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# ■ Volume 25 – Number 23 ■ 1 July 2021 ■ 21 Tamuz 5781

# South African Jewish Report

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## Fleeing eSwatini to safety in the nick of time

NICOLA MILTZ

The co-owner of popular kosher eatery Frangelicas, Elana Godley, made it out of eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) in the nick of time on Tuesday afternoon, moments before the country plunged into total mayhem.

She had no idea when she arrived at the Royal Villas in the Ezulwini Valley on Sunday, 27 June, for a week-long workshop and conference that she would find herself caught in the middle of violent civil unrest.

Godley, an industrial psychologist, was holding a workshop for one of her clients in the mountain kingdom this week when tensions began to reach fever pitch as pro-democracy protests engulfed the country.

There have been scenes of chaos in eSwatini as violent protests against the rule of King Mswati III swept across the country. Chaos intensified in the tiny kingdom as citizens demanded that the king relinquish power and called for multiparty democracy.

Low-level protests have taken place since last month, resulting in the government imposing a ban on political gatherings last week. This apparently fanned the flames of discontent.

On 29 June, according to reports, the rioting spread to the capital, Mbabane, where journalists said residents were fleeing the city, causing traffic jams. The government imposed a dusk-to-

dawn curfew and closed schools.

Godley, who was meant to be in the country until the end of this week, was frantically whisked away from her conference by concerned local clients

who feared for her safety. They went out of their way to make sure that she was rushed to the border to get her safely back to South Africa before potentially finding herself trapped in

the landlocked nation.

"It was surreal," she told the *SA Jewish Report*, "I felt like I was in a movie."

When she was collected from the airport on Sunday, her driver mentioned that he was surprised that her trip hadn't been cancelled because of rising tensions in the country.

"I wasn't aware at the time that things were so heated as there had been little news in South Africa. I was in the dark," she said. "It was only on Monday night that I realised things were becoming tense."

She still hadn't grasped the gravity of the situation by the 10:00 tea break on Tuesday morning. However, "My clients gathered together during tea and decided that it was best for me to leave the country as soon as possible," Godley said.

"They said, 'Elana you have to leave now!' and instructed me to go to my room and pack my bags. As I walked back to my room, I still didn't quite absorb the urgency of the situation," she said.

"I remember thinking I had all my kosher food in the little fridge, and wondered what I was going to do with it. There was a knock on my door. My driver, [whose name is known by the *SA Jewish Report* but has been withheld for his safety] summoned me to make haste. He



Simon and Elana Godley

seemed agitated about my safety."

After throwing her things in her bag and leaving the food behind, Godley and her driver left the hotel. He told her they were going to the border and not the airport as originally planned. She relayed this information to her husband, Simon, who immediately left Frangelicas and "drove like a bat out of hell" for four hours to the border to reach her.

"This news threw me completely because I always fly to eSwatini – I never drive. I was a little shocked, and I felt a little anxious at that point," she said. Little did she know that the roads to Mbabane and Manzini were blocked by protesters so there was no way to reach the airport.

"I was worried that my COVID-19 test had expired, and that I would be denied permission to enter South Africa," she said.

"Along the route, there were dozens of cars travelling at pace that suddenly did frantic U-turns to go straight towards us in the opposite direction. There were burning tyres, barricades, and smoke.

"It was unnerving. I remember

## Desperate battle



Photo: Jason Blasi

Firefighter Jason Blasi took this photograph of the collapsed Champlain Towers in Florida where he is working 12-hour shifts. See story on page 5.

Continued on page 6>>



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# Israeli filmmaker banned from Durban film festival

TALI FEINBERG

**Y**akie Ayalon is an Israeli filmmaker who grew up in Nigeria, and makes films based on humanitarian values. With a strong connection to the African continent, he was looking forward to showing his work at the upcoming Durban International Film Festival (DIFF). But that dream came to an end when the festival banned him from participating because of his Israeli origin.

The festival, which will run from 22 July to 1 August, was organised by the Centre for Creative Arts at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Ayalon was born in Jerusalem in 1978. "Social values and human issues play a significant part in my films and work," he told the *SA Jewish Report*. I spent most of my childhood in Nigeria. My father worked with an international company on various projects, mainly in agriculture and construction. My family and I lived in Lagos. This experience has served as a formative one for me until today. Even now, I consider Nigeria my second home, and I often visit it and other African countries for various film projects."

He has directed and produced award-winning films which explore all aspects of Israeli society, shining a light on minorities. "Most of my films try to give a voice to those who aren't at the centre of social discourse," he says. "I always try to find the most common ground that everyone can relate to, and give the viewers an experience of optimism, hope, and inspiration."

For example, in his film, *Jirah*, directed with Yousef Abo Madegam, "the story is about Hader, an artist. He lives in Rahat with his Bedouin wife and their children. His extended family, mother, siblings, and former wife live in Gaza. The film accompanies Hader's efforts to visit his sick mother in Gaza. In *Studio Varouj*, Varouj Ishkinian is the third generation in an Armenian family of photographers. Many know the studio in the old city of Jerusalem. The documentary accompanies Varouj during the last month before he closes the studio. Almost all my films raise questions of identity and belonging: what's the meaning of home? Is it where you were born and raised? Or is it the place you feel you belong?"

The Durban festival maintains that it's "committed to being a vibrantly creative enabler and advocate for social justice and democracy", yet it banned Ayalon from the festival in spite of the fact that his films enshrine these values.

The film that was originally chosen to participate at the DIFF is titled *Scattergories*. It's about the Essien children, born in Israel to migrant parents from Nigeria. "In a moment of despair, their mother quickly left with them back to Nigeria. As the children understood, they were travelling to Nigeria for a short visit," says Ayalon.

"Years passed, and they still felt detached, living for a time on the streets and struggling to survive. Esther, the eldest, took on the role of the responsible adult at home. In spite of the fact that in Israel they didn't always feel that they belonged, the Israeli experience has played a significant part in their lives, language, culture, and dreams.

"They try to return to Israel. At the heart of their struggle exists a moral dilemma: the mother and her children must part ways. When Esther celebrates her 18th birthday, she is able to return to Israel on her own.

"The film focuses on Esther's feeling of alienation in Nigeria and Israel," he says. "Israel isn't the same home she remembers, and she feels foreign and out of place. She is forced to deal with these challenges without her family, and is sometimes uncertain whether she made the right choice. But she's determined to bring her family back to Israel and reunite."

Ayalon says he wanted to be part of the DIFF because he had "heard wonderful things about it, and I know that it usually has a great selection of quality films. It's important for me to screen my film in African film festivals, reach wide and diverse audiences, and not participate only in European and North American festivals."

His participation was initially welcomed, but then he was told he could no longer participate. "I was saddened by the cancellation since we were already discussing the final details," he says. "From my point of view, boycotting and targeting individual Israeli filmmakers isn't the answer. This is especially since almost all my documentary films deal with issues which aren't in the main discourse and give a voice to those who are usually not heard.

"My films promote equality and strive against violence of all forms," he says. "It's heart breaking that I was denied the opportunity to screen my film and be heard, allegedly in the name of values I have tried to promote in my films. Boycotting individual filmmakers is itself an act of violence."

He says that in *Scattergories* specifically, "the film touches upon moral dilemmas and sacrifices. These dilemmas may be private to their family, but they also touch the stories of many migrant families around the world. I believe that whoever sees the film will be able to identify with the 'other' that he generally doesn't encounter in his daily life."

Ayalon will continue to focus on filmmaking. He hasn't submitted his film to other festivals in South Africa yet, but hopes to do so in the near future.

He wishes for "a peaceful resolution between Israel and Palestine. It was heart breaking seeing the images

Yakie Ayalon

of casualties and destruction in Gaza and Israel [in the recent conflict], knowing that most people on both sides wish to live in peace.

