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■ Volume 25 – Number 21 ■ 17 June 2021 ■ 7 Tamuz 5781

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'Wake up!' say doctors, as third wave ramps up

NICOLA MILTZ

Communal experts this week issued a stern warning to "catch a wake up" as the community has been hard hit by death, severe illness, and an unprecedented number of infections which continue to rise daily during the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"This is extremely severe," warned Dr Richard Friedland, the chief executive of Netcare Group. "In Gauteng, we are in the eye of the storm, with things set to get a lot worse than they are."

"We should all be doing what we can to prevent a single death, to prevent people from having to be admitted to hospital," he said.

The death rate has risen at hospitals, and hospital stays are about 20% longer, exacerbating the shortage of beds, especially in Gauteng, which is leading the uptick in infections.

"As I walk through our COVID-19 units, I see people struggling to breathe, fighting to survive this shocking pandemic. Every day, we are reminded of the pain, the suffering, and the enormous loss that it brings," Friedland said.

Issuing a plea to the community to be hyper vigilant, he said, "I want to be abundantly clear that there can be no place for a lackadaisical approach."

Several doctors this week told the *SA Jewish Report* that the situation was dire, with one doctor describing it as a "battlefield".

"Patients, some quite young with no comorbidities, are really sick, with the vast majority on one form of ventilation or another," said Dr

Carron Zinman of Netcare Linksfield Hospital.

"Some severely ill patients are being temporarily managed in casualty because there are simply no intensive-care beds available at other hospitals," she said.

"We are seeing a fairly young cohort, some with no underlying conditions, who are becoming seriously ill. The variants are more virulent and transmissible. We have had quite a lot of patients who have had COVID-19 before or who have received the vaccine, and got it."

"We treat more aggressively, but there's still no magic drug. We're doing everything we can to turn the inflammatory response around. It takes some longer

than others," she said.

"Sadly, some people over 60 believe that once they have had the virus or the vaccine, they are safe. They aren't. A lot of families including couples and their children are being infected," she said.

At the time of going to print, Hatzolah had 501 active patients with 64 patients requiring oxygen at home. At least 11.7% of the active cases include children and young adults under the age of 20.

"There are a higher number of younger people including children than in the previous waves," said Dr Anton Meyberg of Netcare Linksfield Hospital.

Sadly, the majority of patients are still the elderly over 60, but doctors have noticed a rise in the number of patients between the ages of 40 to 60, many requiring hospital admission.

There appears to be a disproportionately higher number of cases within the community, with doctors putting this down to complacency and carelessness about observing protocols.

"There is more testing, but people aren't following the rules," said Meyberg, "People who have been vaccinated are becoming lax, and there is a large asymptomatic spread of the virus."

The country technically entered its third wave on Thursday, 10 June. According to the Ministerial Advisory Committee on COVID-19, a new wave starts when the seven-day moving average of new infections surpasses 30% of the previous wave.

More than 70% of the new cases are now in Gauteng and the Western Cape, where there is evidence of a resurgence after a period of recovery, and there are daily increases in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

According to experts, the next two weeks will be particularly severe in Gauteng as the numbers steadily increase. Cape Town is a few weeks behind, they say.

Private-sector hospital admissions have increased four-fold since April. More than 500 patients are being admitted a day in the private sector in Gauteng, which is putting enormous strain on emergency departments fighting to open as many beds as possible to make space.

Continued on page 2>>

The youth are our future

Photo: Ilan Ossendryver



See pages 10 and 11

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Silicon Valley tech stands against antisemitism

Heads of some of Silicon Valley's most recognised technology companies including Google, Twitter, and YouTube are among about 200 technology and business leaders who have signed a letter calling out antisemitism.

The signatories include former Twitter Chief Executive Dick Costolo, media mogul Ariana Huffington, current Google executives, and chief executives at Bay Area start-ups.

“To be too Jewish in America, or to be a Jew, is still a dangerous mark,” the statement says. “As business leaders, we have a collective responsibility to stand up for the society we want. Today, we stand against antisemitism and violence against Jews. This is true regardless of your views on Israel; this is about protecting people from the injustice of antisemitism and hatred.”

“Too few Americans acknowledge that antisemitism exists [and] events of recent weeks cannot hide the truth,” the letter says, describing the incident in Los Angeles in which Jewish diners were attacked with bottles at a sushi restaurant. The incident is being investigated as an antisemitic hate crime.

Shabbat times this week		
Starts	Ends	
17:06	17:58	Johannesburg
17:27	18:22	Cape Town
16:46	17:39	Durban
17:07	18:00	Bloemfontein
16:58	17:53	Port Elizabeth
16:51	17:46	East London

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Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Googleplex headquarters in Mountain View, California

According to Jewish Insider, the statement's primary author is Jordana Stein, the chief executive of Enrich, a private network for industry professionals. Signatories also include cultural and business figures, such as makeup artist Bobbi Brown, former NBA player Baron Davis, and Neil Blumenthal, co-chief executive of the glasses company Warby Parker.

The letter comes as the tech industry grapples with antisemitism in its own ranks. Antisemitic comments made by Google's diversity head, Kamau Bobb, were found this month in a 2007 blog post in which he said that Jews have “an insatiable appetite for war and killing”. The company later moved Bobb off the diversity position.

Swastika discovered on ark at Frankfurt Airport shul

A swastika was found scrawled on the ark at a synagogue at Frankfurt International Airport in Germany on 11 June, according to the German publication Bild. It's unclear when the swastika was drawn as the synagogue has been closed for several months due to the pandemic.

A German organisation of Orthodox rabbis condemned the vandalism at the airport.

“It's simply sad. This hatred of Jews must finally stop,” the Orthodox Rabbinical Conference said, according to Associated Press. “The ugly grimace of antisemitism doesn't stop even in a highly secured area, at a place of encounter, silence, and stopping, where people from all over the world meet briefly while travelling and are in transit.”

The swastika was discovered less than a week after a fire was set outside a synagogue in Ulm, about 70 miles (112km) northwest of Munich, in what police suspect was an attempted arson attack.

Zionist group ousts rabbi over harassment allegation

The World Confederation of United Zionists (CUZ), one of several groupings within the World Zionist Organization, has let go its secretary-general, American-born Rabbi Dov Lipman, citing his dispute with two women who say he sexually harassed them.



Haaretz, which first broke the story of the harassment allegations, reported on 14 June that the confederation's chairperson, David Yaari, notified the World Zionist Organization of Lipman's departure last month after the allegations were made public.

“Given the grave allegations against former MK Dov Lipman, it was decided to part ways in order to focus on CUZ's vital work within the global Zionist forum,” Yaari told Haaretz.

Lipman, who is from the Washington DC area, is a former Knesset member from the Yesh Atid party.

He denied that he had been fired, saying he had left of his own accord to devote more time to helping new immigrants to Israel settle and assimilate.

Lipman has denied the harassment allegations, which first arose on a private Facebook page. He has sued the two women making the accusations, and they have countersued.

The two women, like Lipman, are members of the modern Orthodox community in Beit Shemesh, a city near Jerusalem. They said the harassment occurred when they and Lipman were part of a movement to push back against Haredi Orthodox harassment of modern Orthodox women and girls in the city over modesty and other perceived religious infractions.

• All briefs supplied by JTA

‘Wake up!’ say doctors, as third wave ramps up

>>Continued from page 1

According to Hatzolah Chairperson Lance Abramson, there were 263 active cases at the peak of the first wave, 333 cases at the peak of the second wave, and now there are more than 500 active cases “with no peak in sight yet”.

“There are a staggering number of active cases in the Johannesburg Jewish community,” he said.

“Ambulances are transporting multiple COVID-19-positive patients to hospitals daily, where it is sometimes difficult to find a hospital bed. Patients are sometimes having to wait in ambulances in the parking lots of hospitals. This is very challenging for teams on the ground,” he said.

Hatzolah has had 238 patients on the programme who have had a vaccine. Of those, 171 had received the first Pfizer vaccine, and 83 had received the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, two the AstraZeneca, and one Moderna. Thirty eight patients have been fully vaccinated and of those, only one required hospitalisation and has since recovered, he said.

According to Dr Ryan Noach, the chief executive of Discovery Health, globally, vaccinations have materially slowed the progression of new cases and deaths. There are early signs of reduced COVID-19 infection rates among the vaccinated pollution in South Africa post 15 days after vaccination.

“There are signs that the first dose is working, with early data showing that there are less admissions post vaccination and fewer deaths,” he said.

Worryingly, he said, “The data points to the potential for a very severe third wave, and we're seeing the beginning of it only now.”

He said more than 50% of adults 70 years and older require admission to hospital.

“Hospital admissions in wave three have reached the level of admissions at the peak in wave one. There are currently 2 012 Discovery members admitted to hospital,

of which 526 are in intensive-care, and 275 require ventilation.

“A large number of people are showing evidence of reinfections. Discovery members who contracted COVID-19 in the first wave have again contracted COVID-19 in the second wave. Three members have now tested positive three times,” Noach said.

On 13 June, President Cyril Ramaphosa confirmed that two million Johnson & Johnson (J&J) doses would have to be destroyed because the United States regulator, the Food and Drug Administration, found that the main ingredient with which they were made wasn't safe for consumption.

As a result, South Africa has no J&J doses to administer at present, setting the country back in its vaccine roll-out in the midst of a third wave. The good news is that, according to the Bhekisisa Centre for Health Journalism, J&J will replace all the doses within the next two weeks, with 300 000 due to land within a few days and another million to be released by Aspen's Eastern Cape plant next week.

In the meantime, doctors have appealed to people to be hyper vigilant and maintain all non-pharmaceutical measures.

The organisation is also looking after 64 patients on home oxygen where they are closely monitored, Abramson said.

The organisation's nurses are seeing between 80 to 100 patients a day.

Interestingly,

Torah Thought

Moving from tumah to tahara

This week's parsha introduces us to the detrimental spiritual effects of *tumat met*, the impurity that comes from being in contact with the dead and the requisite process of purification through the mechanics of the sprinkling of the ashes of a red heifer – the *para adumah*.

Tumah (ritual impurity) is a prevalent topic in the Torah and in many instances, we are warned to distance ourselves from numerous sources of *tumah*.

But what is it anyway? The English translation does it no justice (as is the case with most English translations of Hebrew concepts).

I have heard rabbis and teachers try and compare *tumah* to a type of “spiritual radiation”, which can affect anyone who comes close to its source.

Another idea which I read a while ago describes *tumah* as deviation from an object's designation, while *tahara* (the opposite of *tumah*) is the return or recalibration of an entity to its purpose and goal. For example, a dead animal is by definition *tamei* (impure) while an animal shechted in accordance with halacha, is *tahor* (pure), and can be eaten by the holiest and most pure Jew around – apologies to all the vegans out there. A human corpse carries the highest form of *tumah*, as he can no longer fulfil his purpose in this world, namely living and sanctifying Hashem's name in the world.

But I think the best explanation is that *tumah* is the erroneous sensation that Hashem has abandoned us. Hashem is all of reality. (The ineffable name “*havaya*” talks to this concept.)

The truth is that Hashem is always everywhere and intimately involved in our lives. When we perceive and appreciate this, we live on a lofty level of *tahara* and *kedusha*. However, when we don't perceive Hashem's presence because of a death or being in contact with certain spiritually tainted objects, we are labelled as being *tamei*.

