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## Dutch compensate owners of Nazi-looted painting

A Dutch museum will compensate the rightful owners of a Nazi-looted painting the government said it could keep because displaying it would be in the public interest.

Museum de Fundatie in Zwolle has agreed to give \$240 000 (R3.4 million) to the descendants of Jewish Holocaust victims who under duress sold the 1635 painting *Christ and the Samaritan Woman at the Well* by

Bernardo Strozzi, the *Noordhollands Dagblad* reported on Monday, 19 April.

The painting, which was sold by Richard Semmel of Berlin, is one of several artworks that the Dutch government's restitutions committee has acknowledged as looted art. The committee holds, however, that the museums should be allowed to keep the paintings because the public's right to have access to culturally significant works outweighs the interests of the rightful owners.

This approach, unique among countries that say they are interested in resolving ownership issues among Nazi-looted art, has exposed the Netherlands to criticism.

It risks "turning the Netherlands from a leader in art restitution to a pariah", restitution expert Anne Webber and

Wesley Fisher, the director of research for the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, wrote last year in an op-ed.

The best-known looted item on display in the Netherlands is *Painting with Houses* by Wassily Kandinsky, whose worth is valued at \$20 million (R28.5 million) at least. Amsterdam's municipal museum, Stedelijk, acknowledges it was looted, but hasn't offered to compensate the rightful owners, who have sued the museum and lost.

## Macron calls for reform after French killer avoids trial



Photo: Jean-Francois Badias POOL/AFP

### French President Emmanuel Macron

After a man who killed his Jewish neighbour successfully pled that he was unfit to stand trial because of what a court called a marijuana-induced psychotic episode, French President Emmanuel Macron is calling for legal reform.

"Deciding to take narcotics and then 'going mad' shouldn't, in my view, remove your criminal responsibility," Macron told the *Le Figaro* newspaper in an interview published on Sunday, 18 April. "I would like the justice minister to present a change in the law as soon as possible."

A high court recently ruled that the killer, Kobili Traore, shouldn't stand trial for beating Sarah Halimi to death and throwing her out the window of her third-story apartment in 2017.

The CRIF umbrella group of French Jewish communities called it a "miscarriage of justice". The founder of the National Bureau for Vigilance Against Anti-Semitism, a communal watchdog known as BNVCA, said he "no longer had full confidence that antisemitic hate crimes in France are handled properly".

Traore, who is Muslim, called Halimi "demon", as he hit her for more than 30 minutes and shouted about Allah, witnesses said. After defenestrating her, he shouted, "A lady fell out the window", and tried to escape but was detained nearby. He was placed in a psychiatric facility and may be released.

## Warsaw unveils monument to ghetto archive

A group of Jewish organisations has unveiled a monument marking the area where a group of Jewish writers and activists buried an archive of material documenting their Holocaust experiences.

The commemoration of the Ringelblum Archive was timed to coincide with the 78th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising on Monday, 19 April.

A group of historians, journalists, writers, and social activists led by Emanuel Ringelblum and known as Oneg Shabbat collected the material – from reports and diaries to posters, drawings, and even candy wrappers – documenting the horrid conditions in the ghetto and hid the cache underground in metal boxes and milk cans. Most of the documents have been found. The monument at 28 Nowolipki Street, designed by Łukasz Mieszkowski and Marcin Urbanek, centres on a transparent cube containing a copy of an archival document.

## NYPD creates civilian panel on hate crimes

The New York Police Department (NYPD) is creating a civilian panel

to help address a rise in hate crimes in New York City.

Its five volunteer members will include Devorah Halberstam, a Hasidic woman whose son, Ari, was murdered by a terrorist in the city in 1994.

Spurred by a spike in hate crimes against Asian Americans, the diverse panel will help advise if incidents involving any group should be deemed a hate crime.

The NYPD already has a Hate Crimes Task Force and has set up an undercover Anti-Asian Hate Crimes Task Force in response to attacks on members of the Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders community.

The task force said 135 hate crimes had been reported in the city in 2021, compared to 93 last year. Through to the end of March, there were 20 antisemitic acts and 31 anti-Asian acts.

## Dutch soccer fans chant 'Hamas, Jews to the gas'

Fans of Dutch soccer team Vitesse chanted, "Hamas, Hamas, Jews to the gas" at a fan rally before a scheduled match against Ajax, an Amsterdam-based team known for its history of Jewish supporters.

Police began examining footage from the action on Wednesday, 21 April, which occurred in Arnhem, where Vitesse is based. The two clubs played on Sunday, and Ajax won 2-1.

Supporters and rivals of Ajax often affectionately refer to the club and its fans as "Jews" out of recognition of the centuries-long strong presence of Jews in Amsterdam. It's a pattern across Europe used for fans of teams in England, Italy, and Germany.

But in the Netherlands, the "Hamas, Jews to the gas" chant has become more commonplace in recent years.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

### Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
17:26	18:15	Johannesburg
17:56	18:47	Cape Town
17:10	18:00	Durban
17:30	18:20	Bloemfontein
17:27	18:18	Port Elizabeth
17:19	18:10	East London

### Torah Thought

## Why we should shun Egypt and Canaan

As the Jewish nation camps in the wilderness linking the land of the Pharaohs and the promised land, they are warned not to emulate the behaviour of their place of origin or that of their destination. The verse, in this week's Torah reading, instructs them, "Like the practice of the land of Egypt, in which you dwelled, you shall not do, and like the practice of the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you, you shall not do, and you shall not follow their statutes." (Lev. 18,3).

Literally, the instruction is to refrain from the notoriously decadent and immoral conduct of both nations. It remains as pertinent now as it was then. The ways of these two lands also refer to common pitfalls in our lives.

Canaan, the exciting new

destination ahead, is the symbol of our constant search for innovation. Too often, we become impatient with the status quo, and seek novelty for the sake of originality not necessarily improvement. The allure of newness and freshness in its own right draws us to abandon the tried and tested ways, and venture into uncharted territory. In this instant-gratification 21st century, anything that doesn't smell fresh and different is quickly dismissed as irrelevant and passé.

Egypt, the land from which we came, represents custom. This is our natural tendency to resist change, to continue doing what we have always done. An approach may have failed us in the past, but we still retreat into the safe cocoon of the habitual. It's crucial that we reflect and look

back, following traditions and rituals. South African Jewry prizes time-honoured customs, and this has held our community together through generations. At the same time, we must constantly re-evaluate whether a practice is still relevant (if it ever was), or is actually standing in the way of progress.

Generally, the younger generation restlessly head for the greener pastures down the road less travelled. Older folk tend to shelter in the sanctuary of convention. The Torah teaches us to shun both Egypt and Canaan, to critically analyse why we are refusing to change our ways, and why we are often in such a hurry to abandon the old ways for the new.



Rabbi Yossi Chaikin, Oxford Shul

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AUTO AFRICA



# Johannesburg shul robbed in broad daylight

NICOLA MILTZ

Following what appears to be one of the first armed robberies at a shul in Johannesburg, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein has described armed robberies targeting shuls and schools as previously “unheard of”.

Last Thursday, 15 April, at 11:30, two armed men robbed Kehillas Shomer Emunim synagogue in Percelia Estate. They entered the shul on foot and robbed Rabbi Adam Saffer and two of his congregants, Chaim Blumenfeld and Daniel Segal. The suspects allegedly had been seen loitering nearby before entering the open gate.

The robbers allegedly gagged the men with their yarmulkes, and tied them up using tallit which they cut using a knife from the shul’s kitchen.

They asked for car keys, and to be shown where there may be a safe containing money.

The suspects stole cell phones, laptop computers, and a black Toyota Run X vehicle belonging to one of the victims. No one was injured.

The incident has shocked the community and horrified Jews around the world as a number of distressing photographs and stories have been disseminated via social media and international news sites.

The photographs that were circulated appeared to be staged after the fact for dramatic effect, making the story that went around even more shocking. The photographs exacerbated fear in the community over rising crime, and lead to antisemitic comments online by people doubting the incident happened in the first place. It was also portrayed as an act of antisemitism.

In the wake of it all, the chief rabbi visited the shul last Friday night, and addressed the congregation.

He told the *SA Jewish Report* the incident was “an outrage which is deeply upsetting”.

“I offered words of support to the rabbi and congregants whom I found to be strong and undeterred in their attitude,” he said.

“Any incident of violent crime is deeply shocking and causes great trauma to its victims. It’s even more shocking when it happens in a shul, but of course, any attack, even in a home, is also a desecration of our

most sanctified space.

“This was definitely a criminal incident and not based on antisemitism, as reported in a number of international fake-news reports. It’s disappointing that this incident was portrayed in international media in a sensationalist manner without providing any real context.”

The chief rabbi said that the community had set up Community Active Protection (CAP) as a community-based, non-profit organisation precisely to counter the threat of violent crime.

“In the more than 14 years of its holy work, CAP has managed to bring down violent crime in its areas of operation by up to 90%. It does so through its combination of proactive patrol and investigation, a highly responsive call centre, and other innovative crime-fighting tactics. Of course, one crime is one crime too many,



and our vision at CAP is to aim for zero crime,” said Goldstein, who was the driving force behind CAP.

“What gives me confidence going forward is that CAP is getting more effective all the time, effecting more arrests than ever, and achieving the lowest crime rate we have had in a long time.

“The brilliance of its senior leadership, the professionalism of its call centre, and the bravery of all its tactical officers and investigators is inspiring. May Hashem continue to bless their holy and brave work in protecting us.”

Sean Jammy, the chief operating officer at CAP, said his team was “deeply distressed by the trauma experienced by the victims of the robbery at Kehillas Shomer Emunim.

“We are committed to bringing the perpetrators of this crime to justice. CAP’s security and legal division is assisting the SAPS [South African Police Service] to investigate the robbery. We are

suspects apprehended by our tactical teams and subsequently arrested by the SAPS since the beginning of 2020.”

He said the tireless work of its special intervention teams, controllers, field-intelligence agents, and ongoing proactive security patrols of its areas, coupled with a deep commitment to the latest technology interventions such as CCTV and LPR (license plate recognition), continued to bear fruit. “The combined crime rate across all CAP areas has reduced every year for the past three years, and the trends are similar for the start of 2021,” Jammy said.

The Community Security Organisation (CSO) immediately sent responders to the scene, and to surrounding shuls, schools, shops, and restaurants.

“Although we do work with security companies and the police, we can’t be everywhere at all times. Our facilities also need to take the threat of crime seriously, and put in the necessary measures to keep themselves and the community as safe as possible,” said Jevon Greenblatt, the director of CSO Johannesburg.

Greenblatt said it was imperative to take all necessary steps to secure yourself, your family, and your community as much as possible.

“The key is to prevent something from happening, not to react when something happens,” he said.

This includes being vigilant about what’s happening around you, keeping your facility’s doors and gates closed and locked at all times, and if possible, hiring security guards from a reputable security company. You should ensure your alarms, panic buttons, electric fences, perimeter and interior lighting is in good working order and checked regularly. Ensure that you have a trained team of community volunteers to protect your communal facility during key times such as Shabbos, *yomim tovim*, and larger communal events. Immediately report anyone or anything you deem suspicious.

The victims have declined to comment.