"I believe the only way to a peaceful future is by creating dialogue and getting to know your neighbours. As a filmmaker specifically at this time, when baseless hatred and racism are a regular occurrence within our society, only awareness and dialogue can eventually lead to change. This is one of the main reasons I chose film as my profession," he says.

In a statement, DIFF organisers wrote, "We decided not to screen any films produced and funded by the Israeli apartheid state and its complicit institutions. Our deeply-held principles include the firm commitment to freedom of artistic expression. We are fully aware of the impact this has on individual filmmakers, and would like to emphasise that we didn't do this against any person or entity based on identity."

Speaking to the *SA Jewish Report*, DIFF media spokesperson Marlyn Ntsele said, "The management team and curatorial team of the DIFF is cognisant of the impact of our decision on individual filmmakers and empathise fully with the filmmaker. The decision wasn't a personal attack or indictment of any individual filmmaker. Our firmly held beliefs include a solid dedication to artistic independence and a desire for freedom, justice, and equality for everyone. We stand by our decision, and wish the filmmaker well in their future endeavours."

## Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
17:10	18:02	Johannesburg
17:31	18:26	Cape Town
16:50	17:44	Durban
17:11	18:04	Bloemfontein
17:02	17:57	Port Elizabeth
16:55	17:50	East London

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## Torah Thought

# Bring healing by reaching out to others

**T**he saddest period of our year known as the "three weeks" has just commenced, and culminates with Tisha B'Av on 18 July. We remember the violent destruction of our holy Temples, and the exilic consequences which have long endured ever since. Yet, we view this time as an opportunity to awaken our hearts.

During this period of mourning, there is a traditional expression that people offer each other as a wish that "these days be transformed into joy and happiness". We recognise why it's a sad time lest we forget what used to be, but we also realise that sadness is most certainly not our

goal.

The challenge for us is to seize this perception, seeing it as a unique annual window of opportunity to engage in concrete acts of kindness to help bring about absolute transformation. We know that the best way to bring healing to our world is with care and concern for others, as the cause of the destruction was wanton animosity, as taught by our sages.

As we are all back in lockdown, now is a good time to reflect. The Torah tells us, "It's not good for a person to be alone" and to feel isolated. Support of family or friends is an indispensable need of the human condition.

If you are in a position that enables giving, please seize this opportunity to give what you can to someone less fortunate than yourself. If you are in a position that requires asking, please don't be embarrassed to ask. We are, fortunately, a community with so many wonderful organisations and resources that can help anyone who needs it.

Everyone experiences highs and lows throughout

life, and even if one is now in a position that requires them to ask and to lean on others for support, remember that the tables turn and in time, it may be that very person who will be the one to support others who are in need of support. That's what being human is about, and it's certainly what being Jewish is about.

Even if it sounds clichéd, when there's little a friend or family member can do practically to help, one should never underestimate the benefit of a shoulder to cry on – just someone who can be there to listen.

Now is a time to tap into the redemptive power to transform this time of sadness into joy. These are called "days of goodwill before the G-d". We reach upward for strength to reconstruct spiritual and national unity, deepening our closeness with Hashem to hasten Mashiach's arrival.

We can and will get through this together, even though we are apart.

south african  
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# Top SA boxing trainer in Russian hospital

MIRAH LANGER

Little did acclaimed boxing trainer Colin Nathan ever imagine that the fight of his life would be spent in a sterile Russian hospital where he has been battling COVID-19 for more than a month. Yet he has been overwhelmed by the support and love shown to him by locals, and the endless Jewish network of caring – in this case from the St Petersburg Chabad. “There are some beautiful people in Russia. They might come across as hard,


undergo another mandatory COVID-19 test. Liebenberg tested negative, but Nathan came up positive. He did a second test that same day, which then came up negative. Nathan said that although he felt a bit run down, this was his usual experience of travelling across extensive time zones. The next day, he and his team had to take a third COVID-19 test, this time in preparation for their flight out shortly after the match. The morning of the match, with the



Colin Nathan

but the nurses and the doctors have been absolutely fantastic. Without the medication and the care, I don't think I would have made it,” he says. “Chabad have stayed in touch daily. They have sent food parcels twice a week. They have sent through tefillin. Anything and everything I have ever needed, they've sent. It has just been wonderful.” Nathan first arrived in St Petersburg on 28 May along with South African boxer Ryno Liebenberg who would be fighting a match held as part of the Economic Russia Summit. As per legal regulations, Nathan and his team had all taken COVID-19 tests before flying, and were all found to be negative. On arrival, a weigh-in ceremony was scheduled for 2 June, ahead of the actual match scheduled for 4 June. Prior to the ceremony, Nathan and Liebenberg had to

result of the test not yet released, “I woke up with terrible back pain. I thought, ‘I know I've walked a lot, but I'm a fit guy, I don't smoke or drink and I train a lot. I'm always in the gym’. Something was just not right.” Meanwhile, the co-ordinator of the summit contacted Nathan saying that there was a big problem as “national health authorities wanted to come and check me out at the hotel” owing to the fact that even though the second test was negative, the original result had been positive. Nathan went into isolation in his hotel room as they waited for the most recent test results. “By then, I was scrambling for this third test to get me out of this – to have the fight and fly home.” In the interim, a doctor and paramedics came to check up on him, and found his condition stable. He clung to the hope that



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the result would be negative, even going to shower and change ahead of the match. However, it wasn't to be. “An ambulance came and took me from my hotel room”. As they passed the corridor where the rest of his team were, he had to say goodbye to Liebenberg, for whom this was a final match before retirement. “I had to say, ‘Look I am not going to be with you. I can't be in your corner.’”

Nathan was astonished when the hotel's general manager, Oxana Menshikova, hopped into the ambulance with him. “I said, ‘Why are you coming with me?’ She said, ‘Colin, I know Russian hospitals: you are foreign and you can't speak the language – I just want to make sure you are okay.’” A month later, Nathan said, “I thank her every day for what she has done for me.”

Arriving in the self-isolation section of the hospital, reality began to feel like a “horror movie”. In the weeks that followed, he has gone through pneumonia, excruciating back pain, kidney problems, fever, headaches, being unable to swallow from the severity of the infection in his throat, and two sinus punctures – carried out on a chair under local anaesthetic. “I have never been this sick in my life,” he said. Yet, the terrifying, twisted reality is that even with what he has gone through, he knows it could be worse after seeing others in hospital, even younger than himself, battling to breathe.

He has been buoyed by the support of loved ones back home, and longs to return. “Father's Day was really hard on me; I did break down,” Nathan said. Yet, he's also astonished at the reach of love across continents. “When you are a Jewish person and you've got people in South Africa who love you and care, the



Russian officials waiting to attend to Colin Nathan in his hotel shortly before he was hospitalised

network is incredible,” he said, referring to his connection with Chabad in South Africa. At this point, Nathan has undergone 26 COVID-19 tests. Fifteen have been negative and 11 positive. Until he gets a consistently negative result, as a foreigner, he cannot be released even to isolate in a hotel room. “It has just been a very humbling experience,” he muses.



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# Suburbs plagued by slumlords and house hijackers

MIRAH LANGER

It might start with shade cloth being used to cover gates and visibility; multiple satellites erected on the roof; badly painted numbers on the gate or boundary wall; and many people constantly entering and exiting one property. Then more drastic problems emerge such as blocked sanitation and increasing wear and tear on a property left to fall into near total collapse.

“Slumlord” rentals and the hijacking of houses are plaguing north-eastern suburbs, and residents’ associations and concerned neighbours believe the situation is getting worse. Moreover, some of those behind the illegal slumlord rentals are people living within the community itself, and have thus far been

unwilling to rectify the situation. “The biggest revelation has been that some of the landlords – not all – are people we know, people in our community. They may live just a suburb away,” says Nadia O’Brien, the chairperson of the development planning committee of the Sydenham and Sandringham Residents Association.