It's for this reason that a mourner, someone who by definition came into contact with a relative who passed away and mistakenly felt that Hashem had abandoned him, has to recite kaddish publicly in shul and re-infuse himself with *kedusha* – sanctity and the realisation that Hashem was always there and would never forsake him.

Shabbat shalom!



Rabbi Ryan Goldstein, West Street Shul

BDS boycott ‘creating divisions among ordinary South Africans’

TALI FEINBERG

“I felt targeted because I’m Jewish. It’s antisemitic,” said a businessman affected by an alleged boycott of companies purported to support Israel.

A group of 300 South African hardware stores supposedly cancelled contracts with “SA-based suppliers and companies that have relations with or who have shown support for Israel”. The executive director of Africa4Palestine (formerly Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) South Africa), Muhammed Desai, last week described the boycott as “heartwarming”.

“Many people have been pressured by their community to be part of a boycott and cause harm,” said this businessman, speaking on condition of anonymity. “This affects ordinary South Africans because it destroys long-term business relationships.”

Although there has been an impact on his company, it seems not many businesses have felt the impact of the boycott. Other suppliers listed by Desai told the *SA Jewish Report* that no contracts had been cancelled. “None of our relationships or sales into any of the hardware stores in South Africa have been compromised,” said one supplier, who asked not to be named.

“I can state categorically that this has had no impact on our business,” said another supplier who wanted to remain anonymous. “Our order book is full.”

“As the ‘rainbow nation’, this is just aggressively encouraging divisions that were never there before,” said the first businessman. “People are making business decisions based on religion rather than good business principles. These enforced divisions are what worry me more than anything. What happened to the South Africa that we know? This radical stance is completely nonsensical,” he said.

Desai went on to declare, “Today, standing with Israel, having ties with Israel, or serving in the Israeli military


have all, correctly, become similar to, in the past, having stood with apartheid South Africa or with Nazi Germany. To stand with Israel today is now synonymous with saying, ‘I stand with Germany’ during the Holocaust or declaring, ‘I stand with South Africa’ during apartheid.”

He said Africa4Palestine welcomed “this ethical position as a morally sound example to other stores in South Africa and the African continent to emulate so that we can truly create apartheid-Israeli-free zones. Your efforts have served as another great blow to those who believe they can support the Israeli regime on the one hand, and take money and profits from principled and moral South African people.”

“We aren’t fooled by his couching of words or references to those who ‘have relations with or who have shown support for Israel’ and those ‘standing with Israel, having ties with Israel’. What he actually means is Jews.”

If the language of boycotting Jewish businesses and creating “Israeli-free zones” sounds familiar, that’s because it is. South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director Wendy Kahn said, “In his congratulatory letter to the boycotters, Desai compares Israel to Nazi Germany and the Holocaust. The irony of his use of Holocaust terminology is also not lost on us Jews. Nazi Germany also came to our minds when we read this letter. We remember that the Holocaust began with the boycotting of Jewish businesses.

“We aren’t fooled by his couching of words or references to those who ‘have relations with or who have shown support for Israel’ and those ‘standing with Israel, having ties with Israel’. What he actually means is Jews.



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According to the University of Cape Town’s Kaplan Centre study in 2019, 90% of South African Jews support Israel, so invariably, what Desai is calling for is the boycott of Jewish businesses.

“The delight that he takes in potentially destroying these Jewish businesses is gut-wrenching, not least because of the fragile and precarious economic climate in South Africa. Will Desai and the BDS organisations rejoice in the jobs lost by these businesses?

“His so-called victory of boycotts of Jewish business won’t have an impact on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. All these threats achieve is attempted intimidation of local South African Jews who hold an opinion different to BDS. The South African Jewish community won’t be intimidated. It’s effect will be only to harm South African businesses trying desperately to survive and retain jobs,” Kahn said.

“Our Constitution states that everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion. There’s no rider that excludes Jews and people who have a connection to Israel. Nor does it call for the destruction of livelihoods of people for daring to believe differently.”

Desai issued a statement saying that the accusation of antisemitism was “a deliberate misrepresentation”, but then reiterated that “we welcome South Africans

shunning, boycotting, and ending relations with suppliers and companies that are trading with, have links to, or are supportive of Israel”.

In response to the SAJBD’s statement on the matter, published on Facebook, Africa4Palestine’s Bram Hanekom wrote, “The 300 hardware stores can buy the things they need from other South African owned and ethical businesses.”

Benji Shulman, the director of public diplomacy at the South African Zionist Federation, noted that “the boycott of Jewish businesses has a long history in the BDS movement going back more than a decade, with Jewish businesses or those with Jewish management frequently targeted. What’s more, commercial boycotts against Israel have been a complete failure internationally. Since the boycott movement started, trade between Israel and South Africa has actually increased on average.

“BDS has many other failed boycott attempts,” he said. “One that comes to mind is the failed Woolworths ‘tomato’ boycott, which also produced zero results, other than a pig’s head placed in the kosher section of a supermarket. BDS may be trying to intimidate smaller Jewish businesses, but as yet, it hasn’t shown any signs that it has the capability of undertaking a full-fledged boycott campaign.”



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Bedfordview Office

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SAZF takes on Judge Desai for his conduct

NICOLA MILTZ

The South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) has predictably come in for some heavy criticism by the anti-Israel lobby for lodging a complaint against retired Judge Siraj Desai with the Judicial Conduct Committee (JCC).

Last week, the SAZF lodged a complaint with the JCC against the judge, who recently took up the position of the Legal Services Ombudsman.

The SAZF said Desai’s actions and conduct over many years was plainly in breach of the code of judicial conduct and “entirely unbecoming of a judicial officer”.

This was a bombshell complaint against Desai, who is a well-known social activist and respected jurist described by many as the “people’s judge”.

The detailed complaint against him spans many years from 2009 till the present, highlighting Desai’s actions and conduct connecting him to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, and the pro-Palestinian movement.

The SAZF said that Desai’s alleged misconduct included his involvement in political controversy, misusing the prestige of his judicial office to advance his personal political interests, failing to recuse himself in a case in which he was obviously conflicted, and involving himself in activities that used the position of his judicial office to promote a partisan political cause.

Desai, who served the legal profession for 43 years, retired as a Western Cape High Court judge last year, and almost immediately accepted the ombud position having been appointed by President Cyril Ramaphosa. The objective of the ombud is to advance and safeguard the integrity of the legal profession in South Africa. But more importantly, it’s to ensure fair, efficient, and effective investigation of complaints of alleged misconduct by legal practitioners.

Former Judge Rex van Schalkwyk of the Rule of Law Project told the *SA Jewish Report*, “This isn’t about whether one is pro-Israel or pro-Palestine. Did Judge Desai conform with the ethics that constrain him as a judge? Having looked at the complaint, there is at least a case that needs to be answered. Judge Desai must give an explanation about his conduct. It’s legitimate for this issue to have been brought to the professional body of the JSC [Judicial Service Commission] and to be dealt with specifically in accordance with the principle of law not in accordance with the political issues which will cloud the complaint.”

The SAZF has been lambasted for the complaint, which it lodged on 10 June, by members of Africa4Palestine and the South African BDS Coalition. They have set up a Facebook page called “Hands off Judge Desai”.

The anti-Israel lobbyists described the complaint as “spurious” and “baseless”, and called it a “vengeful attack”. Africa4Palestine criticised the “questionable” timing of the complaint, saying that it was an attempt to distract from its complaint lodged against the country’s outgoing Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng.

Last Friday, 11 June, the JCC appeal panel said it was continuing its deliberations on Mogoeng Mogoeng’s appeal against a misconduct finding for his remarks about Israel brought by Africa4Palestine.

Earlier this year, the JCC found that



Judge Siraj Desai

Mogoeng had contravened the code of judicial conduct with comments made during a webinar in June last year and subsequently at a prayer meeting where he declared that he would never apologise for the views he expressed. In the webinar, hosted by the *Jerusalem Post*, he said he believed South Africa would do well to consider adopting a more objective stance on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and said “hatred” of the Jewish state could “attract unprecedented curses upon our nation”.

In his March ruling, Judge Phineas Mojaelo stressed that “judges are to stay out of politics”.

The South African BDS Coalition said

the SAZF’s complaint against Desai was in “retaliation for the failure to secure a seat at the Constitutional Court by Judge Unterhalter” accusing him of being an “apologist for Zionism”. Earlier this year, the SA BDS Coalition demanded that Unterhalter not be selected to the Constitutional Court for his association with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.

Rolene Marks, SAZF’s legal forum spokesperson said, “At issue here, is the role that judges play in our society. The reason that there is a judicial code of conduct is that judges need to be seen not to be promoting political causes since they may have to rule on them at some stage. However, it’s

clear through his comments that although Judge Desai is entitled to his views in terms of freedom of speech, he is bound by the judicial code of conduct, and his actions fall outside of that.”

According to the SAZF, last year, Desai while being interviewed on an Iranian YouTube channel, made “inappropriate comments” likening Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini to President Nelson Mandela.

“To compare a world-renowned peacemaker like President Mandela to the despotic founding leader of a regime notorious for its disregard of human rights, and which is responsible for gross human rights violations, including torture and violence against thousands of people, is an insult to the people of South Africa, the Constitution, and our democratic institutions,” the statement said.

It added that Desai also made “several other shocking remarks” during the interview regarding foreign policy, including referring to the United States – an important trading and diplomatic partner of South Africa – as the “great Satan” which demonstrated that Desai had “engaged in conduct incompatible with his status as a judge of the high court”.

According to the SAZF, Desai has a long history of endorsing and promoting the anti-Israel political lobby.

In 2009, Desai was part of a South African delegation of pro-Palestinian activists that was to take part in a protest known as “the Gaza Freedom March” organised by the Palestine Solidarity Alliance. It was

during this time that the Cairo Declaration was signed which was a call for a global movement for Palestinian rights and a boycott of Israel. The SAZF said Desai “lent his stature as a judge to the drafting and issuing of the declaration”.

In 2015, he gave an order in a review application brought by pro-Palestinian, anti-Zionist organisations and activists against the City of Cape Town. There is allegedly no record in the judgment of him having disclosed his interest in BDS to the parties in that case, according to the complaint.

In 2018, Desai welcomed Hamas during its visit to South Africa and said, “We hope to make an intellectual contribution to the resolution of the Palestinian issue, but we take our leadership from you, you are the leadership on the ground.”

“This, despite the fact that the Hamas charter includes direct calls for violence against Jewish people and the destruction of the state of Israel. Using the prestige of the judicial office to publicly promote an extremist organisation is clearly contrary to the precepts underlying the judicial code of conduct,” said the complaint.

“Judge Desai has long conducted himself well outside the realms of the judicial code,” said the SAZF. “It’s therefore crucial for maintaining public confidence in the judiciary that manifest judicial misconduct is called to account.”

Desai told News24 through his spokesperson, Professor Usuf Chikhe, that he was “unapologetic in his stance in condemnation of apartheid Israel”.

Kacev heads up Jewish education network that will benefit SA

TALI FEINBERG

The former director of the South African Board of Jewish Education, Rabbi Craig Kacev, has been selected as pedagogical director of a new project called the Global Jewish Education Resource Centre, in partnership with Israel’s Diaspora Affairs ministry.

For the first time, there will be one organisation liaising with Jewish schools throughout the world, creating a global Jewish education network.

The initiative includes a global educational and professional network that will work with experts and providers across all continents and in different languages. It will pioneer the development of educational content, training of teachers, support of school leadership, building of virtual platforms to share ideas and initiatives, and the provision of professional consulting services to individual schools.



