *Ani Ma'amin*.

Much planning has gone into ensuring that this year's single national ceremony is as inclusive as possible. Participants will include representatives from Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, Durban, East London, and Port Elizabeth, as well as Mauritius. I thank all those involved in putting this event together, in particular our national president, Mary Kluk; Tali Nates; and Heather Blumenthal, and the three Holocaust & Genocide Centres in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town.

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

ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



Lessons for South Africa from Freedom Seder

We have had a gratifyingly enthusiastic response to our virtual Passover Freedom Seder, held on 24 March, the Wednesday evening just before Pesach. Our guests from government, political parties, diplomats, university leadership, and media were given a "Pesach box" beforehand, including a Haggadah specially adapted for the occasion. For our keynote speaker, we were honoured to have former cabinet minister and provincial leader Mathews Phosa, who spoke about life under apartheid, his time in exile, and campaigning for human rights and non-racism. Afterwards, Investec Chief Executive Fani Titi reflected on 27 years of democracy in South Africa, while other participants comprising SAJBD leaders from the three main regions spoke about basic themes of the seder, charity, education, diversity, and the importance of learning from the past.

The event concluded with Rabbi Dovid Hazdan reflecting on lessons of human rights from the Pesach story. Just prior to the event, SAJBD National Director Wendy Kahn spoke at the World Jewish Congress Model Seder, sharing the concept of the South African Freedom Seder with it.

I commend Wendy and her team for putting together this very successful evening in spite of the short notice. It was an inspiring example of how our Jewish heritage can be used to share important lessons with our fellow South Africans and values relevant to our time and conditions.

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



IN ERIC'S HONOUR

Eric Jamson

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We, the Samson, Sank and Cohen families, would like to express tremendous gratitude for the outpouring of love, respect, support and admiration shown to us after the passing of our dear husband, father, grandfather and great grandfather.

The messages have been so very comforting and although we have not managed to respond to all of them personally, we are grateful to receive these words of comfort and the memories and tributes shared with us will be cherished always.

His name Ezriel means "G-d is my help" and this is what he was to all of us, the Jewish People, and the world. We are so grateful to have shared our lives with such a special and unique individual. He continues to inspire us daily and his memory is truly a blessing. Once again, we thank you.

Warmest regards

Sheila Samson and the Samson, Sank and Cohen families

"Spread the light with love and kindness"