“In other instances, the owners have moved to other provinces or even overseas and have appointed a ‘manager’ to collect rent on their behalf. In one instance, the owners simply abandoned their home. This house was, in fact, hijacked.”

A concerned Sydenham resident, Alex, whose name has been changed for anonymity, says that attempts to engage with some of the landlords that still live nearby have proved fruitless. Some are even “supposedly well-respected

individuals in the Jewish community”. “We, as neighbours, want to engage with the landlord, to say, ‘Listen we have no issue with individuals living in your house – you are entitled to do this. Let us meet the tenants, let’s make sure that your house is compliant and doesn’t pose any safety or health risks to anyone.’

“But when I’ve tried to approach one or two of these landlords to have a discussion about how to ensure compliance, the landlords aren’t interested in talking. One told me, ‘If you’re not happy with it, go and sell your house and live somewhere else.’

“Why should I? It’s really frustrating. I mean, what do you do? Do you actually start naming and shaming? Do we need to fight this in the press and public space? Do we need to report them to treasury for not complying with tax?

“Maybe if XYZ gets named as a slumlord they won’t be so comfortable anymore walking into the synagogue every Friday, shaking everyone’s hand,” he says.

O’Brien says that a slumlord can be understood as “a landlord that rents out a property to more people than the property is designed to accommodate. The property’s infrastructure cannot support the number of people living in it, and over time, it deteriorates under the strain of too many tenants.”

While there might be an assumption that slumlords are trying to eke out a living from a property that they no longer need, in fact, the opposite is increasingly true. The practice has become a lucrative business, with many taking advantage of a depressed property market to snap up houses on auction and flip them into overcrowded, shared spaces for multiple inhabitants.

“Generally, these landlords have a portfolio of properties spread across many suburbs.”

The practice isn’t just unethical; it’s illegal. “Slumlords generally don’t have leases with the tenants. In some cases, they aren’t paying for municipal services like electricity and water. This results in the tenants being cut off from essential services. There are cases where their tenants have to truck in water

or connect illegally to electricity and water. In a couple of cases, tenants use the yard for ablutions.” Alex concurs about health and safety concerns, noting an example

where there is an open, algae covered swimming pool in a house where toddlers were living – an “accident waiting to happen”. “The tenants generally don’t pose a threat. They are people who need decent, affordable accommodation. Slumlords take advantage of these vulnerable people,” says O’Brien.

In addition, rundown properties are dangerous for inhabitants, and

they “affect the character of the neighbourhood”. This is a heartsore reality for neighbours. “For most residents, our property is our most significant investment; it represents our life savings. We’ve invested in our homes for our future, and these landlords threaten



JPC originally purchased a number of properties and sold 50-year leases to developers. For various reasons, these properties were then illegally occupied, including after corrupt officials from the JPC itself set up illegal leases with private individuals. An investigation into the matter initiated in 2018 by the city had disappointing results, with only one official dismissed.

The director for property hijacking investigations, Victoria Rammala, told the *SA Jewish Report* that the city’s Group Forensics and Investigation Services is “aware that the scourge of property hijacking is city wide, including the areas under question”. She said the city was “making positive strides to fight this new phenomenon of property hijacking”.

Chadwick, however, believes the “city doesn’t have the will or expertise” to resolve the situation, nor does it have the money for the legal processes that would be needed.

Moreover, while legal action is one way in which neighbourhoods might be able to resolve the situation, it’s financially beyond most residents’ means.

Like O’Brien and Alex, Chadwick says many of the inhabitants of slumlord rentals are simply people in need, who would be willing to enter legal agreements if given the option. As such, one solution is for the city to provide the people with

legal, inclusive accommodation. Ultimately, partitioned private residences are functioning as hostels, and this, proposes Chadwick, is what the city should formally erect.

When it comes to privately-owned properties with these problems, there is recourse through the residents’ association which can assist by instituting various checks and laying complaints with the city. “If people stand by on the sidelines watching it happen, it’s only going to get worse. There’s no short-term fix, but the community has to galvanise around this,” says Alex.

“We need a concerted effort from the community when it comes to reporting building projects and overcrowded properties,” says O’Brien. “We need to make it uncomfortable for the slumlords. We need to make them stop. We can make sure that they operate within the law and abide by the bylaws.”



that. What happened in Orange Grove is no secret, and it’ll happen here unless we make it as difficult as possible for the slumlords to operate,” says O’Brien.

Roger Chadwick, the chairperson of the Orange Grove Residents Association, has been at the helm of a tireless battle to fight the burgeoning situation in his suburb. He estimates that half of the approximately 50 properties in the vicinity that are victim to illegal occupiers, are, in fact, owned by the Johannesburg Property



Photos: Ian Ossendyver



Signs of neglect and overcrowding in Joburg suburbs

Company (JPC).

The status quo in some of the most seriously anarchic areas has become extreme. “We have even had hijackers hijacking hijackers,” Chadwick says. In a handful of cases, the situation has deteriorated into physical violence and pets being killed.

It’s a complex problem dating back a number of years, when the

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# Florida building collapse hits close to home

TALI FEINBERG

When South African expat Melissa Skuy moved to Miami from Johannesburg seven years ago, she never expected a scene of disaster and destruction on her doorstep. But waking up on the morning of 24 June, she was told of apocalyptic scenes in the neighbourhood next door, where a 12-storey apartment building simply collapsed at 01:30, with most of its residents asleep inside. More than 150 people were still missing at the time of going to press. “Surfside is close to us,” Skuy told the SA Jewish Report from Florida this week. “We frequently go to shul there, and we often go for walks along the beach where Champlain Towers [the collapsed building] is located. This is a beautiful area, and many Jewish people live there.

“I was in complete disbelief [at the news]. One parent from my kids’ school said that five of her relatives were missing. The harsh reality dawned that many were missing in the collapse. It soon became apparent that the majority were Jewish. More parents from my kids’ school started saying that their doctor, dance teacher, or friend was missing. Another parent is a fireman and has been working non-stop [at the scene],” she says.

“I think the image that stands out is a photo of a child’s bunk bed hanging from one of the destroyed apartments. That really brought the horror of the tragedy home. As the days go by, the hopes of finding the missing people fade, and there is a terrible sense of sadness. One of the saddest things I heard was how some family members were calling out their relatives’ names [at the site] in the hope that they would respond.”

For two Johannesburg families, the tragedy hit too close to home. Rabbi Mendel Lipskar of The Shul at Hyde Park is the brother of Rabbi Sholom D. Lipskar, who founded The Shul of Bal Harbour. His shul is about 1.6 km north of the building that collapsed.

Rabbi Mendel’s wife, Rebbetzin Mashi Lipskar, says the disaster is “unprecedented and unimaginable”. Their two sons, Zalman and Rabbi Aaron Lipskar, also live in Surfside. Rabbi Aaron works closely with Rabbi Sholom. Their daughter, Sarah Dworcan, works at the Palm Beach Synagogue, about two hours away from Surfside. Dworcan’s neighbour happens to be South African expat Sarah Gordon, who has volunteered at the kosher kitchen that has been set up at the disaster site, serving 4 000 meals to families and rescue workers over the past few days.



Champlain Towers in Surfside, Miami after the collapse



Volunteers from different communities work to distribute goods collected at the Skylake Shul in North Miami to the disaster site in Surfside

Photos: Melissa Skuy

Chabad-Lubavitch *shlichim*, building a thriving community from the ground up. “They know whole families, from the grandparents to the grandchildren. Being Chabad, this isn’t a ‘job’, these are friends, fellow Jews, people with whom we all have a personal connection.

“Because we have three children living there, we have been there so many times,” she says. “We’ve walked the streets, connected with people, given lectures. We are close to many South Africans who moved there.” People that they sat next to in shul or spent Shabbos with are now missing.