Diaspora Affairs Minister Omer Yankelevich at the signing ceremony with Herzog College representatives

The need for this initiative was recognised during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many communities in the diaspora were struggling to cope with the closure of schools and the transition to virtual learning while facing a shortage of Jewish Studies teachers and high-quality curriculum resources.

The initiative will include the creation of connections and dialogue between Jewish school students, teachers, and principals around the world. The initiative is in partnership with Herzog College, Israel’s leading academic college for teacher education in the religious sector. It’s renowned for its expertise in teacher training, professional development, and designing innovative digital content.

Kacev made aliyah earlier this year. Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* from Israel, he says “this new initiative, in response to the impact of the pandemic, has goals uniquely linked to what schools have experienced over the past year and a half. It also seeks to capitalise on the past for the benefit of Jewish schools in the future. The initiative seeks to make a difference in areas of leadership, teachers, and content, with a focus on enhancing Jewish learning.

“That said, it’s also intended to respond to current trends such as distance learning, social and emotional needs, project-based learning, and other areas where schools need support. Herzog College brings a team of high-level educators doing research and teaching in many spheres, and we hope to ensure that schools around the world benefit from this expertise. We don’t claim to know everything, nor do we intend to be an organisation that forces solutions on schools. This is intended to be a platform that provides support. Working with as many partners in the field, it aims

to serve each school in its areas of need.”

Kacev says he took the role on “with much trepidation. The responsibility is substantial, and the pressure to bring an offering that adds value to as many Jewish schools as possible around the world isn’t to be underestimated.”

As director of pedagogy, he will be guiding the educational team on the approach and content that it will use in teacher education, content development, and student engagement opportunities.

“While we will start with a few offerings, this will grow rather quickly. There are many existing organisations developing content or offering services to the field. I hope to work with as many of these as possible to bring their expertise to a larger audience, and then have the Global Resource Centre bring its added offering to the field. We are also hoping to develop more cost-effective models for schools to access high-quality content.”

Kacev says he was drawn to the role because, “having dedicated myself to Jewish education for the past 25 years, this is where I wanted to remain. Now, I will be able to bring all that I learned along the way to Jewish schools across the globe. I have a sense of many of the common needs across

the Jewish educational world, and I’m learning about the specific needs in each country. I believe that I bring a broad and deep understanding of Jewish education, together with the experience of working on a large scale. One quickly learns that if systems are developed correctly then even if the platform or organisation is huge, the customer feels that their needs are being met. We hope to achieve that on a substantial scale for schools and especially Jewish educators around the world.”

On the importance and uniqueness of this project, he says, “There are many providers in the field and many countries have umbrella organisations serving their Jewish schools. But there is no one organisation that is looking to provide a global address for all that’s available while developing meta-curricula, worldwide teacher networks, and looking to harness the substantial expertise in the field for the benefit of all. This is also an initiative that Israel is investing in, and will continue to invest in with substantial funds, together with philanthropists around the world interested in Jewish education.”

At a ceremony last week, Diaspora Affairs Minister Omer Yankelevich signed a 38 million shekel (R160 million) agreement with Herzog College to lead the two-year project.

So, how soon will the project reach Jewish schools in South Africa? “Whatever part of the offering goes live after the *chagim* in October 2021 will be available to all Jewish schools around the world,” says Kacev. “Teachers will be able to find content, get assistance in finding specific content, join worldwide networks on many topics moderated by experts in their fields, and join the ongoing online courses. As the project develops, there will be specific initiatives together with Jewish schools in South Africa based on their needs and requests.”

Regarding the specific challenges facing South African Jewish schools that the project can assist with, Kacev says, “South Africa, like many other places could benefit from ongoing teacher education, opportunities for educational leaders to share with colleagues and learn from experts around the world, and high-quality curriculum content and materials. The extent to which the Jewish schools stand to benefit from the initiative will depend on their proactive use of the resource centre.

“That said, I have a special place in my heart for South Africa, and hope to ensure that they do benefit from all that the initiative offers. There will also be opportunities for schools to benefit from additional investment in our area of responsibility if there is partner funding from the community. We hope to find that sort of support over time, as has been the case in Europe and South America to date.”

Third wave closes schools and shuls

TALI FEINBERG

Amid a merciless third wave unlike anything the Johannesburg Jewish community has seen before, a number of Jewish schools have decided to close, and Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein is calling on shuls not to hold *minyanim* until after Monday 28 June.

The rapidly changing situation and spiralling number of infections has led to a change in the initial decision taken at a meeting convened by the chief rabbi on 10 June with rabbis, senior committee members of shuls and medical experts.

“Initially, Professor Barry Schoub, and Dr Richard Friedland advised that individual shuls should take the decision whether to suspend their services temporarily based on their unique risk circumstances,” said Goldstein.

However, later this week, on the advice of Schoub, a virology expert, and Friedland who is the Netcare CEO, Goldstein called on the rabbonim in Johannesburg and Pretoria to “suspend *minyanim* for the next two weeks” and sent letters to the shuls in this regard.

“The situation remains fluid, and will be reassessed on an ongoing basis and the community kept informed,” he said. “We pray the situation improves so we will be able to responsibly reopen on June 29.”

Rabbi Ricky Seeff, the director of the South African Board of Jewish Education (SABJE), which governs King David schools, said, “As the number of COVID-19 cases in Gauteng began to increase at an alarming rate, as did the Hatzolah numbers over the past week, we felt that closing the schools was the correct course of action for the safety of our teachers, students, and the broader community.”

Asked if children are catching and transmitting the virus more now than in other waves, he said, “Although the numbers within our system have been very low, there is undoubtedly a noticeable shift from previous waves. Children of all ages have tested positive for

COVID-19 in the current wave.

“The majority of cases [of children contracting COVID-19] reported have been due to family transmission and social events that have taken place outside of school,” he said. “As such, in our high schools, a large number of students have needed to isolate. Thankfully, the King David system has been able to adapt and stream the lessons to students at home.”

Seeff said the SABJE consulted with a team of medical advisors on a weekly basis. “We firmly believe physical schooling is ideal due to the educational and social benefits for students, and we have tried to keep the schools open. Last week, our medical advisors felt that the time had come to consider closing due to the spread within the community.”

At this point in time, all King David schools are online. “We will continue to monitor the situation and make the decision to reopen according to data and medical advice,” he said. Online teaching is available for all grades. High school exams continue on campus. “Given the short duration of the school day, the large ventilated venues, and the lack of social interaction [during exams], our students and staff will be safe for exams to continue in person.”

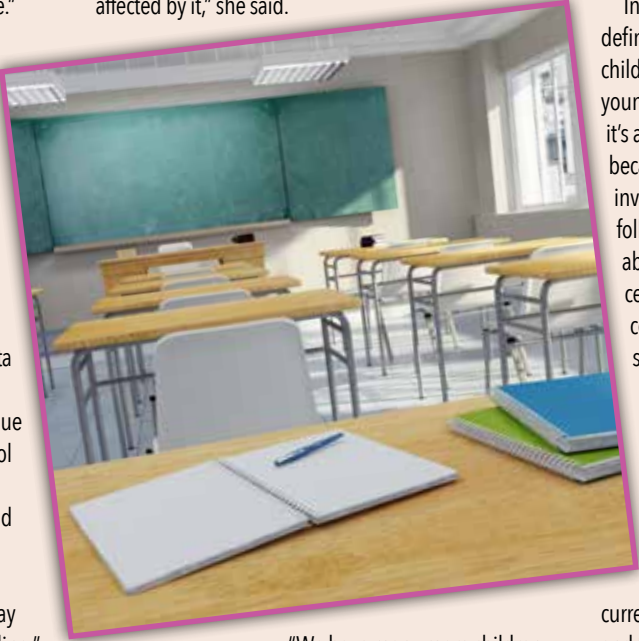
“The decision to close was more challenging this year because parents are back at work and may struggle to assist their children with online schooling,” said Seeff. “We have received an overwhelmingly positive response to the decision in spite of these challenges.”

Rabbi Yossi Liberow, the managing director of Torah Academy, said the school had closed most grades. “Exams will continue until when we intended to complete the term. We are definitely seeing children catch the virus more so than in previous waves. In the past few days, we have seen a bigger increase in cases,” he said.

Rebbetzin Natalie Altman, the director of *kodesh* and ethos at Yeshiva College, said, “We’ve closed our whole

preschool and playschool. Grades R, 1, and 2 remain open. Grades 3 to 6 are online. Grades 7 to 11 are writing exams, and they remain at school. Our Grade 12s are doing block lessons, and they remain at school.

“There’s no question that the Hatzolah numbers are reflecting that children are catching and transmitting the virus, much more now than in other waves, and being affected by it,” she said.



“We have many more children that are COVID-19 positive. In addition, six or seven girls in our girls high school have lost grandparents [in the third wave]. It’s been quite traumatic and sobering.”

Johannesburg general practitioner Dr Daniel Israel said, “We have seen in this third wave a far bigger spread of COVID-19 among children [than in other waves]. In my own practice, I’ve diagnosed a one-year-old and a three-year-old in the past week with COVID-19, as index cases in their families. In schools, it’s sometimes impossible practically to make children adhere to guidelines to the point of no risk whatsoever. So when cases are high, it certainly isn’t the time to be playing the

risk game.”

Therefore, he thinks it’s the correct decision to close schools. “It will make a big difference to the amount of contact. The challenge is what kids do when they’re not at school. If they have arrangements and sleepovers, then it’s far less safe than interacting at school with masks and ventilation.”

In terms of age groups, “the youngest kids are definitely a problem. We’re getting cases in very young children who can’t wear masks because they’re too young – that’s really a spreading environment. Where it’s also a problem is early and mid-high school, because kids there seem to have an attitude that they’re invincible, and sometimes they’re rebellious and don’t follow the rules. Matrics are normally serious enough about it that they wear a mask and are careful. And certainly in the primary schools, the kids are quite compliant. So, I believe we could return to school in stages based on age groups,” Israel said.

Said Schoub, “All the Jewish schools have been exemplary in carrying out COVID-19 precautions. However, the present COVID-19 epidemic is particularly severe in the Jewish community, and it was felt it would be unwise to keep the schools open at this time. Data has indicated that the extent of the epidemic in the Jewish community currently exceeds that of the first and second waves, and temporary closure of schools would be a wise precaution.”

On the Synthesis Podcast of 13 June, Linksfield Clinic pulmonologist Dr Anton Meyberg described the situation in hospitals as “anarchy”, and said he believed shuls (and other places of worship) should be closed and religious gatherings curtailed. Anyone over 60 or those with comorbidities should keep away from such gatherings, Meyberg said. “Put yourself first, contain yourself, even if you are vaccinated. If schools are closing, it should trigger in our minds that we are in trouble.” He called on religious and community leaders to speak up and encourage compliance.

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100MW of light in the dark

When I heard that King David School alumnus Gidon Novick was involved in taking over the lion’s share of South African Airways, I felt inspired and excited. Such good news!

Not least of all because I know Novick to be a smart, innovative *mensh* of a businessman who understands the airline industry, but because now finally SAA will be run like a business.

And while it has sucked up so much taxpayers’ money already, it will no longer be a drain on our economy. To top that, if Novick and crew do what they plan to do, we may even have an airline we can be really proud of. Let’s wait and see, but isn’t it fabulous to have some good news to share?