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# Charlotte Maxeke fire was like being in a movie, doctor says

NICOLA MILTZ

Jewish healthcare workers this week described incomprehensible scenes of mayhem and camaraderie as smoke from a fire at one of Johannesburg's biggest public hospitals forced them to rush to evacuate hundreds of patients.

The disastrous fire at the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital (CMJAH), which broke out on Friday, 16 April, has been eclipsed by the fires which ravaged the University of Cape Town and surroundings this week.

The hospital has been temporarily shut while the extensive damage and destruction to the building is assessed. No less than 800 patients have been relocated to already over-burdened hospitals in the province.

Dozens of adrenalin-pumped healthcare workers and emergency personnel worked through last Friday night in suffocating smoke to ensure patients' safety and continued care.

Some patients could walk, others were speedily carted around in beds, and dozens were transported in wheelchairs, many with IV drips and attached to oxygen.

Miraculously, there were no fatalities from the fire itself, but it's believed many severely sick patients suffered during transportation to other facilities.

Professor Mervyn Mer, the head of intensive care at the hospital, was looking forward to his first weekend off in 13 months and spending time with his family when he was called with the news. He immediately helped from afar with emergency logistical arrangements.

"It has been a truly devastating saga. It's heartbreaking for me," he told the *SA Jewish Report*.

Mer was instrumental in setting up the innovative, ground-breaking intensive-care unit at the hospital last year, doubling the size of the unit and saving dozens of lives during the pandemic. His vision was to improve outcomes in the unit long after the pandemic. He doesn't want to think about what the repercussions could be should the structural damage from the fire put an end to this dream.

"Life throws you curve balls, but you have to move forward. If we have to start again, we will. The damage is done, but the message is that the fire that was ignited in

our healthcare workers to save and make a difference in people's lives will never be extinguished," he said.

His involvement on the day was peripheral, he said. "The real heroes were the men and women across the spectrum who were there making sure that patients' safety came first."

One of the Jewish doctors on call that day said nothing could have prepared her for this.

"It was an awful experience, one I will never forget," she said.

Speaking on condition of anonymity, she said she was still recovering from smoke inhalation.

What began as a normal shift at 07:00 on Friday turned into a horror movie a few hours later.

"At about 09:00, I was working in one of the clinics on the fifth floor when I smelt smoke and it began to irritate my airways. I thought at that stage we should clear out, but people said the fire was under control," she said.

This couldn't have been further from the truth.

"Two hours later, the nursing sisters told us to move our cars. I started to fill out scripts and tell patients to come back as they couldn't just wait in the smoke."

She said there was heavy smoke throughout the day.

At about 16:00, she was needed in one of the wards on the ninth floor in Green Block.

"I noticed the lift was full of smoke, so I decided to take the stairs. The corridors were full of smoke, and so was a lift shaft coming from the parking lot all the way up to the ward."



Hospital staff evacuating patients during the fire at Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital

"There was confusion, we didn't know where the smoke was coming from, and didn't know where to take our patients. We were literally in the dark. We decided to take patients to the other side of the building by the entrance on the ground floor to get fresh air.

"The whole night was spent moving patients. At one point, they were breaking windows to get air. Some lifts weren't working. At one stage, I was genuinely scared the building would give way. This was disaster management, nothing could have prepared me. People came from their homes to help. It made a huge difference, we had a great team.

"It felt like a movie the whole time. At some point, I thought things would slow down but they never did. I was running on adrenalin. I didn't realise how much smoke I was taking in until much later."

A Jewish senior trauma surgeon said it was a logistical challenge to relocate hundreds of patients.

Also wishing to remain anonymous, she said, "I was involved from the outside with contingency plans and moving patients. We started by making plans to move patients to the other side of the hospital. As the day progressed and the fire worsened, it became too hot for the firefighters and we realised the building itself may lose structural integrity. We then started plans to evacuate the entire hospital."

There was a united front with additional help from the private sector, she said.

"We managed to find hospital beds throughout the province. Some of our sicker patients were transported with nursing staff to continue their care. The evacuation went on through the night. By late Saturday morning, we had emptied most of the hospital.

"Initially there was confusion about what to do. A lot of extra doctors came to help, and there was a strong sense of leadership. It's a compliment to the medical and emergency fraternity that the operation went off fairly seamlessly without casualties. When the going gets tough, people in their numbers show up and go above and beyond," she said.

Intensive-care nurse Ricki-Lee Serebro wasn't on call when the fire broke out.

"Seeing your 'home' on fire is the most terrifying experience," she said, "especially when it was happening and we didn't know how bad it would get and how far it would spread. Even though I wasn't at work, I was stressed about our patients and my colleagues and all the stock including PPE [personal protective equipment], which has been like gold this past year. I'm in awe of the hospital management, doctors, and nurses who transferred the patients so quickly to other hospitals.

"At the moment, I'm working in Steve Biko Academic Hospital in Pretoria. The commute takes a lot longer – it's more than 50km compared to 10km to the CMJAH. Being in a different hospital is exciting as we are learning different ways of doing things, however we are disorientated so everything takes longer. We miss our home. Hopefully we will be back there soon."

Dr Barri Strimling, who recently moved to the Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital from the CMJAH said, "The CMJAH is a very special place. We have all given hours of our life to that facility. COVID-19 has taught us to think on the spot, and go to plan B. It has blown my mind how medical personnel and emergency services managed to orchestrate this evacuation to perfection. They are true heroes."

Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said the blaze had caused severe damage to parts of the hospital. PPE to the value of R40 million that was stored at the hospital was lost in the fire. The cause of the fire and the extent of the damage is being investigated.

# Cliff finds faith in interview on religious tolerance

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

Gareth Cliff, a long-time religious sceptic, had a moment of revelation on Wednesday, 14 April, when he interviewed Rabbi David Rosen on national television for his ENCA programme, *So What Now*.

Rosen is known for his work on promoting interfaith dialogue around the world. Cliff is known for being a "shock jock" who airs controversial views, including his opposition to religion and religious practitioners.

"For a very long time, I've made no secret of the fact that I've been a vehement critic of religion," Cliff said in the interview. "I've laid the blame for some of the world's major tragedies at the door of religion. But I do appreciate the profound, positive influence of religion for so many people. Religion has helped many people through this tough time, and so much good is being done by religious leaders."

Cliff explained why he chose to feature Rosen on his national television programme. "He is the foremost voice in the world on interfaith dialogue. It was interesting to hear his thoughts on how much we have in common, and how the differences we have can be respected, whether Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or non-religious. In the interview, I reflected on my own changing opinions with respect to religion. This pandemic has been particularly difficult for many people and connection, religion, and spirituality has helped many through it."

Rosen's international accolades are long, including knighthoods by the Vatican for his work in promoting reconciliation between Catholicism and Judaism, and by Queen Elizabeth for promoting interfaith relations.

He holds senior positions in interreligious affairs and intercultural dialogue across the religious spectrum.

The rabbi spent five years in South Africa in the 1970s as rabbi of the then largest Orthodox Jewish community in the world – Sea Point's Marais Road Shul. He regards this time as being seminal to his career. "It determined my future," he said of seeking to break down apartheid's divisions. Out of this commitment to social justice, Rosen discovered interfaith relations.

In response to Cliff's question about growing atheism and intolerance between religions in a "progressivist" society, Rosen said, "What sells media is sensation, and that's mostly negative news. However, the truth is that never in the history of time has there been as much communication and collaboration as we have in our time.

"Generally speaking, the world is getting more

many who aren't religiously affiliated, but define themselves as deeply spiritual and are searching for meaning," Rosen said.

"Young people are looking for their identity in areas like politics, which gives them less fruit than religion," Cliff said.

"Many of the problems of affluent society with drug culture, cults, and so on is that people are searching for stimulation because they find their lives boring or meaningless," Rosen said. "However, religions haven't stepped up to the plate adequately. Institutional religion globally hasn't succeeded in responding to the search of young people."

Rosen maintained that some religions had dealt with pandemic restrictions better than others. Faiths which depend on mass gatherings or services have struggled more than those that "infuse daily life with a sense of holiness", like Judaism, for example.

"For Judaism, synagogue is a secondary institution. Home is the primary religious institution – major celebrations are around the family table. It's okay to pray at home by yourself," although he admitted there were challenges around marriages and burials.

"One of the fascinating things is the alacrity of religion's response to modern technology," Rosen said. "There has been a remarkable collaboration between science and religion. Often these are stupidly juxtaposed as polar opposites. Science tells us how things work, religion tells us what they work for."

On the subject of religion and philanthropy, he said, "Mosques and churches get to numbers that no NGO [nongovernment organisation] can reach. The largest world interfaith body, Religions for Peace, received a large grant from the Gates Foundation to

assist AIDS orphans. Why? Because so much care and social services are provided by religious institutions."

He pointed out that mental health had become an equally pressing issue during the COVID-19 pandemic. "Religions give a sense of security, value, and meaning beyond the material. It has become more important to people when facing challenges like the existential challenges faced this year."

Asked by Cliff about religion's history of intolerance, Ruben quipped, "Just because there's such a thing as the mafia, doesn't mean that families are bad. We have an awful history as humanity in how we have addressed the diversity and glory of creation. We need to take responsibility for that, and confess our guilt for the failures of the past.

"Difference is part of the glory of creation. We should be able to identify commonalities, but there's nothing wrong with being able to admire something that's not part of your own identity, culture, and religious tradition, and celebrate that.

"Something only religion can teach is that human beings are created in the divine image, and the way you treat the other is ultimately the way you relate to G-d. This is basic to all religions, but we haven't actually preached it. We need to reconnect with the authentic moral, ethical message of our traditions."

He maintained that much of our current progressive, liberal framework is built upon the scaffolding of Judeo-Christian and Islamic tradition. "Values of justice, righteousness, love, caring for the vulnerable in society don't come from the materialistic world view. Moral impulse is rooted in the religious world. Secular society is the beneficiary of this."

Nevertheless, Rosen pointed out that the tension between secular society, modernity, and religion was necessary to contain religion's power, which when unchecked, could be abused.

Cliff said the interview had generated a positive response, saying, "People are hungry for conversations that don't just scratch the surface, or deliver watered-down opinions and social-media rhetoric."



religious," Rosen said, referring to a recent United States Pew Research Center poll in which 84% of the world described religion as important in their life. It contradicts many other surveys which show people defining themselves as not having a particular faith. "What we can conclude from that is that there are



# COVID-risky simchas ‘like Russian Roulette’

TALI FEINBERG

As COVID-19 numbers remain low, many young Jewish couples are taking the opportunity to get married. But at every *simcha*, one can see social media and livestream images of maskless retinues and guests, hugging, kissing, dancing, group selfies, large family photos, and *Horah* dancing. Even some rabbis aren’t wearing masks or keeping a social distance.

Wedding musicians, speaking on condition of anonymity, say it has become too much, and feel that COVID-19-safe *simcha* protocols need to be widely distributed and closely enforced for the safety of the community, wider population, and vendors who put their lives on the line every time they work at a wedding.

They say they have seen reckless behaviour by adults at many *simchas*. They are speaking out after a respected videographer landed up in hospital in January on oxygen, and a well-known bass player died from COVID-19 last year. They fear they’ll be next.