Before Shabbos, she wrote to a friend who lives next to the disaster site. Her friend responded, “It has been a long, hideous day. The number of times Shabbos meals were shared, walking to shul together, taking our children to the beach or my dog for a walk [with people from Champlain Towers]. It was my community for 21 years, and it’s difficult to see and wait to

“I know people from the shul who are missing,” says Gordon. “There is a lot of chaos at the scene – fire, smoke, heat, and rain. There was a lot of hope at first, but now the atmosphere is heavy. People are watching and waiting.”

“Everyone is connected and everyone is traumatised,” says Lipskar. “The Shul [of Bal Harbour] is like a little city. There is an Ashkenazi shul, a Sephardi shul, and many programmes. Most of the people in the collapsed building came to The Shul.”

Lipskar says she cannot say how her brother-in-law is doing, with so many of his congregants lost or missing. “He’s traumatised. He’s trying to help, to alleviate pain, to be there. People are trying to hold onto a thread of sanity. No one is sleeping; no one can go on normally. Many are looking to him as a man of G-d.

“But, as my son said, this is going to stretch on. And it’s that terrible not knowing [the fate of people in the building]. When you know, at least you can mourn and move on. But the not knowing is horrifying. My son tells me the area has been turned into a military zone.”

Bassie Medalie, also in Johannesburg, is praying for the safety of her *machatonim* (her daughter’s in-laws) Itty and Tzvi Ainsworth. They moved to Surfside four months ago to be closer to their only daughter. “We have spent a lot of time in Surfside with family. Everyone knows everyone. It’s a small, very Jewish community,” says Medalie. Her sister, Chani Lipskar, is married to Rabbi Sholom. “They introduced us to everyone,” she says. Now, they wait for word on what happened to the many precious people they met.

“Everyone is in tremendous pain while still hopeful,” says Medalie. “As Jews, we hold on to hope. Hashem can make miracles.” She’s empowered by the Rebbe’s message to “do acts of goodness and kindness to heal a broken world”. She says the outpouring of kindness and love in response to the tragedy has been staggering, and she’s grateful for the support.

Lipskar says her brother-in-law and Rebbetzin Chani have been there for 50 years as

hear about the people still missing. There are whole families that have just disappeared.”

“Many people in the community feel helpless and want to assist. The response of the Jewish community has been amazing and heartwarming,” says Skuy. “There’s a sense of purpose, camaraderie, and community. So many are volunteering, and huge amounts of goods are coming in. But there are very difficult things. There is frustration that the rescuers can’t find people. It’s very hard to hear about the way the building collapsed. There is also talk of how carefully emergency workers have to work through the debris.”

There have been small miracles amidst the darkness. One community member told Lipskar about a family that moved to Champlain Towers about six months ago. On Wednesday night, the mother was out late to mark the end of the fast day [17 Tammuz], her grown children were sleeping, and her husband was away. She got home at 01:00, and felt tremors in the building. She woke her kids up, and they ran out of the building. On the way out, she told the person at the front desk that she didn’t feel safe. They left, and 30 minutes later, the building came down.

“Our community has joined in prayer from the very first moment,” says Lipskar. In times of crisis, “don’t be silent against Hashem. We have a responsibility to react. As a human being, a Jew, a member of society, we must respond.” She’s grateful that in recent years, *tehillim* groups have grown on WhatsApp. “People who didn’t even know about *tehillim* are now taking part and praying together. They don’t necessarily know the person needing help, but they pray for them. It’s a source of incredible strength. That unity reverberates around the world.”

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# Caring on a global scale

When a 12-storey residential building in a Jewish area in Florida collapsed at the end of last week, I had a hunch there would be connections to our community in South Africa.

Why, you might ask? It’s simple. We live in a global village, and our community is connected to Jews around the world.

Tali Feinberg, the journalist who worked on the story for the *SA Jewish Report*, admitted this week, she couldn’t really work out why I thought it would be a story for us. It was on the other side of the globe, and there was no particular reason for those involved to be related to us.

As it turns out, once she started investigating – which she does so well – she discovered that there were close connections to us, and the sadness and desperation felt by the Jewish community there was felt right here in Johannesburg. (See page 5.)

It turns out the rabbi whose congregants lived in that building is the brother of one of our foremost rabbis right here. And, when we were saying *tehillim* for those who were missing, a few of us were praying for people we knew.

This reiterated for me how we are all connected, and the pain of Jewish people in Israel, New Zealand, or the United States, is our pain too. One lost life is a lost family member, and the pain of those in our community is something that genuinely has an impact on all of us.

I would hope that, G-d forbid, if something should happen to our community, the Jewish world would be equally concerned and willing to help us. That’s who we are as a people. We have our faults, but we care and help wherever we can.

This is so clearly demonstrated right here with the incredible women who have made it their mission to help families with COVID-19. (See page 8.) I can’t believe the outpouring of generosity and kindness from people within our community. In many cases, they aren’t even being asked to help, they simply volunteer.

So, while there is so much death, illness, and sadness right now in our community, there is a truly remarkable flipside, which is the kindness and care with which people have responded.

“I can’t bear the thought that someone is sick and is lying in a bed somewhere believing nobody cares about them,” said one mother who spends every day cooking for families struck by COVID-19. This particular woman, who didn’t want to be named, has a full-time job and is a single mom. Free time isn’t something she has in abundance, yet she gives of it willingly to help those in need.

Meanwhile, in Russia, one of our own, boxing manager, trainer, and consultant Colin Nathan, lies sick in a hospital bed with COVID-19. Can you imagine what it’s like to be so ill and not be able to understand what’s going on around you because there’s a language issue?

As tough as this experience is for him, he is so impressed with the incredible kindness and care he is getting from the Chabad rabbi there, who was called on to help. (See page 3.) What was I saying about a global village and that intrinsic care within us?

As the number of COVID-19 cases continues to escalate here, we face tough and frustrating times ahead with level 4 lockdown.

I do recognise the frustration and anger at this situation. I also understand why people are so angry with the government for not rolling out the vaccines fast enough, among other things.

It’s frustrating not to be able to spend a close-knit Shabbos with my beloved siblings and their families or a leisurely Sunday lunch with my besties at our favourite restaurant. The idea of letting my hair down with good friends on Saturday night is extremely appealing.

Having said that, the frustration is all about how we look at things. First, by avoiding those things I miss, I’m protecting myself and my loved ones from illness. That is a huge deal!

Then, there’s nothing wrong with spending time with immediate family in our home, doing things we often don’t have time for and enjoying our own company.

There are so many things we can find to do together or on our own in the comfort of our own home. And when you really are missing people, they are only a phone or Zoom call away. Yes, I know, it isn’t the same as being able to be in the same room, but it isn’t that bad. It’s what we make of it.

There are some pretty cool things about lockdown. I, for one, really enjoy not having to wake up at the crack of dawn to get my kids to school on time. There’s definitely a comfort factor in getting them ready a bit later to go to school online.

It’s also good to know where they are at all times and what they are up to – or is that being too much of a control-freak?

And when I do have to go out briefly, there is something peaceful about not getting stuck in traffic. The quiet in Johannesburg after 21:00 is really quite special too.

Having said all of that, there is the flipside of those people who are so ill and the angels who are saving their lives.

I’m in awe of those people who give so much of themselves to do this. The extent of this is so clear in Yosef Shishler’s piece about one night (right now) in his life as a Hatzolah volunteer. (See page 7.) This is a man with a busy legal practice and a young family, but he gives his precious time to save lives. And he’s not alone...

I know there are hardships in our lives right now, especially for those who are sick or have lost people they love. There are no words to compensate for your situation.

But I can say that you are surrounded by care and kindness, and all you need to do is reach out and someone will be there for you.

We are like that. We may fight. We may argue. We may even hold grudges, but we still care like crazy!


Stay home and stay safe!

Shabbat Shalom!  
Peta Krost Maunder  
Editor

# What would the aliens say?

OPINION

DAVID ABRAHAMSOHN



I often sit and stare at the vastness of the universe and wonder if we are alone in this world. Are there other living beings out there? If there are, what would these aliens think of us humans and the way we run our world; the way we treat each other; how we live our lives and the choices we make.