This doesn’t seem to fit the general mood of our community. I guess we can’t ignore the rise in antisemitism and how COVID-19 is really hitting us. We certainly can’t ignore the huge numbers of us who are sick and others who have died. Yes, it’s frightening at best.

However, it’s not all doom and gloom, and we need to recognise this for our own benefit.

While you have been worrying about COVID-19 and rattling on about all our woes, have you noticed that the rand is 30% stronger than it was this time last year, when it traded at R18.50 to the dollar? Now, it’s about R13.70 to the dollar. I don’t claim to be anything of an expert, but this has to be good news.

Then, this may have passed you by, but for a long time, there has been a call for the ceiling on self-generated electricity to be raised, and the minister of minerals and energy, Gwede Mantashe, has dug in his heels. What this means is that until now, you had a very limited amount of electricity that you could generate yourself without relying on Eskom. So, mines and huge industry had no choice but to spend fortunes on electricity from Eskom. But now, President Cyril Ramaphosa, who we all criticise for not being decisive enough, has overridden Mantashe and raised this ceiling on self-generating electricity without the need for a licence from 1MW to 100MW. In fact, those fighting for the increase were hoping for an increase only to 10MW.

While this may not affect us in our day to day life, it’s a big deal, and one that we can really be positive about. It will help our economy in a big way.

Also, it appears that following all the allegations of corruption on the part of Health Minister Dr Zweli Mkhize, the president didn’t just sit back and take it. He actually put Mkhize on special leave. *Kol hakavod!* It bodes well in tough times, and times aren’t going to get any easier for the president.

Then, on 10 July, an extradition treaty between the United Arab Emirates and South Africa will come into force. Why on earth is this important? Well, the dear old Guptas are hanging out there and wouldn’t it be nice for them to be brought here to have their day in court after all they have done to South Africa? They will probably make a dash for it, but at least they will be shaken up a bit.

Then, when we heard about the destruction of millions of Johnson & Johnson vaccines that were about to be rolled out because they were believed to be contaminated, we all thought: more bad news! But the good news is that pharmaceutical company Aspen has assured us that it will have 300 000 new and uncontaminated vaccines ready to be rolled out by Monday. And more to come the following week. So we should be right on track. Not bad going!

Now, I cannot take credit for all this good news because to be honest, it hasn’t been easy for me to look upwards with this heavy cloud hanging over us. I’m grateful to have a board of directors who recognise how important it is for us all to see the silver lining. I have to thank Howard Sackstein, Benjy Porter, and Herschel Jawitz for inspiring me. And a little bit of help from Peter Bruce’s excellent writing too.

The point is, they were on a roll and could see all these positive changes that were happening in front of us, but so few of us were looking for them.

While we need to keep looking for good news to uplift us and change the way we view our future, we can’t ignore our vital choices about how we deal with the third wave of COVID-19.

We can go into denial and believe it’s never going to hit us ... until it does. We can tempt fate and hold or go to parties, hoping like hell that they don’t become super-spreader events. And we can rationalise our chances, and decide that we are healthy and strong so it won’t hurt us. That’s naïve and foolish and certainly won’t help anyone, rather it will exacerbate the problem.

If we continue to ignore the protocols, our numbers will continue to go up. That’s our choice. The responsibility belongs to each and every one of us. The sooner we observe all precautions, the sooner the third wave will end.

As we commemorate 16 June this week on Youth Day, we recall a time when we thought the country was about to enter a civil war. Children were killed and wounded by police brutality. The world condemned the apartheid government and saw white South Africans as pariahs. They imposed sanctions on South Africa and put pressure on the government. We couldn’t see that our country could be healed, and South Africa went through a dark time.

In the end, there was real change, which was hard to imagine at that time.

And there will be an end to the pandemic. We just have to do what it takes to get us there. This, too, shall pass. We will weather the storm, and we will triumph over this situation. We are survivors.

Having said that, let’s not take any chances. Stop holding and going to parties and events! Batten down the hatches, and take time to enjoy your homes with your nearest and dearest. Do what you need to do to stay safe and COVID-19 free.

Happy Youth Day and Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost Maunder
Editor



Is the new Israeli government the end of ‘the magician’?

OPINION

PAULA SLIER



After 12 consecutive years of Benjamin Netanyahu, Israelis are coming to terms with the fact that the magician, as his fans like to call him, has finally run out of tricks. Or not.

A special parliament session on Sunday ended with a razor-thin majority of 60-59 in favour of a new, hugely diverse, coalition of eight parties. Headed by the leader of the far-right Yamina party, Naftali Bennett, it will result in Netanyahu, as head of the right-wing Likud party that won the most votes in the last election, heading off to lead the opposition bloc.

But before one writes Netanyahu off, it’s worth noting that he’s been here before. Twice he’s returned from the opposition to become prime minister, and he certainly plans to do it a third time. He’s vowed to “rescue Israel” from an incoming government based on “fraud, hate, and power-seeking”.

Netanyahu is a sore loser. He forwent the traditional public handover ceremony on Monday, 14 June, that includes a toast for the incoming prime minister, and reportedly gave Bennett just half an hour of his time before leaving to meet with his new opposition forces. They welcomed him as “prime minister”, and he didn’t feel the need to correct them, claiming that he could feel the “weak points” of the “dangerous left-wing government” at “the tips of my fingers”.

So, who is Naftali Bennett, the man who managed to unseat Israel’s longest serving prime minister? Ironically, the 49-year-old former tech-start-up-millionaire-turned-politician once served as a senior aide to Netanyahu, although the two often clashed. Bennett went on to form his own political party that represents the religious right



and over the years, held three ministerial positions – diaspora affairs, education, and defence. But he failed to perform during the last election in March this year, coming joint fifth with just six out of 120 parliament seats. In the previous election, he didn’t even cross the threshold.

Israelis are asking themselves how someone with such a small mandate (the equivalent of 180 000 seats) is now their prime minister. Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, his erstwhile supporters say he “stole” their vote. Many feel betrayed and angry. They complain that they voted for the right, and now Bennett has joined forces with parties on the centre and left. Many believe his desire to become prime minister, or to oust Netanyahu, or both, was so great, he forfeited his political positions. If elections were to be held today, Bennett would fare worse than he did three months ago.

But the new prime minister sees things differently. After Netanyahu failed to form a majority coalition back in April, President Reuven Rivlin handed the baton to Yair Lapid, the leader of the centrist Yesh Atid party which won the second largest number of votes in the last election. But Lapid was short of seven seats, exactly the number Bennett, an unlikely ally, could offer him, although later, one of the seven left the party. Bennett was kingmaker. After weeks of negotiations, he and Lapid signed a power-sharing deal in which Bennett will be prime minister until September 2023 and then Lapid for a further two years.

Most Israelis, though, don’t believe the new

government will last that long, sounding its death knell as early as a few weeks from now. Bennett is Israel’s first Orthodox prime minister and the former head of the Settlers Council. Lapid is a secular centrist. Bennett wants to annex up to 60% of the West Bank; Meretz’s Nitzan Horowitz wants to withdraw to pre-1967 lines. Finance Minister Avigdor Lieberman is seeking to maximise conscription in the ultra-Orthodox community and drastically reduce that sector’s government funding; Bennett and maybe even Lapid hold out the hope of at least some of the ultra-Orthodox MKs joining the coalition. And so it goes on.

But Bennett is using the coalition’s weakness as his biggest strength, arguing this “change government” is the broadest and most representative in Israel’s history.

“We hope it’s the beginning of a new Israel,” he said, promising that his government would “work for the sake of all the people” and prioritise reforms in education, health, and cutting red tape. Thorny issues like reaching a deal with the Palestinians he’s left out for now.

But the biggest irony of all is that it’s on Bennett’s watch that for the first time, an Arab party will be sitting in the ruling coalition. In the 73-year history of Israel, there’s an unwritten rule that any government is formed only by Jewish parties. The one exception was when the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin relied on the support of an Arab party in the wake of the Oslo Peace Accords in the 1990s. That agreement, however, didn’t formalise the party’s entry into the ruling coalition.

What has driven Mansour Abbas, the leader of the Arab Islamist Ra’am party, to join the government isn’t the desire for a peace agreement but rather pragmatism. He wants immediate attention paid to the demands of the Israeli Arab minority. Among the promises he has extracted from Bennett are the adoption of a five-year economic-development plan for the Arab community with a budget of 30 billion shekels (about R126 billion) as well as plans to combat crime and violence in the Arab community, improve infrastructure, and advance Arab local authorities.

Palestinian leaders, however, have reacted dismissively to Israel’s new government, saying it makes no difference who heads it, least of all when it’s someone cut from the same cloth as Netanyahu.

Inside Israel, there have been calls for physical violence against Bennett and members of the new government. Even before being elected, the new prime minister’s security was increased amid concerns that he could be harmed. Rising incitement and hate speech on social media led to an extraordinary statement being issued by the head of the Shin Bet internal security service, Nadav Argaman. “This discourse may be interpreted among certain groups or individuals as one that allows violent and illegal activity, and could even lead to harm to individuals,” he warned.

It’s worth remembering that Rabin (like Bennett) was depicted as a traitor by the Israeli right, and eventually that led to his assassination. Some are worried the current political climate has echoes of those times.

Netanyahu has declared that the new government endangers the land of Israel, the state of Israel, and the Israel Defense Forces. “We’ll be back,” he pledged just before getting dethroned. Sounding like Arnold Schwarzenegger in his blockbuster *Terminator* movie, there’s likely to be a dramatic sequel to follow. Watch this space!

• Paula Slier is the Middle East bureau chief of RT, the founder and chief executive of Newshound Media International, and the inaugural winner of the Europcar Women in Leadership Award of the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards.

It’s lift off for Novick and SAA

PETA KROST MAUNDER

Former kulula.com now LIFT Airline mastermind Gidon Novick may be a sucker for punishment, but he has taken to turning South African Airways (SAA) around and making it something South Africans can be proud of.

“I’ve already got grey hairs, a few more can’t hurt,” Novick joked, speaking to the *SA Jewish Report* last weekend, days after his involvement in the 51% buyout of SAA was announced.

Novick and Global Aviation, which partnered to launch LIFT in December, have joined up with Harith General Partners, a private equity firm that invests in infrastructure across Africa, to buy a 51% share of the national carrier. The Takatso consortium will be chaired by Harith’s chief executive, Tshepo Mahloele, and Novick, who was also the former chief executive of Comair. The government will still own 49% of SAA.

SAA was put into business rescue in December 2019, costing the country about R250 million. Late last year, R10.5 billion was allocated to SAA for business rescue. This was released over time, and some of it (roughly R2.7 billion) will be allocated to SAA’s subsidiaries.

The government will have no further financial obligations to the airline. Said Novick, “We will control the company, but also value and respect the input from government as a significant and strategic shareholder.

“No doubt there will be excitement and stress,” he said. “I feel like there comes a point in life where you need to chill or give it a real go and take what comes with that. I believe I’m up for the challenge. It feels opportune.”

He said he was at a unique point in his life where he has both energy and experience. “I have done a few things along the way, and am still young enough to have the energy. This venture will make good use of that energy and experience and hopefully, will be meaningful on a few levels.”

Novick comes from an airline family in which his late father, Dave, was in the industry for 51 years. He took Comair from a company with two aircraft and built it into a major player in the industry

with British Airways and kulula.com. As part of Comair, Gidon, a chartered accountant with an MBA from the Kellogg School of Management at North Western University, started the then innovative kulula.com.