The performers say that on previous occasions, they have been pressurised by families to forget about COVID-19 rules. Some have been told that “COVID-19 is over” and that guests flying in from overseas (some of whom have been vaccinated) don’t need to wear masks, or that guests don’t need to abide by the curfew.

But when performing at Barmitzvahs and Batmitzvahs, they say that children and teens are stringent about wearing masks and keeping a distance, which shows that it’s possible to have a COVID-19-safe *simcha*.

“They all dance and eat apart. They really are leading the way. It’s like that campaign that told children to get their parents to ‘buckle up’. They choose to take it seriously. They don’t want to remember it as ‘when granny died because she caught COVID-19 at my Batmitzvah’,” says a performer.

They have witnessed some families thinking carefully about how to make a wedding joyful and safe. “For example, one mother of the bride got a guarantee from the retinue that they would quarantine for 10 days before the wedding and have COVID-19 tests two days before, and only they would dance at the wedding,” says another vendor.

A member of the community who attended a recent Jewish wedding in Cape Town, speaking on condition of anonymity, says, “When we walked in, everyone was sanitised and temperatures were taken. There were also masks at the door and kippot. People were mostly wearing masks, but as expected, they came off later in the night when people ate and

drank and for photos. People were generally quite dispersed as there was an outside section, but I suppose I’d be lying if I said it was proper social distancing – a bit hard at a wedding.”

That may be the crux of the matter – having a COVID-19-safe wedding isn’t easy. And yet our community has been advised by top experts in the field to make it possible. Professor Efraim Kramer, who actually chose to cease advising the community because of its flouting of COVID-19 protocols, says the recommendations he wrote “are the standard wedding protocols that have always been in use [during the pandemic], irrespective of the

drink, or alcohol into the premises except wine/grape juice for the chuppah. No dancing should be done at any time. No communal singing should be done at any time except the designated performer. Remain in your seat after the traditional glass has been smashed until the bride and bridegroom have left the chuppah area. You may clap at the appropriate time as often and as loud as you wish. Please leave the premises immediately after the wedding ceremony without any socialising.”

Kramer has also laid out protocols for every aspect of the wedding, from the pre-wedding reception to the bride and groom’s table, to

it does, we will only know after a delay, and the rise will be helped by super-spreader events – particularly in the early part of the rise. I appeal to people not to provide those super-spreader events.

“My colleagues in India are having an incredibly rough time, and when that variant makes it here, again our knowledge about it will be delayed,” he says. “Even for people who feel comfortable about relaxing their guard, that shouldn’t extend to large in-person events. Please, don’t contribute to a new wave, and don’t allow you and your loved ones to be hurt by it. Stay away from large in-person events.”

Professor Barry Schoub, emeritus professor in virology at the University of the Witwatersrand and the former director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, agrees that lower COVID-19 numbers aren’t a signal to relax vigilance.

“Being a respiratory spread infection, the coming cold winter weather may well herald the anticipated third wave. These precautions still apply equally to those who have been vaccinated. Particularly problematic are *simchas*, when many of us seem to lose our common sense and throw caution to the wind, risking tragic consequences.”

Kramer makes no bones about what these tragic consequences might be. “The COVID-19 pandemic is a classic case of Russian Roulette. Sometimes there are many bullets in the gun chamber, and sometimes there are few, but there are always bullets in the chamber. Remove COVID-19 precautions at mass gatherings, and you pull the trigger and wait to see if someone dies. To ignore standard precautions at these events is against the law, against expert medical advice, and against common sense. We cannot wish COVID-19 away, and sadly, because of our irresponsible behaviour, we will bring on the next COVID-19 tsunami. When it comes, we will only have ourselves to blame.”

• Please see our website [sajr.co.za](http://sajr.co.za) for the full wedding protocols written by Professor Efraim Kramer.



COVID-19 level. The protocols were given to the Beth Din and any rabbi doing a wedding who wanted them. They are a public resource. All rabbonim are aware of the protocols, legislated precautions, and expert medical advice. They have the power and authority to ensure everybody is COVID-19 compliant for the chuppah ceremony, which they control. Whether they choose to exercise their power to ensure safety is the million-dollar question.”

In the document, Kramer sets out COVID-19-safe guidelines for all Jewish weddings during the pandemic. He recommends that each family should appoint a COVID-19 safety supervisor for the event. At the wedding, each person must go directly to a labelled chair with his/her name on it. They must remain in their seat for the entire ceremony, and wear an appropriate face mask at all times.

The protocols show that during a pandemic, a wedding must just be a chuppah – no dancing, eating, drinking, or socialising. But it’s clear that most weddings under COVID-19 don’t abide by these recommendations.

“Don’t socialise away from ones designated chair,” the protocols state. “Don’t bring food,

the *bedeken*, chuppah, and civil-marriage registration. He also provides a “wedding kit” list – everything needed for a Jewish wedding in the COVID-19 era, including a medical screening register document.

Says Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, “As a chuppah is a religious event, there are Beth Din-mandated health and safety protocols endorsed by our medical panel which have been communicated to the rabbonim and shul committees. Regarding private events, including wedding receptions and other *simchas*, we have strongly recommended and requested that people follow the Hatzolah health and safety guidelines for private gatherings. I joined in the Hatzolah video plea to our community to maintain caution and all protocols to prevent a third wave.”

If these protocols aren’t followed, the ramifications could be serious. Jeffrey Dorfman, associate professor in medical virology at Stellenbosch University, says, “The rate at which people are being diagnosed in South Africa with COVID-19 is low for the moment. However, that will surely change, although no one really knows when. When

## Community fights fire on all fronts

>>>Continued from page 1

flames behind their houses as metres high. We had to get fire engines to different places, and phone people to evacuate. This morning [Tuesday] I woke up, heard the helicopters, and just burst into tears, because I knew it was going to be okay.”

Four United Herzlia Schools (UHS) campuses sit in the shadow of the mountain. “As the fire was getting closer, the roads alongside Herzlia Highlands Primary were evacuated,” says UHS education Director Geoff Cohen. “At 06:20 on Monday morning, we made the call to keep the UHS City Bowl campuses closed. There was a huge amount of smoke. In addition, the traffic from getting 1 000 pupils to school would have got in the way of the firefighters. We asked the district commander his advice yesterday afternoon [Monday], and he said the fire was still unpredictable, so we kept

the schools closed again on Tuesday.” Amidst all this, “We decided to evacuate the schools’ Torah scrolls. It was an easy decision – they’re a symbol of who we are.”

Photographer and videographer Chad Nathan captured the scene across the city. “I’m fascinated with fire fighters – I see them as real life superheroes,” he says. “It was literally just me on the [closed] highway. At one point, it was very intense – I couldn’t breathe, couldn’t see – that’s when I thought I had better get out of there. It was really sad seeing people evacuate their homes. And I saw some people refusing to leave.”

Says Shenker, “I will forever be grateful to the fire-fighting heroes. Let’s hope we can rise from these ashes stronger, more mindful, and more protective of our planet.”



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## Fiery message in the embers

It’s one week before Lag B’Omer, and it seems to me that all we are hearing about right now is fire.

Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital in Parktown was severely damaged by a fire last Friday, and Cape Town was burning from Sunday until late Tuesday this week.

It has been said that Johannesburg firefighters didn’t have the infrastructure to contain the hospital fire with speed, hence the extensive damage. There were also disparaging words about the hospital not having an emergency plan, and its fire hydrants not being in working order.

However, in spite of everything, not one person was injured in the fire, and the hospital team managed to get each of about 800 patients out safely and to other hospitals. Some might say it was miraculous.

In Cape Town, the fire raged for days and seemed to be stretching further and further into suburbia and the City Bowl. It gutted beloved iconic Mother City landmarks like the Windmill on the side of the M3, and University of Cape Town’s (UCT’s) Jagger Library, which forms part of the UCT Libraries Special Collections.

A ministerial home was gutted, as well as so many other houses. About 4 000 students in residences were evacuated, and many others who live and work on and around the mountain.

Firefighters didn’t sleep as they focused on their mission to put out the fire. Helicopters flew backwards and forwards with sea water, dropping it onto the fire to try and douse it. Firefighters’ nerves were frazzled, but they kept going until they finally succeeded in putting out the fire late on Tuesday. The problem was, the firefighters explained, every time they thought they were gaining control over the fire, it kept reigniting.

Amidst the mayhem, all sorts of people did incredibly brave deeds to save human and animal lives, precious items, and memorabilia. Read our story on page 1.

The young Rabbi Nissen Goldman rushed into the Kaplan Centre of Jewish Studies on UCT campus, close to the Jagger Library that burned down. He risked his life to save the Torah housed in Kaplan Centre.

Across town the following day, Herzlia’s director of education, Geoff Cohen, evacuated four Torah scrolls from Herzlia Highlands Primary. The whole school was closed on Monday and Tuesday as the fire was way too close for comfort, and smoke hung over the school like a pall, dropping ash everywhere.

You can, of course, think what you want, but I believe there is something very symbolic in these fires. Fire in Judaism is an extremely powerful symbol. Remember, G-d convinced Moses of his existence when he spoke to him from a burning bush.

We light fire to welcome the Sabbath, and we light up to end the Sabbath and begin a new week. We light candles to remember those who have left us, and we speak of our eternal flame being the light within us, our souls. This flame is also believed by many *tzaddikim* to be Torah, which is believed to keep Judaism alive.

Now, in Judaism there are two types of fire, the fire that burns, which is the unruly fire as experienced in Cape Town and at the Johannesburg hospital, and then the fire that gives light (as in domestic fire). Wildfires, while they may be caused by humans, are uncontrolled and forces of nature. They take with them everything in their path, burning the good, the bad, and the ugly. By destroying iconic landmarks and a massive library filled with historic books, there is a message for us about protecting the old, but also letting go what we can’t save because we don’t have total control. Could it be that it’s a message to let go of the old and make way for the new?

Or to preserve what you can, but remembering that lives are so much more important than belongings or things. Even iconic buildings aren’t as important as lives.

It’s astonishing that with all that could have gone wrong with both fires, there were no deaths. And in the Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital, not one of the many sick people – some of whom were in intensive care and on ventilators, hooked up to drips, and unable to walk – were injured or harmed because of the fire.

It’s mind-blowing that in spite of what sounded like fiery mayhem, they were all safely transported and accommodated in another ward in another hospital. Read our story on page 4.

In both fires, there were people who risked their lives to save others. I’m always amazed at how in times of crises, heroes emerge. Sometimes it’s those you least expect who step up to the plate to help. And of course the firefighters and medical staff who put their own lives in jeopardy for other people were simply incredible. *Kol hakavod!*

### Crime and weddings

Fires and crime seem to be on the increase all over Johannesburg and Cape Town. We have to take every precaution to prevent it happening to us. I know that’s easy to say, but we have to ensure we have adequate security and use it at all times. (See page 3.) And we have to make sure our protection against fire is up to date and ready just in case we need it. There are people who can advise us on this. Take their advice, and safeguard yourself and your families.

In this edition, we also look at how many weddings have taken place this year where COVID-19 protocols have been mostly ignored. Now, I would never want to dampen the happiness of newlyweds, but we would all hate it if one of these weddings became a super-spreader event. We have put the COVID-19 wedding protocols on our website. Take a look at it, and let’s be responsible. Again, take precautions to avoid distress and trauma.