The human mind never ceases to amaze me. Irrationality and complexity often overshadow what seems to be simple and logical. An example is a battle most of us face on a daily basis – our health.

Most of us acknowledge that our health is a precious, irreplaceable gift. So why then do so many people smoke when they know it can kill them? Why do people avoid exercising and choose to eat unhealthy foods when they know it could shorten their lives? It just doesn’t make sense.

A possible answer can be found in a psychological concept called cognitive dissonance. It’s a fascinating concept that describes the uneasiness people feel when two cognitions (thoughts), or a thought and a behaviour, contradict each other.

At its core, cognitive dissonance is about how people strive to make sense out of blatant contradictions that they have chosen in order to live lives that are (at least in their own minds) consistent, meaningful, and tension free.

It’s astonishing to watch the process at work. Intelligent people present as almost delusional in the lengths they go to justify their irrational behaviour.

Attempts to live with contradiction have been a significant dynamic during the global pandemic. When the facts clash with people’s needs, many choose to put their lives and the lives of others at risk.

So many adults have chosen to wear masks and social distance selectively and have justified their behaviour with a variety of irrational reasons. Some

have play dates and sleep overs, and justify the decision by pointing out that their children need face-to-face interaction with peers to avoid emotional difficulties. Our need to avoid living in the discomfort of pandemic restrictions has led to irrational justification of dangerous behaviour.

How do we resolve this dilemma? Although it’s difficult to change thoughts and behaviour, it’s not impossible. First, it’s important to stop and honestly self-reflect.

Give thought to the contradictions that you have created rather than jumping immediately to self-justification that seemingly makes them acceptable. This can be very uncomfortable to do. Be forgiving with yourself if you have made mistakes. No one is perfect.

Take the time to ask yourself important questions like: why do I want to do this when I know it’s not safe? What am I needing? How am I trying to justify that this behaviour is ok? How can I meet this need or some of this need without threatening my health and the health of others?

I’m sure there are many frustrated and angry people who are inclined to reprimand others who they see or hear are engaging in “irresponsible” COVID-19 behaviour. However, the key is not to criticise.

If we continue to criticise people for not wearing masks or social distancing, it implies that they are selfish and careless, which immediately creates a situation of conflict. These will almost always lead to a defensiveness and reinforcement of living with their contradiction.

People are more likely to be open to messages from others who share their concerns in a constructive and non-judgemental manner.

There is no doubt that we are all facing very difficult times. However, the manner in which we confront this challenge is what ultimately matters. Will we sit and be thoughtful about the uncomfortable and painful contradictions we live with and change our behaviour? Or will we keep finding non-existent loopholes in the advice we get from the experts, which somehow allows us to do the pre-COVID-19 things that we have desperately missed doing.

I hope if aliens do land one day and ask if we listened to proven scientific, medical advice that could prevent so much physical and emotional suffering, that we will be able to look them in the eyes (or eye) and say that we made the more difficult but correct decisions.

• *David Abrahamsohn is a clinical psychologist in Johannesburg.*



of these include having no comorbidities or being resigned to the “fact” that “we are all going to get the virus anyway”.

So many parents have allowed their children to

Fleeing eSwatini to safety in the nick of time

>>Continued from page 1

thinking that maybe I'd be stranded in one of the local rural villages for the night," she recalled.

Her anxiety rose when she realised that she didn't have a local cell phone to call Simon or any of her family who had no idea where she was at that point. Her driver had 1% of charge on his phone and was fielding calls along the route by those concerned about their safe passage.

"I don't recall the time, it was all so crazy. My driver was intent on getting me to safety, and was concentrating on the roads. He pulled whatever strings he could when we eventually made it to the Oshoek border.

"He weaved his way around dozens of trucks to get to the top of the queue, and made me wait inside the car while he spoke to officials."

After what seemed like an age, she eventually made it through passport control following a number of health checkpoints and a rapid COVID-19 test which turned out negative.

"Simon was frantic that I'd be left alone on the South

African side. You can just picture this middle-aged woman from Glenhazel with her suitcase and laptop waiting on the side of the road."

Her driver didn't leave her side until he knew she had been reunited with Simon literally moments before the curfew and reports that the government had shut down the internet.

"I knew Simon and one of my client's drivers were making their way to me. I also managed to reach Simon once I made it over the border when I got a shaky signal and there was a power cut."

Her hosts were right about her travelling by road, as Eswatini Airlink cancelled all flights to and from South Africa amid the civil unrest.

Meanwhile, protesters torched and looted shops, ATMs, government offices, and official and commercial vehicles.

"I'm so relieved to be home but all the while, I felt protected by the kindness of the Swazi people who made it their responsibility to protect me and keep me safe," Godley said.

# A day in the night of a Hatzolah volunteer

OPINION

YOSEF SHISHLER



It’s 17:20 on Tuesday, and I have just finished a full day’s work as an attorney. My volunteer Hatzolah shift starts at 18:00. In spite of wanting to rush home and catch an early dinner with my family, a luxury I haven’t afforded myself over the past few busy weeks, I decide to fetch an ambulance early before my shift starts.

While running through my pre-shift checks, a call comes through on the radio, someone is suffering from chest pain. Although I’m not yet on shift, the full-time teams are caught up with other emergency calls (after fielding back-to-back calls throughout the day), and I immediately respond to the call.

The patient is having a heart attack and urgently needs to go to hospital. After the call, I manage to get home just in time to put my kids to bed and get something to eat. I pray for a quiet night. Unfortunately, my prayers go unanswered.

The next call comes in. There is a COVID-19-positive patient who needs to go to hospital. My partner and I meet up and don full PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) – a protective suit, N95 mask, face shield, and a double pair of gloves. We assess the patient although it is exceptionally difficult with all our gear. My glasses/face shield mist up, the hood of the protective suit makes it difficult to hear the patient talking behind her mask, while the patient struggles to hear me through my mask. We take the patient to the hospital, alone, as the rest of the patient’s family are isolating.

From the outside, the hospital is deceptively quiet. We unload our patient, and walk into the emergency room, only to be stopped abruptly in our tracks. The casualty is complete chaos. The nurse demands:

“Why are you here? What’s wrong with your patient?” We tell her that we have a COVID-19-positive patient. “Go wait in your ambulance. We have no beds, and there are other patients waiting outside for a bed.”

I ask the nurse, who appears totally exhausted, how long she believes the wait will be. She says we can expect about an hour’s wait, and then adds that she would like a short break at some point to grab something to eat (it’s almost 23:00). Out of her pocket, she pulls a piece of paper with handwritten notes showing how many beds are available in the entire hospital.

She crosses some numbers off and says, “There are only two beds left.” I glance over at the rescue room. There are four patients lying in beds hooked up to oxygen tanks, desperately waiting to be admitted.

I head back outside to the ambulance where my partner is monitoring our patient. She, too, is breathing through an oxygen apparatus in our ambulance. We are still kitted out in full PPE, and the discomfort of the mask cutting into the bridge of my nose only worsens, but we

cannot risk getting exposed and exposing our families.

The hour mark passes slowly, yet there are still no beds. Waiting outside, I chat with a medic from another ambulance service in the same predicament. He tells me that he’s tired. He has brought his patient from Soweto, as there were no available beds at any of the other hospitals. “I’m starting to think that this job isn’t worth the money,” he shares with me.

Another hour drags by. A sobbing woman exits the hospital. Clearly, she has lost a loved one but cannot be with the deceased or her family.

A doctor walks out of the Emergency Room. He hardly has time for a quick smoke. We speak briefly, and he explains how much worse this wave has been compared to the last two. “Young and old are dying, and we still don’t know enough about the virus,” he points out.