In 2019, Novick told financial journalist Alec Hogg that running SAA would be “pretty much the worst job – after Eskom”. However, he did say that if he were ever to take on SAA, “certain things [would] have to be put in place, and one would require the autonomy to make some quite drastic decisions in that organisation”.

So it may not be such a surprise that Novick now says this has always been something “that could emerge or evolve over time”.

He is excited to take on what many may consider to be a dinosaur because, “Government has come a huge way, some of it by necessity, and the dealings we have had have been so positive. I understand it better now, and believe we have a real opportunity for alignment and pulling the right interest and skills together in the private and public sector.

“The best thing is we all have the national interest at heart,” said Novick.

He said real discussion about the SAA takeover started during the COVID-19 pandemic, when he reached out to the department of public enterprises to start

talking. “They had put together various advisory teams to look at SAA’s future as it was under business rescue.”

These discussions began before Novick launched LIFT. “I was sharing some ideas about what we could do with SAA. It was very initial, and then we got stuck into launching LIFT, which we are still completely submerged in,” he said.

“At the time, I had been out of the airline industry for a while, and was building an airline model in LIFT that was right for this time. That helped a lot, and became more practical and real in relation to working with SAA.”

To create LIFT, Novick partnered with Global Aviation, a company that leases out fully crewed, maintained, and insured aircraft to established airlines locally and around the world. Then, he met the leadership of Harith that already co-owns Lanseria Airport and was interested in investing in airlines.

“I was introduced to Tshepo Mahloele, its executive director, who said they were interested in SAA and we combined our efforts,” said Novick. Harith committed the finances necessary for the deal.

As to what exactly the future SAA will look like, Novick said, “I don’t quite know yet. We have done a lot of work in planning how things will operate, but there is still mountains to be done.

“I believe in the creativity that exists in South Africa, and the solution will capture the best of the legacy of the SAA emblem and its name. We will infuse modernity and creativity into something all South Africans can be proud of. It will be iconic and fresh, stand out, and be globally recognised.”

Novick said he planned to import some of LIFT’s efficient agile operating model into SAA, among other things. “The customer obsession we have at LIFT will also become a

mainstay of SAA,” he said. “It’s critical, everything has to revolve around the customer.”

As for staffing, he said 80% of SAA’s staff had already taken voluntary retrenchment, but, “we need to take a good and careful look at the organisational structure”.

He is clear that the vision for the new SAA is to build an iconic national brand and a globally competitive airline, particularly on the African continent. “It will be a cornerstone of commerce, tourism, and industry.”

He isn’t yet sure how LIFT will fit in, however he says experience and skills will be exported into SAA so that the national carrier can benefit from its learning.

Novick plans to start local flights soon, and get going with regional ones soon after. “Regional flights use the same infrastructure as local, so that isn’t too complicated. The long-haul network will depend on tourism, the opening of borders, COVID-19, and global collaboration.

“I am hoping this initiative becomes a blueprint for future public-private partnerships, and gives all South Africans the confidence we need to continue building this incredible country,” Novick said.



Gidon Novick

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“How much blood will be shed?” ask bereaved parents

STEVEN GRUZD

Losing a child to violence devastates the parents left behind. It creates an unspeakable emptiness, a void of loss, pain, and anger. Two bereaved Israeli and Palestinian parents have joined forces to forgive, and have become unlikely warriors for peace so that their children won't have died in vain.

Robi Damelin and Bassam Aramin shared their grief and hope in an emotion-filled webinar, “One Day After Peace”, hosted by the *SA Jewish Report* on Saturday, 12 June.

Damelin was born in Johannesburg, and settled in Israel in 1967. Her youngest son, David, served in the Israeli army during the Second Intifada. The liberal and open-minded educationalist David struggled with serving in the territories.

He was killed by a Palestinian sniper's bullet in March 2002.

“One Palestinian,” Damelin said, “Not the whole Palestinian nation. I told the army, ‘You may not kill anyone in the name of my child.’”

Losing a child “tears your heart out”, Damelin said. Reluctantly, she was persuaded to attend a weekend for bereaved Israeli and Palestinian families in East Jerusalem. “I thought I had had enough pain. But they understood. Palestinian mothers shared the same pain, our tears were the same colour.”

Damelin became a voice for non-violence, reconciliation, and restorative justice, and shared her story around the world. When the man who killed David was found, “That was the test,” she said. “Did I really mean all this stuff about reconciliation and forgiveness?” He said he had killed 10 people – David and nine others – to “free Palestine”, having as a child seen his uncle die for this cause. He took a path of revenge and was a folk hero. Damelin reached out to him, only to receive a bitter and stinging reply years later.

“When you are a victim of any circumstance, don't remain one. It will hold you back for the rest of your life. I gave up my just right to revenge,” Damelin said. “Forgiveness is a very personal.” She has found that writing letters to David has given her solace.

Aramin also shared his story. Growing up under what he called “this strange occupation”, he began throwing stones at Israeli soldiers when he was 13. He was arrested at 17, and sentenced to seven years. He learned Hebrew in prison, “So I could know my enemy and kill my enemy. Jail gets you to hate more.”

Then he watched a film in prison about the Holocaust. “The vast majority of us don't believe it happened, and that the Zionists use this ‘great lie’ to justify the occupation.” He was unexpectedly moved, and went on to do a Master's in the Holocaust at Bradford University.

When he started a family after the 1993 Oslo Accords, Aramin realised that 100 years of armed struggle hadn't worked, and just wanted a safe, normal life for his children.

In 2005, he met Israeli officers who had refused to serve in the territories. Having difficult conversations, they kept meeting. Their group grew to 300 in a year, and became Combatants for Peace. “When you work with your enemy, he becomes your partner,” Aramin said.

Then on 16 January 2007, an Israeli border policeman shot and killed Aramin's 10-year-old daughter, Abir, outside her school.

“I joined a bereaved parents' circle, an organisation in my worst dream I wouldn't want to join. The ticket price is very high. You never fully heal.” Aramin was disappointed at the lack of regret by the man who killed his



innocent daughter. “Revenge is a right, but forgiveness is a choice.”

“A child's life is more important than any holy land. Without loving each other, we need to respect each other, and both peoples

have a right to exist. Palestinians will never ever accept the Israeli occupation. We're not going to leave or disappear. We will remain and the occupation will go. But how many more children will have to

die?” asked Aramin.

“This last war was terrifying – a repeat of 2014 with better weapons,” Damelin said. “How are those children growing up filled with hatred in Gaza ever going to handle things? Children in Sderot, Ashkelon, Ashdod are traumatised and wetting their beds. Palestinian women have no safe room to run to. Israeli mothers have 15 seconds to run – what if they have more than one child?”

“We need brave leaders,” said Aramin. “The Nakba [establishment of Israel in 1948] is over. The Holocaust is over. We are very strong nations, but we must look

forward. We need to share this land, in one state, two states, five states, or there will just be two big graves here. I hope to see peace in my lifetime, but how much blood will still be shed?”

Aramin partnered with more than 100 Israeli soldiers to build gardens for children to play in, in Abir's memory. “One can kill, 100 can build,” he said. “Me and Robi are family now. We are human beings and we need to trust and respect our partners.”

Damelin said, “If we don't deal with the problems with Palestine, one of these days there won't be an Israeli state. I love Israel, and I have paid the highest price. But it's important to live in a moral country, and the occupation is taking its toll.”

Both speakers appear in documentaries about their journeys, *One Day after Peace* and *Within the Eye of the Storm*. Aramin's story was also an inspiration for the novel, *Apeirogon*, by Colum McCann.

Why Benjamin Netanyahu treats the Jewish media with contempt

OPINION

GARY ROSENBLATT — JTA



Whether this week marks the last of Benjamin Netanyahu's record-setting tenure as prime minister or is just a prelude to another never-count-him-out comeback, it seems a fitting moment to try to understand why he has consistently treated diaspora Jewish media with disdain.

It's something I've experienced personally on several occasions, and may well reflect the prime minister's attitude not just toward the Jewish press but toward American Jewry in general.

It seems ironic, if not baffling, that Netanyahu would be rude to the one group of journalists who are most sympathetic and accommodating. But then he is a man of many contradictions, with remarkable skills and ugly traits, towering oratory, and gutter-level charges, and great success in protecting Israel from outside threats while allowing the weakening of Israeli society from within.

I have interviewed the prime minister one-on-one in his Jerusalem office, attended a number of meetings he's held with the press, and heard him speak many times in the United States (US) and Israel. Perhaps the most illuminating example of his contradictory behaviour dates back to a visit he made to the US when he first served as prime minister, from 1996 to 1999.

During that visit 25 years ago, Netanyahu's staff scheduled back-to-back sessions for him with two separate groups of journalists in a small conference room at his Manhattan hotel. The first group consisted of about a dozen major media figures, including the network news anchors of the day and A-list reporters. The second meeting was with the same number of editors of Jewish newspapers from across the country.

As editor and publisher of *The Jewish Week*, I was invited to the second meeting. But thanks to an influential friend at the local Israeli consulate, I was allowed to attend the first meeting as well, though I was asked to keep a low profile.

When Netanyahu walked into the room with the media notables seated around a table, he was warm, friendly, and upbeat from the outset. He greeted them individually by name, shaking hands, making small talk as he moved gracefully around the room. During the session, he handled questions with aplomb, on point, articulate, and used colloquial expressions at times – it was easy to forget that he was the leader of a foreign country. He was thoroughly charming.

About 15 minutes after the meeting, while Netanyahu was taking a break, my Jewish media colleagues were ushered into the room. When we were settled in, the prime minister re-entered and immediately sat down at the head of the table. No schmoozing this time. He was all business and began, “OK, ask me your questions.”

A bit taken aback by the abrupt opening, the chair of our delegation asked if it would be all right for us to introduce ourselves briefly, stating our names and professional titles. Netanyahu agreed. When it was my turn, the prime minister looked closely at me and said, “You look familiar.”

I said, “I was with the first group here as well.”

What I wanted to add was, “I saw how engaging and friendly you can be if you want to make the effort. What's

your problem?”

For a split second, Netanyahu seemed a bit taken aback, but he just nodded and the introductions continued.

The mood of the session couldn't have been more different to the earlier one. Though he was in the presence of loyal, influential Zionists who treated him with great respect, the prime minister was curt, contentious, and clearly couldn't wait to be done with us.

“Ask me your questions.”

A few years later, when I was in Israel, I was granted a one-on-one interview with Netanyahu in his Jerusalem office. I was ushered in by an aide who announced my name as I sat down in a chair facing the prime minister. He wore a leather bomber jacket and was seated at his desk, reading through a document in front of him.

“Go ahead, ask me your questions,” he said without looking up. He was using a yellow outliner pen to mark his reading material.



Then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks to reporters at a Jewish media summit in Jerusalem in 2016

I wasn't sure how to proceed and waited for him to make eye contact. After a moment, he repeated his request. I waited again – it felt like minutes but was probably only a few seconds – before proceeding, reluctantly, with the interview.

I don't remember the details of what transpired, only that I was thrown by Netanyahu's rudeness, and that the agreed-on 45-minute session ended abruptly when an aide came in to announce that the prime minister was needed for a pressing matter. It seemed prearranged; the prime minister got up and followed him out of the office without a word or gesture to me.