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



## Extreme fear or unfettered activity both unhealthy during COVID-19

OPINION

DR DANIEL ISRAEL



Every time we drive our vehicles into the streets in South Africa, we embrace real risk. The Automobile Association of South Africa has previously quantified that risk as 1 in 101 (1%). Almost every facet of our lives is strewn with inherent risk. This concept is apparent in larger life decisions: the risk in making a career choice, the risk in choosing who we marry, the risk of emigration. It’s also equally apparent in smaller life choices: the risk in making a worthwhile investment, the risk of trying out a new restaurant on an important occasion, or of swapping smartphone brands!

Risk taking with our most valuable resources seems counter-intuitive. Surely, the greater the value, the less risk we should tolerate? Our children ought to grow up in risk-free environments. Yet, we know that risk is inseparably paired with opportunity. It’s a catalyst for growth, and a necessary ingredient for daily life. We gladly put our children through daily risks for their own development: contact sports, unaccompanied travel, and so on.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which is now developing a somewhat endemic flavour in South Africa in its 15th month (in the absence of mass-population vaccination), is no exception to this risk model. Perhaps COVID-19’s greatest challenge to the individual is to embrace risk responsibly. Let’s explore.

A basic tenet of Judaism is the value of preserving human life over all. The Torah commands us to “live by the *mitzvot*”, not die by them. This concept is translated into a strict principle – *pikuach nefesh* – in other words, any risk that threatens life must be extinguished. Even the mere possibility of a life-threatening risk is intolerable. When COVID-19 hit our shores in February 2020, the risk of death based on the experience in Wuhan was palpable. The government took the decision to shut down the country in deference to *pikuach nefesh*. Saving lives supercedes all. Even with strict lockdown measures, both nationally and communally, the loss of life and devastation over the next few months in South Africa became formidable.

The appropriate societal knee-jerk reaction was to tighten measures and remain socially isolated. In fact, preserving an approach of “hiding away until the pandemic is over” seemed achievable for most South Africans. However, as the indicators surfaced that this pandemic may indeed last a couple of years and as several months of social and economic dysfunction followed, it became more and more apparent that the “no risk” approach was damaging us economically, developmentally, spiritually, and socially. Ironically, after the first and second waves, we re-engaged in outside life with new case numbers significantly higher than they had been, even in the initial no-risk-tolerated pangs of the pandemic.

This was, perhaps, the juncture at which I noticed, as a GP, our community’s approach to COVID-19 becoming polarised. Individuals who had been personally affected by COVID-19 seemed to maintain strict measures of infection prevention. Those who hadn’t either chose to continue the same strict approach, or to deflect and nurture the importance of risk taking. The vast majority of patients felt that risk investment in their personal lives outweighed the risk of serious complications should they

contract COVID-19, and pushed for resumption of “normal” life, in spite of not being vaccinated.

Balancing risk is the most important task incumbent upon every community member, especially at this perplexing time between a second and probably third wave. I strongly believe that, other than in exceptional high-risk individuals, aversion to all risk is detrimental to well-being. COVID-19, with its variants, vaccination challenges, and higher-than-ever worldwide infection rates, is here to stay for the short-term future at least. I have treated significant numbers of patients with mental-health challenges and neglected chronic diseases because of irrational risk aversion. Children need to develop friendships and learn the important formative skills of outside-world independence. Keeping them cooped up at home or preventing them from playing sport (for example) will damage their development. Grandparents need to spend time with their families, especially if COVID-19 prevails over the last years of their lives. Businesses need to take on expansion and new ventures. Treading water is a poor approach to build prosperity and preventing income loss.

I believe that advising patients to “stay home and save lives” is now inappropriate and detrimental (other than in extraneous circumstances). Furthermore, this approach creates a far bigger contingency in our society that swings to the other extreme and exercises no caution. The danger in this latter approach is far worse.

I also believe that throwing off masks, attending indoor packed events, and not limiting social-event sizes (for example) is just as inappropriate and unacceptable, especially in light of the possible increase in new cases.

It requires every family and individual to decide on an approach that will allow them to function in the long term without incurring unnecessary risk. Masks, hand sanitising, and social distancing still save lives. It’s up to each unit to decide on balanced measures like small social circles to mitigate risk, strict mask wearing in public places, outdoor socialising, individual family member isolation after inadvertent high-risk behaviour, and so on.

Although the answers aren’t always clear or even consistent, I firmly believe that every individual in our society has a personal responsibility to create for himself/herself a list of COVID-19 rules in an attempt to stay safe, prevent danger to others, but as importantly still to allow himself/herself the opportunity for growth. We imminently await a mass rollout of vaccination, but the reality is that never before has the world attempted such a widespread vaccination programme. It will take a long time. On an individual level, even after receiving a vaccine, risk still exists.

If you are someone who has either kept every one of your guards up since Level 5 lockdown or you have gone to the other extreme and are even doubtful about whether “COVID-19 poses much danger in South Africa anymore”, please think again. Find a balance. Embrace risk responsibly, and review your approach often.

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





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# Another way to look at SA’s COVID-19 vaccine roll-out



OPINION

PROFESSOR BARRY SCHOUB

Going into our second year of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been fed an ample diet of despair, blame, and negativity, especially when it comes to the vaccine plan – or perceived lack thereof. From what I gather from colleagues overseas, we’re no different to many other countries with a free press. In South Africa, fashioning a negative narrative isn’t too difficult.

To start with, the country last year failed to secure vaccines while so many Western countries were on a buying frenzy to pre-order the as-yet unproven COVID-19 vaccines for their citizens. Then, when South Africa eventually did manage to secure one million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine in February this year, no sooner had the vaccine landed on our shores than its distribution was stopped in its tracks and the consignment was “dumped” onto some other “hapless” African countries. There was still no vaccine.



Vaccination sort of started up at a snail’s pace via a phase 3b implementation study, using the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine to vaccinate with urgency our hard-pressed healthcare workers, only for it to be stopped again. Why?

This time because of some vanishingly small risk of blood clots which were reported in the United States!

So, now in mid-April, a quarter of a percent of the country’s adult population have been vaccinated, compared to Rwanda, Ghana, and Senegal each having already reached 2.8%, 2.5%, and 2.3% of their respective populations with the first dose of vaccine.

Now, let’s look at another narrative on the same series of events.

Undoubtedly the COVID-19 pandemic has been a seriously damaging event. It has disrupted lives, cost livelihoods, hammered economies and, of course, not to mention, taken more than three million lives globally and at least 50 000 in South Africa. Infection-prevention restrictions have been uncomfortable, tedious, and mentally challenging. However, consider for a moment how challenging COVID-19 would have been had it occurred but 15 years ago, when it could have taken several years rather than 10 months to develop a vaccine.

## Strike on Natanz nuclear facility strategic or short-sighted?

OPINION

HARRY JOFFE



A story broke in *The Jerusalem Post* on 11 April that Iran’s Natanz nuclear facility had once again been attacked. According to the paper, the site’s electric grid and its backup system were destroyed along with a large number of centrifuges. It estimated that the latest attack had added nine months to Iran’s breakout time.

This isn’t the first time this facility has been attacked. In 2010, it was struck by a mysterious Stuxnet computer worm believed to have been a joint effort between the Israel Defense Force’s (IDF’s) 8200 Unit and the National Security Agency of the United States (US). In July 2020, it suffered a major explosion, where, again, according to *The Jerusalem Post*, it was estimated that three-quarters of the above-ground centrifuge assembly facility was destroyed.

It’s therefore no surprise that this particular facility was targeted once again. The only question is, why now, and why was Israel less secretive about this operation? This time around, there were leaks to the local press and barely concealed satisfaction from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi (chief of general staff of the IDF). Previously, they refused to comment.



The answer, of course, is the resumption this past week of talks in Vienna between Iran and various other countries (Britain, France, Germany, China, Russia, and indirectly the US) in an attempt to resuscitate the 2015 nuclear deal.

The close link between the two events is unlikely to be coincidental. By attacking the nuclear facility now and almost leaving a calling card this time, Israel no doubt attempted to reap some strategic benefits.

First, a clear warning was sent to the US. The US’s negotiating officials have stated that they want any return to the 2015 deal to be accompanied by amendments to the deal to make it “longer and stronger”. However, Israel and its new Gulf allies fear that any changes to a newly signed deal will be cosmetic and not address their fears.

While it’s unlikely that Israel is against a nuclear deal *per se*, Israel has three key clauses that it insists must be included in any upgraded deal. If these aren’t included, Israel fears its security will be severely compromised.

The most important amendment to the 2015 deal is no “sunset clause”. The current nuclear deal which placed limitations on Iran’s nuclear programme would expire in 2030, and this is unacceptable to Israel.

It requires a much longer limitation on Iran’s nuclear

programme. The second key problem, according to Israel, is the lacuna that the 2015 deal didn’t address Iran’s ballistic missile programme, which Israel finds unacceptable.

Israel’s third problem with the 2015 deal is that it didn’t address Iran’s malign activities in the Middle East, and its destabilisation of various neighbouring countries.

Israel believes it cannot live with a new agreement that doesn’t address these three key issues, and this strike is a statement of intent to the US. It says, “Sign a deal that doesn’t address our concerns, and we won’t be bound by it.” Or, even more directly, “If you ignore our concerns, expect a lot more attacks and instability.”

What’s increasing Israel’s anxiety and no doubt caused it to strike now is Western efforts to achieve a breakthrough in negotiations before the 18 June Iranian presidential election. Israel fears a more hardline leader could emerge and scupper talks.

This rush to reach a settlement, Israel fears, could lead to the US signing a new deal prematurely, before all the issues are adequately addressed.

Many commentators believe the Obama negotiators were outmanoeuvred last time by the Iranians, and Israel no doubt wants to raise the temperature now as a warning not to rush into a situation of being similarly outplayed.

The second reason that now would be a good time to strike the facility from the Israeli point of view is that Israel knows Iran doesn’t want any major escalation at this stage. It would put any new agreement at risk.

Israel could feel safe in therefore taking another shot to “change facts on the ground” without fearing any major retaliation. That has proven true. While Iran has threatened to retaliate, it hasn’t done so. Also, its move last Tuesday, 13 April, to announce it would be enriching uranium to 60% purity might have worked against it.

The US and European parties to the deal called the move “provocative”, and warned it was contrary to efforts to revive the deal abandoned by Washington three years ago.

On the other hand, some commentators are speculating that the Israeli strike could backfire. With Iran enriching uranium to 60%, in spite of the strike and the damage it caused, it could make the US and Europeans more anxious and lead to them pressurising their negotiators to reach a deal quickly. That could therefore achieve the exact opposite of what Israel intended, and lead to a hurried deal being signed, with Israel’s key concerns not adequately addressed.

It’s well known that in international geopolitics “timing is everything”, and this doubtless caused Israel to strike when it did. It remains to be seen, however, whether this more aggressive attempt by Israel to influence the nuclear talks will bear fruit, and whether the strike achieved its tactical and strategic aims.

This will become clearer in the next few weeks as the game of diplomatic and military poker plays out.

• Harry Joffe is a Johannesburg tax and trust attorney.