Finally, two and half hours later, we are called in and told that they can accept our patient. We complete the handover and wish our patient well. However, we aren’t done yet. We head back to base to properly remove our PPE and decontaminate the ambulance. It’s a huge relief to remove the protective equipment as I can once again hear and see properly, notwithstanding the marks that remain on my face.

Eventually, we head home to try and get some sleep, although it’s never easy falling asleep after servicing a call. Slowly my eyes close, only to be disturbed by yet another “high-risk call” shortly thereafter. And so it goes, the cycle restarts as I start to don my PPE gear once again.

It’s already 07:00 by the time we get back to base after the call. The sun is out, and we still haven’t had a chance to sleep. We finish off our paperwork, and head home, physically and emotionally drained. The full-time team takes over for the day, facing the same fate almost every single day. I have to return to my regular job, give my clients the best possible service, and be the best father to my kids and the best husband to my wife, all while shutting out the horrors I was exposed to over the past 12 hours.

These are difficult times and they carry a heavy weight, but it’s imperative that I don’t allow it to have a negative impact on my life. At the end of the day, life goes on, but not for everyone.

Take your safety into your own hands. Stay home! Put off your social arrangements for the next few weeks. Believe it or not, one can get COVID-19 from extended family members and close friends (and it’s happening at an alarming rate). Wear a mask, keep a social distance, sanitise/wash your hands, and avoid going out unnecessarily.

• *Yosef Shishler is an attorney who specialises in family law. He is a police reservist, who also volunteers as a medic for Hatzolah.*



Yosef Shishler on duty for Hatzolah

## One night in Alex makes us humble

CLAIR JAEGER

A team of Jewish philanthropists were recently hosted for a sleepover in Alexandra, Johannesburg, to raise awareness about the struggle the residents face daily in a township with rampant overpopulation, unemployment, and few resources.

The “big sleepover” was the brainchild of Solly Krok to celebrate his “92-years-young” birthday. Krok, the founder of Keep the Wolf from the Door; Marc Lubner of Africa Tikkun; Romi Levenstein of FeedSA; and the author were hosted by Linda Twala, the unofficial mayor of Alexandra.

On 27 May, the team visited shacks and spent time understanding how families live. Miriam Morifi, a gogo (grandmother), with her six grandchildren, a son, and a daughter, all sleep on one bed in a single room, as neat as a pin but tiny. Social distancing is impossible. Ablutions take place in rows of chemical toilets outside. There’s no hot water.

For many residents, a bath means scavenging for wood, building a fire outside, fetching a bucket of water from a public tap, heating it, then bringing it into your single room to wash in a plastic dish. Food is prepared in the same room, meals are eaten there too, and there is barely enough space for everyone to sit. Privacy doesn’t exist.

The team handed out 62 blankets, 62 scarves, and 62 sanitisers and mask packs, and 1 000 loaves of

bread, before tucking into a kosher braai arranged by Lewenstein with some of the local community.

Though Twala is referred to as the unofficial mayor of Alex, he is loved and respected unconditionally. People in need stream into his home continually, knowing they will find help or at least a loaf or two of bread. When his home was destroyed during the struggle years ago, Twala built a centre focusing on community needs rather than just his own. His focus remains on the elderly, the disabled, mentally challenged, and single mothers.

Though the team was safe, warm, and comfortable, it was impossible to sleep in this jarring environment, in which people’s needs can best be described as a relentless tsunami. As huge as the project is, it’s but a drop in the ocean.

The following day, the team visited the Phuthaditjaba Centre, an Africa Tikkun initiative established in 2006 to serve meals to the elderly. Soon after it opened, children started arriving at the facility looking for a meal and a place to get off the streets, and the centre blossomed into a youth centre sporting excellent facilities.



Marc Lubner, Solly Krok, and Romi Levenstein (masks removed for the photo)

The author also visited the home of an elderly Alexander resident who had been attacked by rats. Being over 90, she was unable to escape, and the rodents literally gnawed on her legs. In spite of this trauma, she greeted visitors bearing blankets and bread with a warm smile. An infestation of rats the

size of cats has been plaguing Alexander residents for years, and this tragedy has led to a notable clean-up of street litter.

Lastly, the team delivered two big truckloads of firewood supplied by Palletmen, and the last of the blankets, scarves, and sanitiser to Setswetla, an informal settlement. Without electricity, people rely on wood for cooking and heating, and as winter sets in, it’s a commodity in high demand.

Every year, we prepare ourselves for Yom Kippur and fuss about fasting for a day. So many in Alexandra didn’t eat today, or yesterday, and there’s no guarantee they will eat tomorrow. This isn’t a remote situation in a far off place, these are real people, just a few kilometres down the road in Alexandra township.

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# Small WhatsApps, big gestures, warm hearts

NICOLA MILTZ

Amid the unfolding trauma of the crippling COVID-19 third wave, an unprecedented spirit of generosity has inspired countless acts of kindness.

When Johannesburg mother Ricci Kodesh was ill with COVID-19 a few weeks ago, she was overwhelmed by generosity from family and friends during her 10 days of isolation. “It’s a very lonely and scary time,” she said.

When she saw the numbers of COVID-19 cases in the community starting to spike, she wanted to make a difference in the lives of those hit with the disease. So, she started a voluntary WhatsApp Community COVID Care Group that has grown rapidly.

“There are more than 100 carers who at any given time drop off care packages for people, in most cases complete strangers affected by the virus,” said Kodesh, 43, a Sandton mother of two sons.

“A small gesture can mean so much, anything from coffee, soup and bagels, to babke, fruit, flowers, and magazines. People have been amazing, the community has pulled together,” she said.

When news that mother of two, Monique Leibowitz, 46, tragically passed away from COVID-19 on the weekend, Ricci’s care group went into overdrive.

Within minutes, dozens of people on the group volunteered to help in whatever way they could to support the Leibowitz family.

“It has been totally overwhelming, I have run out of fridge and freezer space,” said a heartbroken Andrew Leibowitz this week.

He and his two daughters, 14 and 11, are reeling from shock. “The girls and I don’t have much of an appetite at the moment, so I have tried to turn some meals away, but this hasn’t stopped caring people – strangers – from arriving with parcels, crafts, and things to take the girls’ mind off their sorrow,” he said.

Parents from King David Linksfield, where his one daughter goes to school, and the Edenvale Shul have rallied in support, he said.

He said the whole family had contracted the virus. “My wife tested positive last



Ricci Kodesh going to deliver food

Monday. On Tuesday, Hatzolah became worried about her oxygen levels and she was taken by ambulance to hospital. By Friday, she was in intensive care (ICU) and on Saturday, she passed away.

“Nothing takes the pain away, but knowing that there are so many caring people out there has really helped. I’m blown away by the love and support,” he said.

For some, the only way to tackle the rising tide of pain and suffering is to help. Their kindness has been noted.

Said one woman on the COVID Care WhatsApp group last week, “My son and I have COVID-19. Today was a horrific day as we lost our nanny to COVID-19. I feel awful physically and emotionally. I wanted to let you all know what it meant to hear the doorbell, and receive the meal for supper tonight. It’s one less thing to think about. One less worry. Today of all days you have no idea the impact the kind gestures have on those who are suffering.”

Inspired by these random acts of kindness, people have made cupcakes

and other confectionery for healthcare workers at hospitals and for Hatzolah. Kosher restaurants and establishments, many overcome with their own mounting problems following further COVID-19 restrictions, have discounted their prices for those affected by the virus, dropped their delivery fees, and even donated meals and cakes.

People have organised suppers and non-perishable goods for waiters and other staff who lost their jobs this week following President Cyril Ramaphosa’s stricter lockdown measures.

Challah2Share, an organisation started before COVID-19 by Johannesburg mother Kelita Hoffman, has delivered challahs to every household listed on the COVID Care Group.

Last week, Jodi Maron delivered 10 challahs in the Sandton area, all of which were donated by people in the community. “There is overflowing kindness and care as people really want to help and make a difference by paying it forward,” she said.