One more: five years ago, at a Jewish media conference in Jerusalem I attended with dozens of colleagues from the US, Europe, and South America, Netanyahu addressed our group and was ornery from the outset. His manner was challenging and dismissive, interrupting the moderator, the *Forward's* Jane Eisner, and suggesting alternative topics. At one point, he evaded a question about his government's relations

with American Jewry and responded, in effect, “Why not ask me about Israel's impressive dairy output?” He then waxed eloquent on the subject, and had an aide display a chart on the wall with statistics about Israel's prolific cows.

“After the session ended, some of the women journalists in the room were furious, sure that he acted as he did because I was the moderator,” Eisner wrote. “I appreciated their support, but male colleagues tell me that Netanyahu can be similarly dismissive to them, too.”

How does one explain this behaviour?

I turned to two close colleagues and veteran Bibi watchers – journalist and author Yossi Klein Halevi in Jerusalem and Mideast expert David Makovsky in Washington – and asked why they think Netanyahu treats the Jewish media so shabbily. Is it because he doesn't respect us as journalists? Or because he believes that diaspora communities are less relevant to Israeli politics? Or neither, or both?

“Bibi treats his friends worse than anyone,” Klein Halevi responded, “which is why, at the end of the day, he doesn't have any. He takes them for granted and abuses their trust. That's why this new government is being led, in part, by three of his former closest aides,” Naftali Bennett, Avigdor Lieberman, and Gideon Saar.

“The American Jewish media was simply in his pocket,” Klein Halevi continued, “or so he assumed, and he could treat them with the special contempt he reserved for those on his side.”

Makovsky believes Netanyahu views the diaspora Jewish media in the larger context of his attitude toward American Jewry – seen as declining dramatically in relevance.

On a practical level, he noted, diaspora Jews don't vote in Israeli elections and so are “less central for his [Netanyahu's] purposes to cultivate”. Similarly, the prime minister focuses mainly on Israeli media, which he views as either for him or against him, so the diaspora media is less important.

The prime minister has told those who meet with him privately that with the exception of the Orthodox, “American Jews will last another generation or two ... due to assimilation and low fertility rates,” Makovsky said. “This has enabled him to discount the liberal attitudes and voting trends of non-Orthodox American Jews and not think of the impact of a few of his policies on the relationship.”

In addition, Netanyahu has said in private that as long as he has the support in America of evangelical Christians, who vastly outnumber Jews, and the Orthodox Jewish community, he's in good shape.

We'll know in the coming days the shape of Netanyahu's immediate future. But even if the “change” coalition is sworn in, no one who knows Bibi Netanyahu believes he can be counted out.

• Gary Rosenblatt was editor and publisher of *“The Jewish Week”* from 1993 to 2019.



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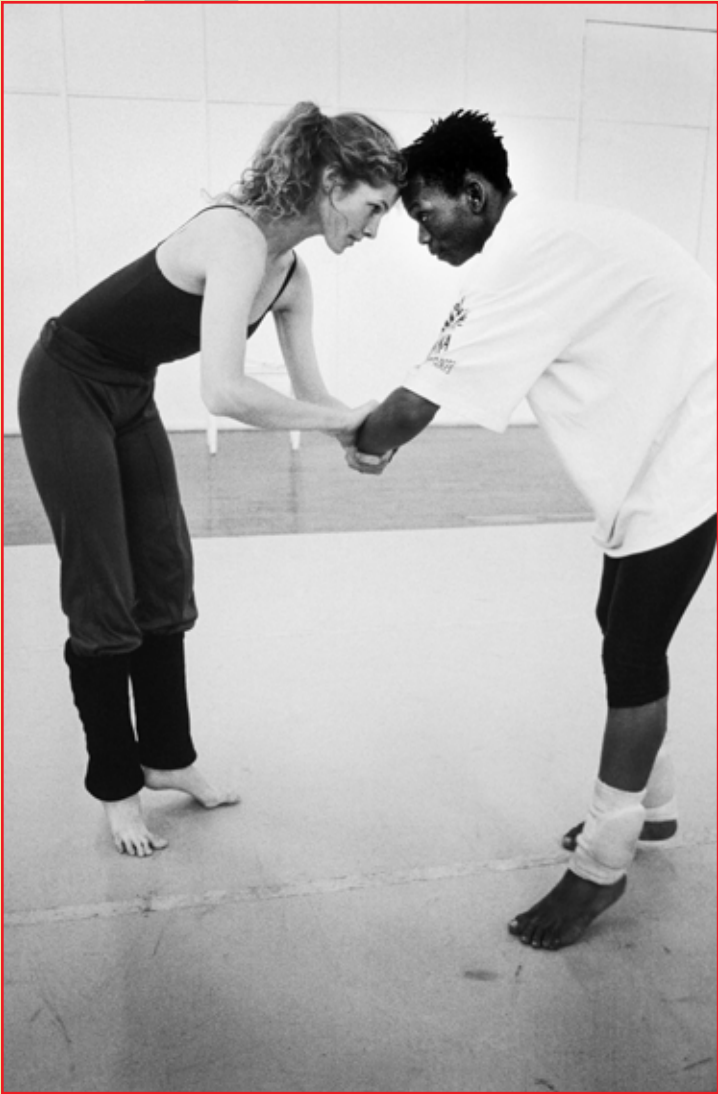
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Snapshots of youth

MIRAH LANGER

To commemorate Youth Day, the SA Jewish Report asked some of South Africa’s most illustrious photographers to share a photograph that they felt evoked something of youth, either past or present, within our land. They reflected on their choices.



Paul Weinberg, *Dancers*, 1995

I took this photograph of two Zimbabwean dancers while on an assignment for a cultural magazine called *Du* in 1995. It was a dance production with a group of street performers. A fleeting moment of connection between two people, whose parents had been engaged in a conflictual past, but now were kinetically and intimately bonded through this performance. Images provoke arresting questions. That was 25 years ago. The two youths then are now middle aged. So much has happened in Zimbabwe since this period, as in this country. What happened to these two people, where are they now, how did life play out for them? This image also provokes an important meditation for me. A moment of synthesis that speaks back as well as to the future. How difficult is it really to suspend prejudice and polarity to find our common humanity and human potential? Why do we struggle to learn this over generations? This image, buried deep in my archive, has come back to life. It’s a touchstone for a more humane and loving world, as relevant now as it was then.



Alon Cohen, *Kids of the Street, Oaklands, Johannesburg*, 2016

This photograph of four young men that live together in a community on the streets of Oaklands, Johannesburg, represents a massive segment of the youth that we sadly haven’t managed to cater for in this country. These guys are well meaning, lost people that come each from their own unique, dysfunctional background where they felt they could no longer stay because to live amongst their families was more torturous than living on the streets. I just know that given a healthy place to live and a basic purpose to fulfil every day, many of these youth could bring value to their lives as well as the country as a collective. Yet, in spite of everything, they’re still able to look at each other and have a laugh. So human, just like any one of us.

Jodi Bieber, *Soweto Country Club, Soweto*, 2007

Through all my travels in South Africa and around the globe photographing different communities, my experience reveals that children the world over, often living in environments with few opportunities, show resilience and creativity with very little. I fantasised that one day, I would become a talent scout for those children that shone in order for them to live out their dream.



Eric Miller, *Poverty, the Third Pandemic, Ingwavuma district, KwaZulu-Natal*, 2002

In the middle of this pandemic, the consequences on the poorest and most vulnerable are exacerbated by the poverty and circumstances within their communities. My work as a documentary photographer in this country stretches back several decades, and includes the documentation of a previous pandemic, HIV/Aids. Ingwavuma district, KwaZulu-Natal, was at the epicentre of the HIV/Aids pandemic, with an infection rate generally greater than 30%. The photograph shows the three oldest of five sisters orphaned after their parents died of Aids-related illness. Four of the girls attended school, the fifth taking care of her own two-month-old baby at home. The girls, aged then between eight and 19, were left to care for themselves, collecting water from a nearby stream for cooking, washing, and so on. They were reliant on assistance, receiving food provided by a local community organisation which survived on donations from well-wishers. During the current pandemic, my thoughts often turn to them and the many similarly orphaned children left to fend for themselves or in the care of elderly grandparents who during this pandemic have been most vulnerable in the face of rampant COVID-19 infection, often relying on government grants as their only income for survival.

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Ilan Ossendryver, Tyre Race – Kliptown, Soweto, 2019

Kliptown is an area in which everyone has been forgotten, yet it's quite an amazing place. I've been working with the community there for many years.

I selected the photograph because of the creativity with which children create toys and games. They have parents that care, their parents will fight for everything, but the government doesn't care. The photograph shows the creativity of the children, but also the failure of government to really help people. They live in really terrible conditions: no running water, no toilets, and no electricity.

I do outreach programmes and we hold a tyre race where they get prizes. Eventually, I give everyone prizes, but first I want them to learn to keep trying better next time. In their expressions, you can see the absolute determination to win, and the community watching them. One of the men watching is actually one of the best drummers in South Africa, and even played at a Lag B'Omer celebration at a shul in Johannesburg.



Marc Shoul, Jané, Sydenham, Port Elizabeth, South Africa, 1999

I took this photograph in my early 20s before I became a father. When I look at this image, I see the gentleman in the background, and I can sort of relate to the feelings in a way. I shot this in a house that I would frequent from time to time when I was in Port Elizabeth. This was when I was completing a body of work called *Beyond Walmer* where I was concentrating on the lower-income white group, post-1994. The little girl's expression is just priceless. The man on the very right hand side, to my knowledge, is her father; the guy holding her is a mother's new young boyfriend or husband at the time. It would be amazing to go back to that house and see where all these people are now. Perhaps I will.

It's an image that has contrasts, and hopefully, it has some sort of hope for the future, not only doom and gloom, but the reality is that there is a long, winding road ahead.



Ilan Godfrey, Swimming in the 'Long Sea', Diamantheogte, Koffiefontein, Free State, 2013

I came across these kids swimming while travelling across South Africa to various mining towns for my book titled *Legacy of the Mine*. Daily life in and around these mining towns was an important component of this project, and this scene really emphasised how this legacy is engrained on our landscape. The pure joy, spontaneity, and youthfulness of the children, and their ability to find the most imaginative of spaces to play, really epitomises Youth Day for me.

The suburb of Diamantheogte (Diamond Heights) is home to a predominantly coloured community that lives on the outskirts of the diamond-mining town of Koffiefontein in Free State province. During the summer months, children enjoy swimming in the canals, which they refer to as the 'Long Sea'. The canals carry the overflow of water through the town from Kalkfontein Dam and the mine dam to outlying farms.

Koffiefontein became a stopover point for transport riders travelling between the diamond fields in the south and gold mines to the north during the 1800s. After diamonds were discovered here, Koffiefontein developed into a mining town. The town has a significant military history. It was seized by the British during the South African (Anglo-Boer) War, and was later used as a detention camp in World War II. Among the internees was John Vorster, who later became prime minister and president of South Africa. The mine has been closed several times over the years, but continues to recover some of the most valuable diamonds in the world.

When Brad Fisher founded ADreach in 1998, he was determined to show that innovative business initiatives could drive socio-economic development and yield a positive return on investment (profit). He went on to prove this was possible, and is still as passionate about this commitment more than 20 years later.

Innovative business ideas light up communities

Adopt-A-Light was the first such initiative, channelling the advertising revenue generated from display adverts on streetlights in business nodes like Sandton to the installation of streetlights in neighbouring impoverished areas like Alexandra. It resulted in the creation of ADreach (advertising driving outreach), now a leading out-of-home advertising and marketing solutions provider.