Let’s consider if the government had listened to the howls from the media and also the handful of howlers from the medical profession, and it had bought up a population’s supply of vaccine, say AstraZeneca. We may then have been stuck with 80 million doses of a vaccine which science has shown may well be ineffective against the dominant variant of coronavirus in this country – B.1.351. Fortunately, it bought only one million doses, which was sold to other countries on the continent where B.1.351 is either non-existent or a minor component, and where it could well have been a lifesaver.

Universally, it’s agreed that first in line for COVID-19 vaccination are the country’s healthcare workers. Fortunately for South Africa, a well-planned clinical trial in this country included elderly participants who would be vulnerable to severe disease, ultimately what we would want to establish in a candidate vaccine. It showed that the J&J vaccine effectively prevented severe disease from B.1.351 coronavirus.

On the coat tails of that trial, J&J donated vaccine for our healthcare workers in a phase 3b implementation study, the so-called Sisonke programme, which commenced in February. The programme, like any other trial, comes with certain regulatory requirements. Among these is the appointment of independent monitoring boards including an ethical monitoring board. The latter is tasked with looking out for any safety signals among participants anywhere in the world where the study is being carried out, no matter how rare. Like any trial, once a safety signal is reported, no matter how rare, safety monitoring requirements oblige the ethical body to hit the pause button while the assessment is carried out. This pause isn’t a suspension of the trial, and is usually only for a few days. In the case of the recent clotting safety signal with J&J in South Africa, the pause lasted about four days. Clearly, a four-day pause out of a 90-day vaccination programme couldn’t have had a serious effect on the vaccination benefit, especially in a time of low virus activity.

The COVID-19 vaccine roll-out programme itself is planned to begin in May. It’s undoubtedly delayed compared to most Western countries and even a significant number of middle-income countries. Starting in May, it will be about four months later than Western countries. And yet, the number of COVID-19 deaths per million population in South Africa is less than half that of the United Kingdom (UK), the first country in the world to kick-off a national vaccination programme. The UK has reached 49% of its population with the first dose of the vaccine, and is only now coming out of the longest and most stringent lockdown in the world.

It’s also worth bearing in mind that many of those middle-income countries against which we are compared and which are well ahead of us in their vaccine roll-out programmes, are probably driving their programmes with vaccines which haven’t been approved by any stringent regulatory authority or the World Health Organization, and wouldn’t currently receive approval from our regulatory authority, SAHPRA (the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority).

Meanwhile, after much tough talks with vaccine manufacturers involving complex and difficult negotiations on procurement contracts and liability, sufficient amounts of the two premier vaccines, J&J and Pfizer, both effective against the B.1.351 variant, have been secured to vaccinate the entire adult population over 2021.

Maybe, just maybe, there’s another way to look at the half-filled vaccine vial.

• Barry Schoub is the chairperson of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on COVID-19 vaccines. He is the founding director of the National Institute for Communicable Diseases, and professor emeritus of virology at the University of the Witwatersrand. He isn’t employed by the department of health, receives no remuneration from the department, and isn’t a spokesperson for the department.



# Mahmoud Abbas ready to ‘remove obstacles’ to relations with US

RON KAMPEAS – JTA

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said he was ready to “remove obstacles” to renewing ties with the United States, apparently signalling a willingness to stop the payments to the families of Palestinians who have killed Israelis and have proven to be a stumbling block.

Speaking on Sunday, 18 April, to J Street’s annual conference, Abbas also urged the participants of the liberal Middle East policy group’s forum to lobby congress “to repeal all laws that block the road toward enhancing Palestinian-US relations”. The current law designates the Palestine Liberation Organisation a terrorist group, and bans direct aid to the Palestinians as long as payments are made to the families of Palestinians jailed in Israel for any terrorism-related offense.

“On our part, we will remove all obstacles to achieve this goal,” Abbas said. “The continuity of these laws is frustrating and unconstructive.”

Abbas didn’t outline which “obstacles” he planned to remove, but his pledge, however vague, was a sign of Palestinian eagerness to re-engage with the US after years of virtually no relations under former President Donald Trump. Trump mostly ceased ties with and assistance to the Palestinians, in part because of the payments, but also because the Palestinians rejected his peace proposal, which recognised Jerusalem as Israel’s capital and allowed Israel to eventually annex parts of the West Bank.

At a news conference on Monday, J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami encouraged Abbas to reform the payment programme and make other changes, including ending anti-Israel incitement in official Palestinian media and textbooks, and holding long-delayed elections.

“I think the principle that the Palestinian Authority understands is that even many of those who have goodwill towards the cause of the Palestinian people are deeply disturbed by the shape of the current programme, and we’d like to see reform,” Ben-Ami said.

The Palestinians have long argued that Israel’s terrorism laws are too broad and are applied promiscuously. But they have privately acknowledged that payments to those who have killed civilians – as opposed to those convicted of lesser crimes, including membership of banned organisations – complicates their case.

President Joe Biden campaigned on restoring assistance and reopening diplomatic ties with the Palestinians. He has already restored nearly \$300 million (R4.3 billion) in aid through United Nations relief agency UNRWA and other platforms.

In asking J Street to seek the rollback of US laws, Abbas named the 1987 law designating the PLO, an adjunct of the Palestinian Authority, as a terrorist group. The law has complicated US-Palestinian relations for years – setting up a Palestinian diplomatic mission in Washington DC, for example, required a special waiver. Abbas suggested that the basis for the law was moot, noting that the PLO had recognised Israel and entered into agreements with it.

The J Street conference, held virtually this year, was a celebration of the group’s renewed influence now that Democrats hold the White House and lead both chambers of congress. There were greetings from an array of Democrats, including moderates like Representatives Elissa Slotkin of Michigan and Abigail Spanberger of Virginia, and party leaders Representatives Nancy Pelosi and Senator Chuck Schumer. Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the American ambassador to the UN, spoke on Monday evening.

Also speaking were Israeli leaders who oppose the right-wing government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, including Ehud Olmert, who succeeded Netanyahu following Netanyahu’s original tenure in the 1990s.

J Street, once an organisation that sought bipartisan reach and managed to attract a handful of Republicans to its conferences, now makes no pretence of being anything other than in the Democratic camp. Speaker after speaker at the conference extolled the ouster of Trump and Democratic wins in congress. The Jewish Democratic Council of America, a partisan group, hosted a session on political strategy.

One of the many topics tackled at the conference was an exploration of a Palestinian-Israeli confederation as a means of preserving the two-state solution. Also on the agenda was advocacy for restrictions on how Israel spends US assistance. Last week, J Street endorsed a bill that would ban Israel from using US funds on jailing



Palestinian minors, destroying Palestinian buildings, and annexing Palestinian land. For a group that calls itself pro-Israel, it was a notable break from the pro-Israel orthodoxy that American financial assistance to Israel is sacrosanct.

Senator Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass, who spoke on Monday afternoon, said “it would be irresponsible not to consider all of the tools we have at our disposal” to influence Israel, including military assistance. Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who spoke that night, delivered a similar message. During their unsuccessful presidential bids last year, both Sanders and Warren said aid to Israel should no longer be untouchable.

Unusually, Warren also weighed in on coalition negotiations in Israel, advising parties not to endorse Netanyahu for another term. Warren likened the situation facing the party leaders to Americans who in November united to remove Trump from office. Israel’s elected leaders should do the same, she said, and give the Israeli people a new prime minister.

“Will they continue to fight among themselves and, in the process, prop up a corrupt leader who puts his own interests ahead of those of his country?” she asked, referring to Netanyahu’s current trial on corruption charges. “Or will they join together to begin the difficult task of rooting out corruption and reinstating the rule of law?”

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# Dying art of caring: lessons from 34 years in a Hospice

MIRAH LANGER

“Some day, we will all die, Snoopy,” is the declaration of Charlie Brown in the Peanuts cartoon by Charles Schulz. “True, but on all the other days, we will not,” is Snoopy’s famous, gentle retort. It’s this cartoon that palliative nurse Janice Malkinson carries with her as a reminder of the deeper philosophy behind her work, which spanned 34 years at St Francis Hospice in Port Elizabeth until her recent retirement.

Looking back on a career that started with training at Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town at the age of 17, Malkinson says she hopes to have made “whatever path the patient was on that little bit lighter or easier”.

It’s a humble reflection for a medical professional who has received international recognition for her humanitarian work by being awarded a Paul Harris Fellow through the Rotary Foundation. She also served as a past chair of the Port Elizabeth Union of Jewish Women and on the committee of the city’s Jewish Benevolent Fund.

Born in Pretoria shortly after World War II, Malkinson grew up in the small Western Cape towns of Mossel Bay and Worcester. As a child, she says nursing “was the only thing I ever thought of doing”.

In those days, student nurses immediately began



Janice Malkinson receiving the Rotary International Paul Harris Fellowship from Dr Heather Rauch

“It was great fun!” she says with a laugh. “It was about bringing life into the world.”

In the interim, she returned to South Africa and settled in Port Elizabeth, where she got married and had three children. She also studied to be a paramedic and volunteered in the field, later teaching the course to first-year-university pharmacy students.

In 1978, a friend told her about meetings that were being held at a local hospital on palliative care. Malkinson went along to a meeting, and soon started working as a volunteer. When St Francis Hospice was later formally established, she first volunteered and then later became a full-time staff member.

Her first patient was a young mother who had a brain tumour. “Her children were the age of my youngest child.”

The night before Malkinson was to visit, she remembers getting so nervous that she lost her voice. She had to be coaxed by Port Elizabeth’s Hospice founder, Lesley Lawson, to go, and it was with this gentle nudge that she began her true calling.

From that first visit onwards, she took steps to place herself in the right frame of mind to care for the terminally ill.

“Generally, I walk quickly and work quickly. I remember on that first visit, parking my car, and jumping out – and then stopping, thinking, this patient is in bed, she can hardly move. I need to slow down.”

It’s a practice she adopted over the next decades of work.

“Before each patient, I would take a moment to be aware of where I was and the patient’s circumstances.”

Malkinson worked both in the in-patient unit of Hospice when it was in operation and travelled door-to-door across the length and breadth of Port Elizabeth communities attending to patients at their bedsides.

“My job became the opposite of paramedic work. I couldn’t save or cure them. It was about making them have a life, day-by-day, as they were, and where they were. It was to make each day for them as kind and as good as it could be, to help alleviate symptoms and to listen.

“Especially in the early years, the families of patients couldn’t bear to hear the reality of their experience. People kept telling them, ‘It’s going to be okay; you’ll see, you’ll be better. It was so hard for the patients. They needed them to acknowledge the reality, to have them say, ‘I hear what you say.’”

Malkinson has seen society grow tremendously in its ability to cope with these difficulties. However, she laughs wryly that mentioning she’s a Hospice nurse is still a definite conversation killer at dinner parties!