“This is the best community in the

world,” said Lauren Hymanson, who together with a small team of volunteers have arranged meals for families doubly afflicted with financial hardship and COVID-19.

A simple online post by her earlier this week informing the community about many families in distress led to countless offers of help.

In isolation herself after her son tested positive for the virus, Hymanson has managed to co-ordinate countless meals for many families, all online.

“There are some very sick people in our community, and many who don’t have the resources and finances to organise or shop for meals. The community has been incredible in terms of donations and offers to help,” she said.

Lisa Fine and her husband Rowan said they wouldn’t have coped without the COVID Community Care initiative.

After contracting the virus, the couple were admitted to hospital with encephalitis. They were put into ICU in different wards at the same hospital, and forced to leave their two young children in the care of their nanny, Polite Mare, who ran their household in their absence.

“My family live overseas, and my husband’s mother is elderly. Close cousins were also in isolation with COVID-19, so we literally didn’t have a choice. Polite looked after my son of two and my daughter of six day and night. She must have received 20 calls a day from the care group offering to help with everything from Zoom school lessons to meals. She managed everything from online learning, deliveries, meals, and bedtimes. Our fridge is still full of food. There are no words to describe how grateful we are,” Fine said.

Those in a position to help after recuperating or after having spent 10 days in isolation have been inspired to jump on board with offers of their own.

“Everyone has to help each other. It’s a small community with a big heart. For me, it’s just my way of paying it forward,” said Hymanson.

## Vaccines shown to be effective against Beta and Delta

NICOLA MILTZ

The rapidly-transmissible Delta variant has thrown yet another gigantic curve ball into the COVID-19 mix, but experts this week said vaccines were effective against it.

The Delta variant is so far the most transmissible form of the COVID-19 virus. It’s steadily taking over as the dominant variant in parts of South Africa, and is able to spread much more efficiently between people compared to the other variants, scientists say.

They are continuing to study how well current vaccines work against the Delta variant. Research being done internationally and locally shows that the Pfizer vaccine is protective against the Delta variant, also known as the B.1.617.2, found in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, the Eastern Cape, the Free State, and the Western Cape.

While roughly 2.9 million people have thus far been vaccinated in the country, experts stress that major anti-COVID-19 measures have to be maintained until more people have been jabbed as hospitals are overwhelmed. There is also concern that people previously infected with the Beta variant could be susceptible to reinfection with Delta. This research is ongoing.

Alon Rappaport, Pfizer’s medical director in Israel, said on 24 June that the Pfizer-

BioNTech vaccine was highly effective against the Delta variant of COVID-19. “The data we have today, accumulating from research we are conducting at the lab and including data from those places where the Indian variant, Delta, has replaced the British variant as the common variant, point to our vaccine being very effective, about 90%, in preventing the coronavirus disease, COVID-19.”

Dr Ronald Whelan, the chief commercial officer of Discovery Health, told the *SA Jewish Report* there was lots to be positive about.

He said Discovery had done an initial analysis on members over the age of 60 who had received the first shot of Pfizer versus others who hadn’t been vaccinated, which showed “promising and exciting” results.

“We have found people who were 14 days or more post vaccination showed roughly a 70% reduction of transmission of infection and roughly a 70% percent reduction in hospitalisation for those who had become infected after the first dose,” Whelan said. “This is very exciting and promising. It shows that there will be promising results for the Pfizer vaccine in South Africa, which is a relief.

“We have evidence to suggest in an environment where you have both Beta and Delta variants, the Pfizer vaccine is proving to be very effective.

“This is real-world evidence that the



vaccine will work 14 days after the first dose, and it’s reasonable to expect that it will be significantly more effective following the second dose.”

Analysis is still emerging about the effectiveness of the Johnson & Johnson (J&J) vaccine against the Delta variant.

Experts say all indications are that the J&J vaccine will retain its effectiveness, particularly against severe disease and hospitalisation.

Whelan said across all hospitals, there were far fewer healthcare workers (who had received the J&J vaccine as part of the Sisonke trial) infected now compared with the first and second waves. This, he said, suggested the effectiveness of the J&J vaccine.

“They are both excellent vaccines

measured against severe disease and hospitalisation,” he said, pointing out that there was talk about a booster dose of J&J, probably six months after the initial dose.

While South Africa is certainly behind many parts of the world, Whelan said the private-sector machinery was working and vaccinating at a pace. “There is a very healthy vaccine supply in the country, and there is good infrastructure to deliver vaccines. The system is poised for an accelerated rollout, particularly from August onwards,” he said.

On 15 June 2021, the World Health Organization said that preliminary data showed the Pfizer vaccine was 75% effective against symptomatic disease from the Beta variant after two doses. It’s 88% effective against the Delta variant, and 93% against Alpha. All three variants are present in South

Africa.

It also said that preliminary data showed that the J&J vaccine was 64% effective against symptomatic disease from the Beta variant, and 81% effective against severe disease. There is insufficient data to understand how the Delta and Alpha variants could affect the efficacy of this vaccine.

All scientists agree that being vaccinated in South Africa doesn’t mean you won’t get infected, but there can be comfort knowing that the risk of being hospitalised or dying is significantly diminished.

It remains law for South Africans to wear a mask when in public, and businesses must enforce physical distancing and good hand hygiene. Those who are vaccinated have good reason to keep following these protocols for the sake of their health and others, experts said this week.

The National Institute for Communicable Diseases has urged those who are vaccinated to be cautious as they are still at risk of contracting COVID-19. The disease will be milder in comparison to those who are unvaccinated, decreasing the risk of severe illness, hospitalisation, and death.

At the time of going to press, Hatzolah had 1 030 active cases, of which 422 were new cases. There were 55 people in hospital, and 105 were being treated at home with oxygen.

# Social-media bots get antisemitism all wrong

BEN SALES – JTA

In October, one day after Facebook announced that it would ban Holocaust denial, Izabella Tabarovsky received an unexpected message from the platform. A 2019 post of hers promoting an article she had written on Holocaust remembrance was being removed for violating Facebook's "Community Standards on hate speech". No further information was provided, and Tabarovsky doesn't recall being given a way to appeal the decision.

She reached out to a Facebook spokesperson she found on Twitter, but got no response.

Facebook's decision to ban Holocaust denial came only after scholars, activists, and celebrities had pilloried the platform for allowing hate speech. But Tabarovsky is no Holocaust denier. She's a Jewish journalist who writes about Soviet Jewry, including the Holocaust in Soviet territories.

The article in question was titled, "Most Jews weren't murdered in death camps. It's time to talk about the other Holocaust." It was about how efforts at Holocaust remembrance don't focus enough on the millions of Jews who were killed outside the concentration camps, such as Tabarovsky's own relatives, who were murdered at Babyn Yar.

It's possible that the headline tripped up an algorithm meant to detect Holocaust denial, which then blocked Tabarovsky's post. She doesn't know as she never heard from Facebook.

"This message popped up, and obviously the first reaction is, what did I say that was hateful?" Tabarovsky told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency (JTA). "We've seen so much antisemitic speech. They can't battle it, they can't take it down, and yet they remove Holocaust education posts from 2019. It's truly incredible."

Tabarovsky is among the long list of social-media users whose anti-hate posts have mistakenly fallen victim to the algorithms that aim to remove hate speech. Companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok say they have stepped up their fight against abusive posts and disinformation. But the artificial intelligence that drives those systems, intending to root out racism or calls for genocide, can instead ensnare efforts to combat them.

Organisations that focus on Holocaust education say the problem is especially acute for them because it comes at a time when large percentages of young people are ignorant about the basic facts about the Holocaust, and more online than ever.

Michelle Stein, the United States Holocaust Memorial and Museum's chief communications officer, told JTA that the museum's Facebook adverts have often been rejected outright – frequently enough "that it's a real problem for us".