ADreach's innovation caught the attention of high-profile businessmen like current South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, and Jonathan Beare, who invested in the business, which has to date generated more than R180 million for several "Adopt-a-Project" initiatives that have greatly benefited impoverished communities.

WastePreneurs, for instance, uplifts informal waste collectors in Johannesburg while providing a professional collection service for residents. The initiative ensures waste doesn't end in landfills destroying the environment.

The Soweto Canoe and Recreation Club (SCARC) is a youth initiative launched in Soweto in 2003 that uses the power of sport (particularly canoeing) to uplift young people by improving athleticism and developing career and life skills. So successful was this initiative, it inspired an internationally acclaimed film *Beyond the River*.

In 2018, Fisher teamed up with Andile Ramaphosa to extend the successful Adopt-a-Project concept to uplift micro businesses through an initiative called Supplier Development Initiatives (SDI). The idea is to get South African corporates to embrace the international gig economy trend which gives micro businesses a chance to prosper through platforms like Uber and SweepSouth.



"The upliftment of these micro businesses that make up South Africa's informal sector is critical to the country's long-term economic growth. Micro businesses need access to markets [particularly the business sector] to develop and grow," says Fisher. SDI works collaboratively with enabling platforms like UBER, Bolt, Loadit, GreenFlag, and SweepSouth, which play a critical role in creating corporate trust in sourcing services from micro suppliers. ADreach, in turn, aggressively promotes these platforms on a heavily discounted basis.



"We believe that true economic upliftment happens at grassroots level. Channelling funding to micro entrepreneurs and giving them business by utilising the platforms they are part of can make a life-changing difference to these people, their dependants, and their communities," says Fisher.

During lockdown, Fisher spearheaded a six-month volunteer movement - SDI Force - to assist with the challenges of COVID-19. After a successful crowdfunding drive, SDI Force was able to feed 10 000 micro traders over the five-week severe lockdown period. SDI Force also fitted COVID-19-compliant equipment (including ventilation spacers and hand-sanitiser dispensers) in 5 000 school buses. Fisher worked selflessly for up to 18 hours a day over this period to achieve these life-saving measures without any fan fair or compensation and at considerable personal risk.

The common thread ... is to uplift and support South Africans in ways that create real shared value



In his effort to get the poorly understood COVID-19 message to South Africans that the virus is airborne and spreads by virus-bearing aerosols, Fisher collaborated with Apex Environmental to establish the GreenFlag Association, now an international organisation aimed at reducing the transmission of airborne pathogens, including COVID-19, in closed-air public spaces. This multidisciplinary association comprises international scientists, academics, and business representatives who operate collaboratively to provide practical solutions.

The common thread through all ADreach's Adopt-a-Project initiatives is to uplift and support South Africans in ways that create real shared value. ADreach will continue to live up to its promise of uplifting business.



On cantors and choirs: sifting through the soundtrack of SA Jewry

MIRAH LANGER

History books may detail the facts, but it's through the notes and melodies of Jewish liturgical music that the emotional story of the Jews of South Africa can be heard. Now, two aficionados on the subject have begun the mammoth task of collating the tales of cantors and choirs on the tip of Africa, detailing its rich legacy and hopes for the future.

"Chazzanut [cantorial music] is a unique Jewish creation. The *chazzan* [cantor] is described as a *chacham lev* – he who has the wisdom of the heart," says Evelyn Green, who along with Professor Russel Lurie, has dedicated herself to the preservation and practice of Jewish liturgical music in South Africa. After all, she reflects, "What are the Jewish people without their music?"

Green and Lurie have been stalwarts of the Johannesburg Jewish Male Choir (JJMC), Green since its inception in 1985, and Lurie, an acclaimed maxillofacial and oral surgeon, since 1987. Green, who is also renowned for her work as a Unisa (University of South Africa) music examiner and private music and singing teacher, is the choir's musical director, secretary, and repetiteur (singing coach). For the past 25 years, Lurie has served as its chairperson. Most recently, they have begun collating and researching the history of the cantorial and Jewish liturgical musical tradition in this country – the first such project of its kind.

Last month, they presented a set of webinars under the auspices of the Cantors' Assembly in America. They also spoke to the *SA Jewish Report* about their extensive work together and their determination to take it

even further while keeping the art form alive and thriving.

The interweaving of the everchanging South Africa context and this centuries-old Jewish tradition is illustrated by a delightful anecdote involving a cross-over choir, a bottle of whiskey, and a compulsory invitation to the home of the late Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris.

As South Africa commenced its democracy, "within this political scenario, the choir embarked on an outreach programme and on occasions, combined with one of the country's best black choirs, Imilonji KaNtu Choral Society," says Green.

However, Imilonji KaNtu is made up of male and female singers, and this doesn't comply with Jewish Orthodox tradition. Nevertheless, in 2000, in the spirit of the times, the JJMC felt the collaboration had such deep meaning, performing together could be justified.

"A few days before our concert," says Lurie, "my secretary [of his medical practice] came into the office and said Chief Rabbi Harris was on the phone and wanted to speak to me. In his broad, Scottish accent, he said, 'Russel, I want you at my home at 18:00, and bring Evelyn as well.'"

"We walked in, and the tension was there. We sat down, and he brought out a tray with whiskey. He said, 'We have a problem: Russel, Evelyn, you are against halacha. You know that men and women cannot sing together, but I want to congratulate the two of you because you have made a stride in the building of a rainbow nation.'"

Then, recalls Lurie, he immediately turned to the next task at hand asking, "Now how do you take your whiskey, because if you want water with it, you'll have to find some other place." Then he turned to Evelyn, joking "and you are too young for this, you can have a cooldrink".



At the end of the evening, he told Lurie and Green, "Anne [Harris's wife] and I will be at the concert. Leave the rabbinate to me, but don't ever do it again."

Green remembers opening night. "It was at the Linder Auditorium, which was totally packed except for two empty seats. We waited for five and then ten minutes before deciding that we had better start, and as I walked onto stage, they arrived." Harris remained a keen fan of the JJMC for the rest of his life, hosting them for a lunch every year. "He was the most wonderful man and supporter," reflects Green.

Jewish liturgical music was first carried to South African shores by immigrants fleeing pogroms and unrest in Eastern Europe. The Yiddish songs they carried with them were anthems to love, loss, and resilience.

After World War II, South Africa became a safe haven for refugees who brought both Ashkenazi and Sephardi music traditions.

Lurie details how one chazzan of the Oxford Shul in the 1970s was in fact a Holocaust survivor who was taken, along with thousands of others, to the shooting pits. "He lifted his arms and pleaded with the officer in charge to let him sing a prayer for his people. They let him sing, and they pulled him out."

Indeed, as Europe struggled in disarray in the aftermath of the devastation, South Africa was seen as an attractive option for *chazzans* to come and work. "South Africa was a springboard. The cantors would come and stay for four or five years and move on," says Lurie.

Some of the most acclaimed cantors in the world spent time in South Africa. A special story is told across three generations of the Alter family, starting with Israel Alter who was born in the Ukraine, and studied in Vienna and Hanover, before arriving in South Africa in 1936, fleeing Nazi rule. He went on to serve for 25 years at the Great Synagogue in Johannesburg. His son, Elazer Alter, followed in his footsteps at various shuls in Johannesburg and today, Israel's grandson, Avron, serves as the cantor at Sandton Synagogue.

In the 1980s, visits by icons of liturgical music like Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach and cantor Sol Zim, as well as the influence of cantor Ari Klein, resulted in experimentation in a new direction. Classical *chazzanut* was blended with Hasidic and even contemporary pop and folk music. Klein "introduced a light-hearted approach to services and his rendition of foot-tapping music had his congregation in awe," recalls Green.

So popular did this trend of contemporary

experimentation become, Harris even joked in his memoir that he had not known that Andrew Lloyd Webber composed music for the synagogue.

From this heyday of excitement and innovative energy, the current status quo is more concerning, say Lurie and Green. While South Africa certainly boasts superb local home-grown talent in the field, there appears little community support for these efforts in terms of sponsorships. Moreover, say Lurie and Green, there isn't sufficient effort in Jewish education to promote musical appreciation and practice.

Most chazzans are able to practice their art only in a part-time capacity as they must find other employment to make ends meet. In addition, in South Africa, the *shtibl* shul set-up, whereby there is no chazzan or choir at services, is the increasingly popular choice, particularly of younger generations.

It's all the more pity, say Green and Lurie, because their own lives are testament to what richness an immersion in the music has brought. "There is no end to it, and it is so beautiful," says Lurie.

Green recalls the poignancy of experiences like when the choir was invited to the first International Louis Lewandowski Choral Festival in Berlin in December 2011. At one point, the choir was taken to the cemetery of Lewandowski, one of the greatest composers of Jewish music. It was pouring with rain and freezing cold, yet the choir sang in his honour by his grave. When they visited the Holocaust memorial in the city, they too chose song to express themselves.

Lurie says it was an act of the most sacred affirmation. "It showed, 'Look we are here. Not only are we here – we are singing!'"

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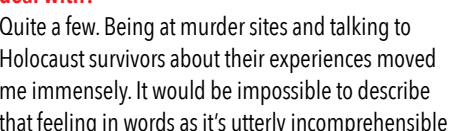
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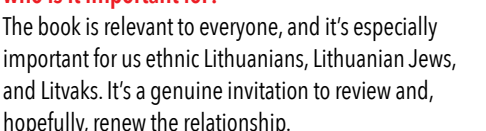
Kęstutis Pikūnas put together a beautiful coffee table book called 'Passport – The Litvaks' about the Jews of Lithuania. Being Lithuanian and having grown up there, he knew nothing about Litvaks beforehand. The SA Jewish Report asked him about his experience.

I believe that knowing history through its dry facts and figures is one thing, but being able to understand the events and reasons why and how it all happened is another.



tion lasted for maybe more than
prior to that, we simply agreed to

An awful lot! I quote Meryl Frank, a Litvak from the United States, whom I also interviewed: "The worst thing a person can do to another is to ignore them, to fail to see them, and erase them from history. I have seen a change in Lithuania over the 15 years I've been visiting the city of Vilnius [Vilna]. I believe that with the passage of time and the recognition of history, there is a possibility for building bridges." I honestly believe that there is no better time than now to reach out for each other's hand. The truth has the power to liberate.



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Artworks, L-R: Jim Dine, Very Lite in Japan | Mr Brainwash, All You need is He[ART] | Jim Dine, Dexter's Four Robes

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

COVID 19 – the battle continues

With the third wave of COVID-19 infections well and truly upon us, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) last week convened a national COVID-19 call with medical experts and representatives of major communal bodies from around the country. Discussion centred on the handling of schools, shuls, and communal functions. While we will continue to do all that we can at the collective level to guide our community at this worrying time, we reiterate the crucial need for every individual to take personal responsibility by strictly observing all COVID-19-related protocols and thereby minimising risk to themselves and those around them.

Last week, COVID-19 deprived our community of another of its most distinguished and devoted leaders, Victor Gordon. One of the guiding lights of Pretoria Jewry and a man of many talents, Gordon served South African Jewry in a range of capacities. Among other positions, he was president of the SAJBD Pretoria council for eight years, in which capacity he also sat on the SAJBD national executive council. He was also an invaluable member of the Zionist Federation media team, where his considerable writing skills were put to excellent use in the many articles and letters in defence of Israel that appeared over more than a decade. We extend our sincerest condolences to our Pretoria colleagues and in particular to the Gordon family during this very sad time.