Yet, the truth is that the work isn’t just the doom and gloom people imagine. “There is such warmth, because in these circumstances, life is so real and kind. There are still happy times around the table as families gather. You see families grow together

and come nearer. You see people take in other people who haven’t got a place to stay. I remember there was one woman who heard about a school friend she had last seen when she was 15. Her friend was now ill and not being cared for properly. She went to fetch her friend, and brought her to her home. You hear of incredible women who take back the man they divorced and care for them in their days of

need.” Overall, says Malkinson, “the work has given me much more than I’ve given”. Nevertheless, according to her colleagues,

Malkinson’s legacy is profound. Lawson says Malkinson’s gifts lie in both her head – in her extraordinary expertise and knowledge – as well as her heart. “She is just fully present to her patients.” Trevor Wiblin, the director of Hospice who retired alongside Malkinson after nearly two decades of service, says he has received countless letters from the families of patients in gratitude for the work she did. He jokes that she had to often be “reigned in”, so unconditional was her sense of service and dedication. Hospice’s Dr Niel Malan said her work could be described only in superlatives, recalling times when she went into dangerous areas and even after experiencing problems with this, still “went back because they needed her”. He said she was, in fact, the first Jewish person with whom he had ever had close contact. “My goodness, what an example of humanity, of kindness, of sincerity!” Malan says. “She has taught me so much.”

## Israel and SA get down to business

MIRAH LANGER

The South Africa Israel Chamber of Commerce’s (SAICC) new chief executive, Jonathan Shapiro, is on a mission to facilitate business between the rainbow nation and its start-up counterpart, focusing on “the greater good”.

“Because of the sensitivity around the world towards Israel, one of our goals would be to try and change the perception of Israel,” says Shapiro. “The best way of doing that is to actually change the lives of lots of people in South Africa. So, there’s definitely a humanitarian drive.”

Shapiro maps out three phases for SAICC’s work. “Phase one is a focus on the commercial side and deal facilitation. It’s about introducing Israeli companies to South Africa and vice versa. Phase two would be to host webinars with Israeli companies and organise business tours to Israel. Phase three would be a greater focus on taking South African companies to Israel.”

He said the SAICC wanted to make connections with Israeli commercial sectors that could really help South African society such as those producing medical and agricultural technology and cyber products.

The chamber is at various stages of talks with about five companies in Israel about products to bring to South Africa. The one closest to execution is a product in baby care medical technology.

Within Israel, it’s engaging with a diversity of businesses including those of native Israelis, Americans living in Israel, and ex-South Africans.

“Each of them is just as excited as the other to do business with South Africa,” Shapiro said.

Ex-South Africans probably understand the challenges of the market best, he said, and are usually passionate about trade because of their roots and ongoing family ties.

For Americans based in Israel, South Africa is interesting for commercial case studies as it offers both a first and third-world market.

Israelis are excited to grow beyond their domestic market, but often need to adjust previous research and development strategies as usually these are based on an American market. “So, it’s a learning curve.”

“Israelis also know that there’s a strong Jewish community in South Africa, and they are quite excited about getting involved in that.”

However, SAICC itself is a non-profit, apolitical organisation

that isn’t affiliated to any religion.

The chamber supports complete inclusivity, he said. “Our message is that we are open to everyone, and that everyone has an equal opportunity to get exposure to the companies in Israel.”

In terms of what South African offers for Israel, Shapiro sees potential in financial technology products as well as some manufacturing of fast-moving consumer goods as a start.

Shapiro, who turned 30 shortly before taking up his new position at the SAICC, is a born and bred Johannesburger and King David alumni. His day job is running his family’s electric engineering company which remarkably primarily employs people with disabilities.

It’s in connection with this that Shapiro first met SAICC chairperson Marc Lubner, who also heads up Afrika Tikkun. Through their interaction, he became interested in getting involved with the chamber.

“The SAICC is a passion project. I’m a Zionist. I’m passionate about business and honoured to be in the role to try and make a difference and fly the flag of Israel and South Africa. There is a motivation for doing good and it’s such a key component to having full-rounded success.”

Lubner said Shapiro brought, “entrepreneurship, intellect, and personality” to his work in fostering business relationships across countries.

“His appointment is indicative of new energy that is being invested in the activities of the chamber,” he said.



Jonathan Shapiro



Janice Malkinson at her graduation

working as part of their studies. She recalls feeling “overwhelmed” the first time she entered Groote Schuur Hospital.

“I couldn’t even find the ward where I needed to go. It was the surgical ward, C Ward, on the third floor, and I remember I was late because I got a bit lost. I walked in, and the sister asked me who I was. When I replied, she said, ‘G-d, een bliksem se Jood [one damn Jew] in the whole lot of student nurses, and I had to get her!’”

“At the end of my three months with her, she said to me, ‘Ek wil net een ding sê: as ek hoer al ooit daar is nog ‘n Jood, ek sal sê, ‘Ek wil haar hê!’ (I want to say just one thing: if I ever hear there is another Jew, I will say, ‘I want her!’).”

When Malkinson graduated, she was still so young that she couldn’t get her epaulettes until she turned 21. By then, she was training to be a midwife in London, first at the Chelsea Hospital for Women in South Kensington and later in the countryside in Ealing, replete with her very own “Call the Midwife” bicycle.

She recalled a time that it was pouring with rain, and she was pushing her bicycle because it had a puncture. “A big truck driver stopped, and I thought, ‘Oh boy! He wants to put my bike on the back and offer me a lift!’ Instead, he stuck his head out the window, and asked if I could give him directions – everyone knew the nurses knew the area. So I gave him directions, and he left me standing in the pouring rain, still pushing my bike!

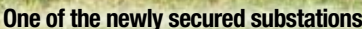


**MIRAH LANGER**

In addition, because substations were easily accessible by anyone, "criminals would conduct a

Once communities have raised funds, the sites are then secured professionally with brackets and various types of locking systems. Community security officials also help with patrols, keeping a watchful eye on the

About 15 to 18 substations have been secured in this manner. Fine isn't involved in his capacity as an electrician, and doesn't make any profit. He's simply happy to help each community with advice and support as to the best process to follow. He also runs a WhatsApp group called "Protect our Power" that



"It's unfortunate that this is the way it is. But if you look at organisations like the CSO, CAP, Hatzolah,

Tzipporah Berman, a resident involved in Fine's project, says it has changed their lives significantly. "The most common time cables were getting stolen was a Friday afternoon because thieves needed money for the weekend. Then we were going into Shabbos, and had no electricity. It was really imperative that something was done. Now, we hope other areas will do the same."



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# The great British botch-up of justice against Nazis

MIRAH LANGER

Only one Nazi war criminal was ever tried and convicted in Britain. In fact, most Nazi war criminals and collaborators who hid in the United Kingdom (UK) were left alone by authorities and allowed to enjoy peace and safety for the rest of their lives. That’s according to Phillip Rubenstein, who served as the director of the All-Party Parliamentary War Crimes Group in the UK in the 1980s. This organisation campaigned successfully to change the law to enable the prosecution of Nazi war criminals living in the UK. Rubenstein shared his experiences in a lecture delivered to the Lockdown University run by Wendy Fisher. The lecture was screened in South Africa through the Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre. Rubenstein reminded the audience that, after the war, the experience of the Holocaust was mostly shrouded in silence for decades afterwards, and little action was taken against perpetrators. For example, between 1945 and 1985, there were seven requests for extradition of Nazi war criminals living in the UK, and none of them were honoured – the British

government using technicalities as an excuse. In the 1970s, interest in the *Shoah* began to increase, and “one of the manifestations was that Western governments started to wake up to the fact that they were harbouring Nazi war criminals usually unbeknown to them”. In October 1986, the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles compiled a list of 17 individuals which it claimed were Nazi war criminals living in the UK, and sent it to then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The government didn’t respond in the first few weeks, but the centre also contacted some members of parliament. A group of MPs from across party lines decided to form a group to “push, prod, ask questions, and find out what the British government proposed to do about the list”. In the interim, the media got hold of the list through a separate leak, and began its own investigation, exposing the fact that there were Nazi criminals in the UK. Moreover, the Soviets also handed over another 34 names in this regard to the British government. By now, media attention ensured there was a public outcry, but for weeks, the government still didn’t respond. “The

issue had turned into a ‘hot potato’. No one wanted to deal with it, and it was being passed from pillar to post,” notes Rubenstein. Eventually, it was given to then-Home Secretary Douglas Hurd, with whom the group immediately asked for a meeting. “So, we sat down in front of him, and he said it was a case of good news/bad news. ‘We have looked at the list, and we have found that of the 17 individuals who are on here, six of them, we can confirm, are still alive and well and living in the UK,’ Hurd said. ‘The bad news is there is absolutely nothing that can be done because we don’t have any law which says that if you commit a crime – even murder, mass murder, or genocide – outside of this country before you were a UK subject, you can be prosecuted for it.’ That was how the meeting ended.” The government then set up an independent inquiry, with Rubenstein quipping that the motivation seemed to be that “the inquiry takes so long to sit and pontificate and report that by the time it’s reported, everyone would have moved on”. In the interim, Rubenstein’s group launched a research project led by historian David Cesarani to determine how Nazi

criminals got to the UK in the first place. The majority of the Nazi criminals found in the UK were Baltic nationals from Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania, or from Poland or the Ukraine. Indeed, researchers discovered that they had been some of the estimated 30 000 local officials who had collaborated with the Nazis *einsatzgruppen*, the troops given the task of murdering mostly Jews, as well as Roma and dissidents once an army invasion was successful. In 1944, when the tide began to turn in the war, many collaborators pretended to have been innocent civilians or part of the Polish Free Forces to be eligible as “displaced people”. After the war, a “displaced person” would be able to get food and shelter on one condition: that they were not a Nazi



war criminal or collaborator. Every army involved in bringing displaced people over was required to ensure this criterion was met. “Most of the armies applied poor perfunctory screening; probably the worst offenders were the British army which hardly screened anyone.” The only time on record when anyone was refused by the British was when a group of seven Latvians, still in their Waffen-SS uniforms, applied. In fact, recalled, Rubenstein, researchers came across one incident when a relief worker came upon 20 Baltic nationals in a displaced-persons camp who all had the same scar under their left armpit. “She discovered the reason why they all had that scar there was that they all had an SS tattoo there and they’d all had their tattoos removed. When she mentioned this to her superior officer, she was told to get on with it, shut up, and do her job.” “Why were the British and others so uncaring about this issue?” mused Rubenstein. There was some element of influence from the Cold War whereby anyone who was anti-Bolshevist was seen as welcome, but Britain’s attitude stemmed mostly from a much more practical place. “As a result of the depletion of men during the war, there was a critical labour shortage.” The government was therefore carefully selecting displaced people based on who best could fill in this gap. Jumping ahead to February 1989, the government’s war crimes inquiry then finally released its report. In its conclusions, it declared that following investigations, “to take no action would be to taint the United Kingdom with the slur of being a haven for Nazi war criminals”. The report called for the prosecution of a number of the cases of alleged Nazi war criminals living in the UK, and for criminal law to be changed in order to do so. However, the parliamentary process met some open antisemitism. It was only through the intervention of Thatcher that the Bill allowing such prosecution was eventually passed in 1991. After this, a metropolitan police force specialist unit was set up. Over the next eight years, it investigated almost 400 suspects. In all that time, there was only one trial: that of Belorussian born, retired British Rail ticket collector Anthony Sawoniuk, who in 1999, was found guilty of the mass murder of Jews. Three months after his trial, the police unit closed down. Rubenstein reflected on a comment that Labour MP Llin Golding made after being asked on a previous occasion if getting the Bill passed wasn’t a waste of time. He quoted her response: “This Bill may not lead to a single prosecution of a single Nazi war criminal living here. But at least it might give them bitter fear that one day soon, someone will knock on their door and make them answer for the suffering they inflicted.”