Calling antisemites to account

Unreflecting bias against Israel is problematic in and of itself, but it brings with it the added risk of such rhetoric crossing the line into Jews

as a whole being denigrated and defamed. Such was the case with an interview programme on Power FM broadcast during the recent Gaza conflict, in which several callers were allowed to make a range of malevolent comments on the theme of global Jewish domination (including explicitly invoking the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*) without at any point being challenged by the host.

Our initial approach to the station was to request that someone who could respond to these stereotypically antisemitic canards appear on the same show, and in that regard, we offered to facilitate an interview with a suitable overseas expert.

In spite of being offered a reasonable, non-confrontational way of addressing the problem it had caused, Power FM chose to drag its heels as well as to try to impose objectionable conditions on the manner in which the interview would be conducted. The conciliatory approach having failed, the SAJBD then decided to escalate the matter by taking it to the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (BCCSA). In our letter of complaint, we explained the fundamentally racist and defamatory nature of what had been said on the show, as well as stressing the signal failure of the host to contradict it. (Indeed, the latter’s response when being challenged by another caller on a later show was to deny that anything wrong had been said.) The BCCSA has acknowledged receipt of our complaint, and advised that it will revert as soon as it has received Power FM’s response.

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



ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev

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

A column of ORT South Africa

ORT Jet – helping small Jewish businesses and changing people’s lives



ORT Jet Facilitating Business Growth Helene Itzkin

ORT Jet was founded by key stakeholders in the community in 2005 to support Jewish businesses, and since then, the shift in the business world has been startling. Over the years, ORT Jet has worked with a large network of mentors, facilitators, and staff to assist businesses in need in Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban.

“ORT Jet attracts Jewish business people who need help to grow existing businesses. Others are struggling to make their businesses profitable, and need a combination of training and mentorship to help solve issues. ORT Jet also receives many entrepreneurs wanting to take a business idea further. The invaluable mentorship, training, and resources they receive has been paramount to the success of thousands of businesses over the years,” says ORT SA Chief Executive Ariellah Rosenberg.

ORT Jet has three sets of specialised panels consisting of experienced business mentors. The first is business’ first “port of call” where the state of the business is analysed. Every three to six months, the catch-up panel assesses its progress, and allocates a new mentor if necessary. During the business’ journey with ORT Jet, it may meet the creative thinking panel, which will shift thinking and help the business to look at the world differently.

An extra panel was formed during the global pandemic called the business rescue panel. It gave advice to businesses in financial distress

by directing them to the Gesher Fund and providing them with information to stay afloat.

“My mentor is incredible. I’ve sat with him twice already in the past week, and I feel like I have another partner in the business. He’s deeply interested in what we do, and assists with things like management strategy, auditors, legal matters, even networking, says ORT Jet beneficiary Darryl Epstein.

“We recently ran our fifth business induction for the year. We attracted a variety of businesses, start-ups, and people with wonderful business ideas. Today, one needs to look at what the world needs and adapt accordingly. Change brings opportunities, and those with creative and open mind-sets will thrive,” says ORT Jet HOD Helene Itzkin.

The ORT Jet impact on the community is evident. Through its webinars, people are trained from all over the world. For extra value add, participants receive useful resources after each webinar and the opportunity to engage with the speakers. “The Canva webinar with Mike Said was absolutely fabulous,” says training participant Debby Bear. “Thank you to ORT Jet for giving us opportunities.”

ORT Jet continuously collaborates with industry experts to keep the training relevant and packed with skills.

To access the ORT Jet training calendar, visit the ORT Jet website at www.ortjet.org.za. All webinar recordings are available on the JETflix YouTube channel. Subscribe at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCgK1Y634pTfquMrNd5SjQw>

To join the ORT Jet programme, email admin@ortjet.org.za. The next induction for new sign-ups will be held on 30 June from 14:00 to 15:00 on Zoom. Follow ORT Jet on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn.

Letters

WHY SEEK CITIZENSHIP OF MURDEROUS LITHUANIA?

“Most of our ancestors were forced to flee Lithuania in terrible circumstances, and restoring our citizenship will go a long way to address the wrongs of the past.” I find these words by the national vice-president of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies to be shameful and incomprehensible. To claim, as Zev Krengel does, that ex-Lithuanian Jews have an ancestral right to citizenship is an insult to the G-d of Israel. The only country to which any Jew has an ancestral right is the land of Israel.

When the Nazis marched into Lithuania in 1941, the government and people (with a handful of exceptions) didn’t lift a finger as Jews in more than 200 shtetls were humiliated, tortured, and ultimately murdered by Lithuanian collaborators. Which Jew with pure emotions would now wish to seek citizenship of that country, or any European country which willingly aided and abetted Nazi murderers?

The yizkor (remembrance) prayer that Jews recite in synagogues four times a year includes one for martyrs: “May G-d remember the souls of the holy and pure ones who were murdered, gassed, burned, strangled for the sanctification of the name through the hands of the German oppressors and their

collaborators. (*Yemach s’hmom v’zichron* – may their name and memory be obliterated.) No, Mr Krengel, no amount of time will “restore the wrongs of the past”.

The most tragic event in Jewish history – the Holocaust – has taught the Jewish people that it’s forbidden for us to derive any benefit from countries that persecuted our people. (Hilchot Sanhedrin 15:9). How can any Jew with pure emotions associate with these places, much less seek citizenship?

With all due respect to Krengel and all those who seek citizenship of these murderous countries, may I humbly suggest that you rather seek citizenship in your one and only true ancestral homeland – the land of Israel. Seeking citizenship anywhere but Israel, after 2 000 years of bitter exile, is scorning G-d’s most precious gift to His people.

Further, I believe that to fulfil the commandment of “may their name and memory be obliterated”, no Jew should ever set foot in or associate with these countries in any way. It’s with dismay that one sees influential Orthodox groups spending money on resurrecting Judaism in these murderous countries instead of obliterating their names.

– Choni Davidowitz, Johannesburg

NONE OF US ARE ANGELS, BUT CONDEMNATION OF ISRAEL IS TRULY SICK

I’m appalled by prominent members of our government, even one of our own – Ronnie Kasrils – who has the gall to speak out against Israel, Zionism, and the Jews for what happened recently in Gaza, even to the extent of mentioning a Jewish policeman or soldier with his knee on a dead Palestinian child. This isn’t the way Jews behave. We are very conscious of our Judaism and families, and kindness is in our genetic make-up.

The photo I’m referring to was taken years ago, in a completely foreign country, and it incites hate where it doesn’t belong.

Sick people have caused anxiety and fear during the pandemic by publishing pictures of COVID-19-related crimes and other lies on Facebook and WhatsApp, and by publishing old photos and leading us to believe

that they are fresh situations.

None of us are angels who never sin. But can anyone truly believe that no action should be taken against 4 000 rockets fired at a country indiscriminately? Does any other army in the world advise the perpetrators that they should evacuate because they don’t want to hurt or kill innocent people when they retaliate?

Well, Israel does.

In conclusion, Israel isn’t fighting Gazans, it’s fighting Hamas. The people who run Gaza are Hamas, not the Palestinians. They made the fatal mistake of allowing Hamas to run their country. It uses them as shields and doesn’t give a damn about their safety or well-being.

So, wake up South Africa, and all who condemn Israel for defending its citizens – you would do the same!

– Joe Marx, Johannesburg

“CLEARLY YOU’RE A ZIONIST, GOING AROUND DEMANDING SHIT”

I’m so sad that I came across this terrible article (“Professor of propaganda” by Howard Sackstein, *SA Jewish Report*, 3 June 2021).

First, I’m a Wits-trained doctor, and I admire doctors like Professor Shabir Moosa who are able to step outside their comfort zones and challenge the minds and beliefs of their younger doctors. South Africa needs more doctors that stand up for what’s right. Israel is an apartheid state. Please stop denying it! You’re basically killing Arabs and jailing innocent kids. You have no humanity as a Zionist.

Second, he posted his article on this group, and that made interns feel uncomfortable! Oh please, grow up! It’s a bunch of white men trying to bully us into acting in a way suitable for them. Imagine, a bunch of privileged white men felt uncomfortable for the first time in their life!

Third, screw the author! That he thinks he has any authority to report and demand “action”. Who do you think you are? Clearly, you’re a Zionist. Going around demanding shit. When you deserve nothing. – Anonymous doctor

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Like Zurich – without the chocolates

One of the vivid memories that I have about the period in my life spent on planes was taking off from Zurich Airport on the way to Munich early one November morning. It was a dark, cold, and wet morning. No one looked happy, and very few seemed filled with the joy of living, which might have been expected considering that it was Switzerland, where a smile is no one's resting face. It was so dank that when we boarded the flight, it was impossible to tell if the water on the window was rain or cloud moisture.

As we began to taxi, the captain welcomed us on board and gave us some details about the short flight. The weather in Munich was apparently much the same, but the flying conditions would be good. Because, as he explained, "it's a beautiful day a few metres up". Shortly after, we took off and he was right. It took seconds for the cabin to fill with sunshine. Suddenly everything looked colourful and bright, and I'm certain that even some of the Swiss might have smiled. On the ground, in the grey and the dark, it would have been impossible to imagine what a magnificent day awaited us.

This week, South Africa felt like Zurich. Without the chocolates, banks, the Alps, and electricity. And water. And watches. And trams, and snow. It was similar in that it felt dark and grey, and it was impossible to know what was causing the water on the windows. Was it COVID-19 or the infrastructure failure or vaccine delay? Was it the fact that we can't socialise and that we don't laugh nearly as much as we need to, or that it's hard to imagine the sun shining again.

I bumped into a friend when I was

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



walking on Shabbat. After he asked me how I was, he gave me his theory as to why it's particularly bad at the moment. He said that bad things have always happened. People have always died before their time, and things have always gone wrong. But normally, there is more balance. After a difficult week, we can get together with friends, have a drink and laugh. Now it feels like all that we have are funerals. I wanted to disagree with him. I wanted to tell him how blessed we are as a community, how fortunate we are to have all that we have in this country, and how wonderful South Africans are. I wouldn't have been wrong. But to say it would have been empty.

It also doesn't help to repeat that it's "darkest before the dawn", that "this too shall pass", and that there is "light at the end of the tunnel". And that "every cloud has a silver lining". All might be true, but none are helpful.

What helps me at a time like this is to find a role to play. We each have a "job", and a way that we can assist in helping others get through this time. Purpose is a life saver. And it has saved my life even before it helped others. It also helps me to think of that November morning in Zurich when it was hard to imagine the sunshine. Until we took off and within seconds, we saw what a magnificent day was waiting for us. Just where we couldn't see it.

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KDVP pupil's family story trumps English speaking world

Daniel Segal, a pupil at King David Victory Park Primary, was proclaimed the winner of the English speaking countries category of the My Family Story contest at the international awards ceremony held on 9 June.

My Family Story gives students and their families the opportunity to learn about their family history and create a sense of belonging between their family and Jewish people all over the world.

This year, participants were divided into four categories: Israel, English speaking countries, Spanish speaking countries, and Russian speaking and European countries.



Daniel Segal

Getting to heart of activism at KDL

Grade 7s at King David Linksfield Senior Primary School have been learning about activism and protest art. They collaborated and created artworks in different mediums, each one portraying a cause close to their hearts.



Mecah Ash and Tali Celgow display their protest art

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