## Nation of miracles creates magic

MIRAH LANGER

As a miracle nation, time and time again Israel has pulled the blue-and-white rabbit out of the hat, offering innovation and pride to Jewish communities around the world. Its 73rd birthday was a great occasion to celebrate not just these wider charms, but the country’s great success in the very concept of magic itself. The South African Zionist Federation did just this with a Yom Ha’atzmaut online performance of world-famous Israeli magician, Lior Suchard, who delighted the audience with all sorts of mentalist mind games and alluring illusions. Using split screens and multiple cameras, he turned the computer screen into its very own labyrinthian location. Indeed, says Lior Manor, the president of the Israeli Magic Club during an interview with the *SA Jewish Report*, the country was at the helm of discovering ways to take magic online in exciting and dynamic ways when COVID-19 hit. “A lot of people said that magicians couldn’t perform effectively online. But we said, ‘Ok we are going to break the rules and show you we can do a Zoom performance. Not a dull show but like a television special’. This innovation began in Israel, and it became fun to do. We transferred everything through technology, made it interactive, and we make people happy!” Manor, who has been practicing magic since the 1980s, completed degrees in mathematics and computer science at Tel Aviv University – “like every Jewish mother wants her son to do”. However, then he met a magician who inspired him to change career paths. He had great success, becoming the first magician in Israel to get his own television show. Manor now works mainly in the field of “infotainment”, in which he is hired by corporate high-tech

companies to explain products using magic. It’s a perfect blend of Israeli’s excellence in these two sectors. He says magic became popular in Israel quite late mostly because “it wasn’t considered a good profession when you were expected to be a doctor, lawyer, or in computers”. When magic did take off in the country, it was mainly seen as entertainment for children until people began to enter the field from a more academic standpoint. For example, Manor says magicians think a lot like mathematicians. “When we see a problem, we look for a different, clever way to solve it. We use a lot of out-of-the-box thinking.” Today, mentalism – magic that focuses on using observation and the mind – is a particularly popular branch of the practice in Israel. Israelis not only practice it, but have invented new tricks in this field.



Geller was, in fact, at the helm of another big moment in Israeli magic when he launched the reality TV show in 2006, *The Successor – The Next Uri Geller*. The winner of this ratings smash was, in fact, Suchard, who went on his own meteoric rise. Manor says when the Israeli Magic Club first started in 1980, it had about 12 members. At one stage, there were then two magicians’ societies in Israel – “you know what it’s like, it’s really Jewish, like when you need two synagogues,” he jokes, but the two associations eventually merged. While traditionally magic has been a male-dominated profession in Israel, there has been an increase in the involvement of women and Israel’s head magician recently was illusionist Dahlia Pelled. Today, the club hosts more than 200

volunteering, doing shows in hospitals or for children in need. “This is something of which we are really proud; it’s our *mitzvah*.” One of the most exciting experiences for the fraternity was the international Blackpool Magic Convention held last year, shortly before the world went into lockdown. One hundred Israeli magicians, the largest contingent from any country, flew El Al to England, entertaining crew and passengers along the way. They filled their hotel, and even gave the chef recipes to make shakshuka and other Israeli delights. The hotel filled the lobby with Israeli flags, and the delegates transported a Torah from Israel for daily services. Manor says that a good dose of Jewish *chutzpah* is what probably makes Israeli magicians so successful. “You have to know how to talk, how to persuade, how to read minds, and you need to know what will happen if you fail – how to get out of it. A lot of that is in our culture.” Asked as to whether his mother ever forgave him for his unusual career choice, Manor jokes that although at the beginning, she kept asking, “Why magic?”, when she saw I was making more money than a programmer, and I started doing shows on television, then she became very proud. The morning after the show, she would go to all the neighbours and the grocery store to check if everyone saw me and liked the show!” Manor muses more seriously on his parents’ place in Israeli history. Both were Holocaust survivors, his mother in Auschwitz for four years, during which time she was placed “in the line for [Josef] Mengele and escaped at the last minute”, and his father in the Warsaw ghetto, surviving injury twice. “After the war, they decided to come to Israel. My father was a colonel in the air force.” Manor’s career in the wonder and joy of magic is surely a culmination of the marvel of Israel.

Manor says there have always been a large proportion of Jewish magicians throughout history, starting with Harry Houdini, whose father was actually a rabbi, and including contemporary acts like David Copperfield and David Blaine. Spoon-bending Uri Geller was the first Israeli magician to make a global splash. While he is a superb showman, says Manor, there is some controversy over claims he has made in the past about supernatural abilities.

members including its youth branch, which has members between the ages of 14 to 18 who are training in the craft. Within the mix are religious and secular Jews, including a handful of haredi magicians. There are also two Arab Israelis in the community. “We have a big WhatsApp group, and I don’t allow any politics. You can upload pictures of what you did in a show, or if you are looking for help.” Another big drive of the collective is



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# Ancient Baghdadi list offers clues to Jewish roots

ASAF SHALEV – JTA

In the late 1800s, the Ottoman Empire was seeking to conscript men into its army, including the several thousand young Jewish ones who were living in the city of Baghdad.

The Jewish community didn’t like the idea of the imperial forces taking away its young men, so it arranged to pay authorities for exemptions. Rabbi Shlomo Bekhor Husin of Baghdad documented the exemptions, carefully jotting each down name in medieval Rashi script.

In the following decades, many of those names vanished or morphed as the Jews living there dispersed across the globe. But the lists survived, and now are housed at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem – if you’re willing to deal with the microfilm format on which they are preserved.

Retired Israeli diplomat and independent researcher Jacob Rosen-Koenigsbuch has squinted to read and translate every single one of the nearly 3 500 names on Husin’s lists. And the lists are just one of the dozens of idiosyncratic sources that Rosen-Koenigsbuch has consulted in his years-long hunt for lost Jewish family names.

Rosen-Koenigsbuch, 73, has published

the world’s most complete lists of Jewish surnames from the cities of Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, and — as of this week — Alexandria. (Next up are probably Basra, Mosul, and Erbil, he said.) The four lists have been combined by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency into this searchable database. (If you know your name belongs but isn’t there, email Rosen-Koenigsbuch, who’s always making additions and corrections.)

Before I spotted Rosen-Koenigsbuch’s

research on the internet, I had only once ever seen a written reference to my family’s original Baghdadi last name. The generically Israeli sounding “Shalev” was “Shaloo” until my grandfather changed it upon moving from Iraq to Israel in 1951.

An act of assimilation, the switch was easy because “Shalev” and “Shaloo” are spelled the same in Hebrew script: shin-lamed-vav. The letter “vav” is capable of making both an “oo” sound and a “v” sound.

I searched and found no “Shaloo” on Rosen-Koenigsbuch’s list. But I did find a “Shellu”, and it felt close enough. Maybe, I thought, that was just how he had transliterated a name that could be spelled out any number of ways.

“One of the biggest problems in this work is transliteration,” Rosen-Koenigsbuch said on the phone from Jerusalem as he began to confirm my inkling. “There are different ways to pronounce the names and different ways to spell them.”

I asked him where he had found “Shellu”. He pulled up his sources and quickly told me that the name appeared three times. First, he told me about Husin’s Ottoman exemptions, and among them was a young lad with the name spelled “shin-lamed-vav”. Shellu. Shaloo. Shalev. Bingo! This could be a forgotten ancestor.

Then, he said the name appeared twice in a 1950 registry from Iraq. This was a list of people whose citizenship was revoked during the Iraqi Jewish exodus – definitely my ancestors. After years of curiosity and some research, I had finally made a genealogical breakthrough.

Rosen-Koenigsbuch started on the surnames project while doing his own genealogical research. But his family isn’t from the Middle East; they’re from Poland.

“My parents were Holocaust survivors,” he said. “And they didn’t speak. My father was completely silent.”

To learn anything about his family’s past, he had to dig.

He discovered elaborate family connections, and eventually gave lectures on his findings. Audience members with Mizrahi heritage would approach him, and they tended to have a certain reaction.

“I would hear this mantra,” he said. “We don’t know anything about our families because we left Egypt or Syria or Iraq in a hurry. We left everything behind, and the archives are closed. We came out alive from those countries, but the documents aren’t with us. In Europe, most of the Jews were annihilated but the archives are open.”

Rosen-Koenigsbuch, who served as Israel’s ambassador to Jordan from 2006 to 2009, had the geographic interest and some of the linguistic knowledge to find out what kind of information might still exist in spite of the lacunae.

He decided to focus on surnames, and found thousands of them in historic newspapers, business directories, a circumcision registry, court records, previously published research, and through the help of social-media groups dedicated to the various Jewish diasporas.

None of these sources are comprehensive. Your family was more likely to be mentioned somewhere, for example, if you donated money or if you sent your kids to Jewish schools.

“There are many limitations, but we have to try to gather the history because we still have among us people in their 70s, early 80s, and in 10 years, there will be no one to talk to,” Rosen-Koenigsbuch said. “If we don’t hurry, they will be gone. It’s a very important message to encourage people to start thinking about this.”

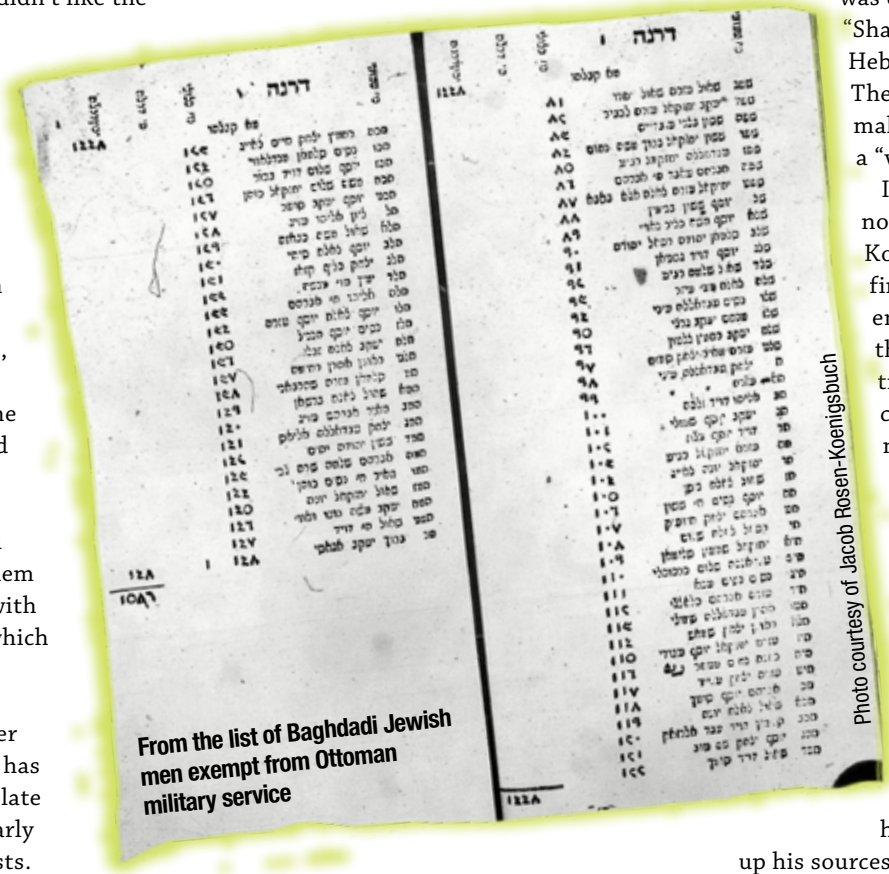


Photo courtesy of Jacob Rosen-Koenigsbuch

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In journey of life, don't pack disposables

My wife gave me this idea. I gave it context. And I love the theme. Once upon a time, in a land far away, there lived a princess. She was by all accounts very happy. Very happy indeed. And she was even happier when she met a young lad who worked in the stables. He, too, it seemed was made happier by her, and so they tentatively and nervously approached the king to ask if they could marry.

He wasn't a bad sort. The king. And after some thought, said the following, in the enigmatic way that kings in these types of stories tend to do. "Son [I assume he hadn't yet learned his name], go to the strongest waterfall in the land. Fill a cup from the strongest point. And bring it to me. If you manage that, then you will have my blessing to marry my daughter."

And so he did. As the journey was a long one, he packed light, and threw in some disposable cups for his task. He travelled the two days, rested, and then early in the morning, he climbed to the source. He placed his cup under the powerful torrent only to find that cardboard disintegrated on contact. He tried a few with the same result.

Alas the cup wasn't the right one! And so, he climbed down and using wood and leaves fashioned a new vessel. Up he climbed again, trapped the water, and down he climbed. Only to find that the water had leaked. And so, with little choice, he took time to find a rock and slowly and laboriously carved a cup

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman

into the rock. He clearly wasn't a Jewish stable hand. It took him weeks.

But in the end, it worked.

Excited as can be, he returned to the king and presented the water with the blushing and expectant bride-to-be at his side. True to his word, the king gave his blessing, and the couple was married.

At the wedding, the now married youngster, aided by the best of wine, plucked up the courage to ask the king what the challenge was all about. "It's pretty simple son [turns out he wasn't good with names], I wanted to show you that it's not only about the power of the waterfall, but equally about the strength of the vessel. If we aren't strong enough to hold on to the power that comes our way, then it might as well never pass us by."

We need to be strong enough to hold the content that we encounter. We need to build ourselves and our children, families, our friends, colleagues, and all those we care about, into cups that are able to hold the power and the force that life has to offer us.

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King David Linksfield Pre-Primary School



King David Linksfield High School



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King David Linksfield Junior Primary School



Minnie Bersohn Nursery School

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Communal security our responsibility

Last week brought with it the disturbing news that armed robbers in Johannesburg had invaded a shul after a service and tied up and robbed those who remained in the building. Fortunately, the victims weren't harmed, but the incident was a sobering reminder of our need – as individuals and as a community – to be continually aware of our environment and take whatever steps possible to secure our installations from attack. In this respect, we need to be guided at all times by the Community Security Organisation (CSO), which for nearly 30 years has acted as the security arm of the Jewish community and to that end, has developed carefully considered protocols, procedures, and guidelines to help its members to protect themselves.

Regardless of whether the threat is criminal or terrorist related, the lesson we need to take from this incident as well as from other attacks against Jewish institutions around the world is that it's crucial for Jewish organisations everywhere to be security-conscious and take practical steps to ensure the safety of their installations.

The CSO, working in conjunction with the police and security companies, can be relied upon to maintain the highest standards of vigilance and professionalism in protecting our community, but in order to be effective, it's reliant on the support and co-operation of the greater Jewish public. From the start, it has functioned as a professionally-headed body working with a larger volunteer base, and this has proven very effective. Those volunteers who stand outside their shuls and schools and at major communal functions are performing a critical role since by maintaining a visible presence, being constantly aware of their environment, and reporting all suspicious or unexplained activity, they ensure that those wishing to target our community won't take us unawares, and that appropriate procedures are followed in the event of an attack.

ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev

Those not involved with the CSO must make every effort to co-operate with and assist that organisation to the greatest extent that they can, both by complying with the security recommendations it provides and by following its directives. It's further incumbent on all of us to be constantly on the look-out for suspicious activity, and immediately report anything out of the ordinary to the CSO on 086 1800 018. Those requiring any advice about improving the security of their installation should email [jhboutine@cs0.org.za](mailto:jhboutine@cs0.org.za).

**We won't be sidelined**

Following on my last column reporting on the BDS-inspired attack on a Jewish candidate for the Constitutional Court, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies has since devoted much effort to engaging with the media to express our outrage about this latest attempt to prevent Jews – or at least the vast majority who refuse to endorse the radical anti-Israel ideology of the boycott lobby – from holding public office in South Africa. In terms of the Constitutional Court issue, this is something we will be addressing with relevant people in the coming weeks and months. As those who have been following the debates over appointments to what is the country's highest judicial body will understand, it's a complex matter, and needs to be dealt with sensitively and with due consideration of all the facts. However this question is pursued, I can assure you all that our community's right to dignity and equality is non-negotiable, and this is of great importance to the board.

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

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

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# Durban runner wins silver at SA Championships

MIRAH LANGER

Adam Lipschitz, 27, is soaring high after scoring a silver and fourth place for his races at the South African Championships at Tuks Athletics Stadium last week.

“I’m happy with the positions, but want to improve on times,” the ambitious and driven athlete says, reflecting on his performance at the Athletics South Africa senior track and field national event.

In the 10 000m race, Lipschitz came second with a time of 29:30:40, and in the 5 000m, fourth, with a time of 14:01.

When he is successful in a race, Lipschitz appreciates the long road of consistent effort it has taken to achieve the result.

“Running is an individual sport so what you put in is what you get out. With running, there is no time to rest, you have to give it your all from the get-go. If you aren’t in shape, it will show in your race from your position. When you are fit and winning, you are grateful for the training that you have put in.”

Although no one enjoys losing, Lipschitz says he takes the opportunity when he doesn’t achieve his goals to think about the adjustments he can make. “You reflect, then you act on it in training.”

The born-and-bred Durbanite, who runs his own property investment and management business, says that while COVID-19 has curtailed participation in many international events, his sights are on the horizon – possibly even the Olympics in the years ahead. His dream is to train for the marathon race in this event.

In the interim, he’s looking forward,

hopefully, to participation in the upcoming World Athletics Championships in America, then Commonwealth Games, as well as next year’s Maccabi Games – an arena in which he has already had astonishing success.

Lipschitz has been running since primary school, representing South Africa in his high-school years, and continuing at university level.

He trains every morning as part of a disciplined schedule. He doesn’t work with a coach, instead choosing to “use a lot of different programmes that I’ve taken over the years that work for me”.

Running remains a form of meditation for him. “You have time to yourself. I run alone in the morning. It’s when I’m without my phone, no music, just running round the athletics track. It’s time to think about life and any problems, time to evaluate. I enjoy it.”

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Adam Lipschitz

Photo: Cuan Walker

are very supportive, and he is particularly appreciative of his parents’ support over the years.

He comes from a traditionally Jewish family. “I practice the faith, and it’s very

much a part of my identity,” and enjoys giving back to the community via the Community Security Organisation and through involvement in Maccabi in KwaZulu-Natal. His other big passion is the administrative side of sport, and he is hoping to be part of making changes provincially in this arena.

Besides having the opportunity

to travel internationally, Lipschitz says it has also been amazing to travel to all nine provinces of South Africa through running. “It’s a beautiful country,” he says. The Transkei is his favourite destination so far.

Lipschitz’s message to other budding Maccabean athletes is to “understand yourself and your body first. No one knows your body how you know it yourself. Feel confident and comfortable before you get a coach to tell you what to do or go onto someone else’s plan.”

Lipschitz’s accolades have been celebrated by Maccabi SA, with whom he has a long association. In the 2019 European Maccabi Games in Budapest, Hungary, Lipschitz won the half marathon – “beating the athlete who came second by thirteen minutes!” says Maccabi SA spokesperson Ros Goldin.

At the 2017 Maccabi Games in Israel, Lipschitz won gold medals for both the 10 000m road race and the 5 000m track race.

“To add to that, the 10km was actually the 10km Jerusalem night race, which was open to the public, with the Maccabi race included as a race-within-a-race. He won the whole event, so both the public and Maccabi races.

“He won against very strong competition. In the 5 000m, he came from third to win it. He was brilliant,” says Goldin.

“He’s a great role model for all sports because he’s very dedicated, he trains hard, and plans well. His races are strategic, and he gives it a lot of thought. He sets an outstanding example for our juniors,” Goldin says.

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**SAJRD NEWS**

Thousands of Jewish South Africans are flocking to Israel, a trend that has been going on for decades. The latest wave of aliyah is being fueled by a combination of factors, including the desire for a better life, the search for a sense of community, and the desire to live in a Jewish state. The South African Jewish community is proud to see so many of its members making this journey.

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## Face to face with an 'ordinary'-looking antisemite

**SAJRD NEWS**

A Jewish community leader is sharing his experience of meeting with an antisemite. He describes the individual as an 'ordinary' person, highlighting the danger of not recognizing antisemitism in everyday life.

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## Deputy minister accuses Israel of exploiting pandemic

**SAJRD NEWS**

A South African deputy minister has accused Israel of exploiting the COVID-19 pandemic. He claims that Israel is using the crisis to advance its political agenda and to undermine the efforts of other nations to combat the virus.

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## Capetonians escape roaring Lion's Head fire

**SAJRD NEWS**

A major fire broke out at the Lion's Head restaurant in Cape Town, but everyone escaped safely. The fire was caused by a gas leak and resulted in significant damage to the building.

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**SAJRD NEWS**

A group of South African soldiers are being deployed to a conflict zone. They are being sent to a dangerous area where they will be responsible for carrying out a difficult mission.

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## Thulsi twins' financial support points to bigger forces at play

**SAJRD NEWS**

The financial support provided by the Thulsi twins is seen as a sign of a larger movement. It is believed that their actions are part of a broader effort to influence the community and the government.

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## The dawn of a new era

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A new era is dawning for the Jewish community in South Africa. With the support of the government and the community, a bright future is ahead.

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## The stripping of Stan & Pete's kashrut licence

**SAJRD NEWS**

The kashrut licence for Stan & Pete's restaurant has been stripped. This decision was made by the relevant authorities due to concerns about the restaurant's compliance with kashrut laws.

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## South Africa witnesses a spike in anti-Semitism

**SAJRD NEWS**

There has been a significant increase in anti-Semitic incidents in South Africa. The community is calling for greater vigilance and support for victims of these attacks.

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## Verdicts bring closure to long saga of hate

**SAJRD NEWS**

The court has handed down verdicts in a long-running case of hate. The community is relieved that justice has been served and that the perpetrators have been held accountable.

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## Velaphi Khumalo makes public apology for hate speech

**SAJRD NEWS**

Velaphi Khumalo has made a public apology for his hate speech. He has expressed regret for his actions and has promised to do better in the future.

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## Ramaphosa: SA has constructive role to play in Middle East

**SAJRD NEWS**

President Ramaphosa has stated that South Africa has a constructive role to play in the Middle East. He believes that the country can help to bring about a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

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## Hitler's typewriter released from SA bank vault

**SAJRD NEWS**

A typewriter used by Adolf Hitler has been released from a South African bank vault. The typewriter is being sold to a collector and is expected to fetch a high price.

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