"Far too often our educational content is literally hitting a brick wall," she said. "It's not OK that an advert that features a historical image of children from the 1930s wearing the yellow star is rejected, especially at a time when we need to educate the public on what that yellow badge represented during the Holocaust."

Recently, the yellow star has been appropriated by protesters of everything from vaccines to Brexit, which may have made Facebook especially sensitive to the image of the star. The Holocaust museum's advert aimed to respond to incidents like those by educating people about what the star actually signified.

There have been other instances of Holocaust education being blocked as well. In March, Facebook deactivated the account of the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies for five days, as well as the accounts of 12 of its employees. When the accounts were restored, a local Facebook spokesperson told a Norwegian publication, "I cannot say whether this is a technical error or a human error."

In 2018, the Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect, a Holocaust education organisation in New York, had a post removed from Facebook that included a photo of emaciated Jewish children. Redfish, an outlet affiliated with the Russian state, said it had three Holocaust remembrance posts, including one with a famous picture of Elie Weisel and others in a concentration camp barracks, taken off Facebook this year.

Holocaust educators aren't the only ones to protest the way social-media algorithms regulate purportedly hateful content. Anti-racist activists have complained of their Facebook posts being treated like hate speech, prompting the platform to change its algorithm. During the recent conflict in Israel and Gaza, both pro-Israel

and pro-Palestinian activists said their posts were hidden or taken off Instagram and elsewhere.

Facebook (which owns Instagram) and TikTok both told JTA that users whose posts have been taken down can appeal the decision. Twitter didn't respond to questions sent via email.

But Stein said the reasoning for why the ads are blocked is opaque, and the appeals process can sometimes take days. By the time the adverts are approved, she said, the teaching moment they were meant to address has often passed.



Photo: Jakub Porzycki/NurPhoto via Getty Images

"It's unclear to us what part of the post is the problem, so we're forced to guess. But far more importantly, it stops us from getting that message out timely," she said.

"Social media's great potential isn't education anchored in a classroom, it's educational moments anchored in what's happening in the environment."

A Facebook spokesperson told JTA that it uses "a combination of human and automated review" to detect hate speech, and that people will "usually" review the automated decisions.

TikTok likewise told JTA that human moderators review content flagged by its artificial intelligence system, and that it teaches its moderators to distinguish between hate speech and what it defines as "counter-speech".

Tabarovsky supports social-media companies taking robust action against Holocaust denial and hate speech, but she would have liked to understand why her post was blocked and, ideally, find a way to avoid having her posts removed. Last week, after JTA inquired about the post and more than six months after it had been removed, Facebook restored it to the platform.

"It's just crazy when you're dealing with a robot that can't tell the difference between Holocaust denial and Holocaust education," Tabarovsky said. "How did we get to this point as humanity where we've outsourced such important decisions to robots? It's just nuts."

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# The corporate exec whose heart TikToks with Torah

MIRAH LANGER

“What would you do if you weren’t afraid?” On the first day of her then-new job at Facebook, this is what Michal Oshman encountered on a poster on the office wall.

“I knew it was a company mantra, but it felt like someone had left that sign there just for me,” said this former Israel Defense Forces officer during a webinar hosted by Chabad House’s Miracle Drive last week.

The question became a challenge that Oshman set herself, leading her down a path of connecting Chassidic Jewish wisdom with her high-powered corporate workplace culture and modern family life. She has now written a book exploring the union of these seemingly disparate realms.

“I began to think, wait, there is a life without fear? Is there is an option to wake up in the

morning and expect goodness? Is it possible that I’m not going to check my children are breathing every three hours and that I [don’t have to feel that I can] never ever sleep from the day they were born?” asked the mother



Michal Oshman

of four, who has suffered from anxiety and obsessive compulsive

disorder for most of her life. “Yes, it’s possible,” she realised. However, “What it meant is that I had to stop putting myself in the centre; realising that there is a much bigger, greater world and a divine presence, much, much greater than us.” Oshman who headed up international leadership and team development at Facebook, now works at TikTok Europe as head of company culture, diversity, and inclusion. Though she was born in Israel, in terms of religiosity, says the 45-year-old, “Judaism was just something that I had on my passport in Israel.” However, during a “dark time” in her life a few years ago, she realised that she had hit rock bottom when she embarked on anti-aging treatments. “I have no issue with the treatments, but when you do

anything too much, you question why are you doing it. I was trying to freeze my face because I was trying to freeze and control myself, but I didn’t understand myself.”

So one day, full of despair, she sat down and began googling “anxiety, fear joy and – for some reason – Judaism”. So began a period of intensive study and the slow introduction of Jewish practice into her and her family’s life. Oshman began to realise that long before modern psychology, Jewish wisdom already offered guidance. Facing reality through a spiritual lens also helped her understand that perfection is never the goal. “I realised that we are wired for hiccups and struggle. I realised that there’s nothing more complete than a broken heart.”

Far from being irreparably damaged by hurtful events, Oshman now sees that each experience is an opportunity for growth. “At some point, things will make sense and if they don’t

make sense, we’re not there yet.” Rather than shying from difficulty, we need to “dig into tension”, she suggests.

She conceptualises challenges as a metaphorical *Mitzrayim*. “G-d can get us out of Egypt, but the question is, can we get Egypt out of ourselves? We need to tame our ego. It’s a big job, and that’s why we have a long life, please G-d, so that we can go on this journey.”

On her own journey to professional success, Oshman, who is based in the United Kingdom, says she has encountered some antisemitism. During one corporate presentation, a person came up to her and asked, “Hey, you’re Jewish right? I’ve never met anyone Jewish before, but I’ve heard of the Jewish nose and now I get it.” At another time, when Oshman was just starting her career, a recruitment agent told her she would have more success if she straightened her “Jewish curls”. Although at the time Oshman was crushed, she now realises just how far she has come in finding her sense of self.

When it comes to juggling family life and professional commitments, Oshman throws out the concept of work-life balance in favour of what she terms “work-life integration”.

“When I wake up in the morning, I ask myself – after saying *Modeh Ani* [the prayer upon waking] – what am I here to do today? Sometimes I have something massive at work, and I will pivot to that thing because it’s important for my clients, my team, and for the business. And that day, I will see less of the kids. Some days, I wake up, and it’s the day that my son has his biggest football match. And my head is thinking only about being there on time, sending him something before to encourage him. That day, I’ll pay less attention to something else.”

When it comes to social-media usage and children, alongside the legal age stipulations set for certain platforms, Oshman encourages parents to establish their own rules and explore what their children are hoping to get out of social media. “Like anything and everything in life, our job is as parents is to help and teach our children how to deal with life – and yes, social media is part of life. So my role as a parent is about explaining what social media is: what’s a good use of it? What’s a bad use of it? As a parent, the values at home are very clear. The expectations are clear. The love is endless, but I also believe in healthy boundaries.”

Navigating all these facets of her life, Oshman says the message she most wishes to convey is for people to get hope from a sense of purpose. Purpose doesn’t need to be achieving high professional accolades, but also just being there for a loved one in a time of need, or being a loving mother or daughter.

Everyone should remember: “The day you were born is the day the world needed you,” she said.

## Stepping down but not leaving town – Sydenham Shul begins a new era

JULIE LEIBOWITZ

“Thirty five years ago, I had to contend with lubo-phobia – Jews afraid of the ‘black hat’. I had to show people I was normal,” jokes Sydenham Shul’s life emeritus rabbi Rabbi Yossy Goldman. “But, with thousands of people in shul every Friday night [in those days] – any rabbi would give his black hat for that.”

Goldman, who is passing on the Sydenham Shul congregational baton to Rabbi Yehuda Stern after 35 years of leading this iconic Johannesburg shul, was speaking at a special Sydenham Shul webinar commemorating the passing of his and his wife, Rochel’s, leadership to Rabbi Yehuda and Estee Stern.

Goldman certainly succeeded in the task he set himself, building the shul into an institution that has led in many areas – religiously, musically, intellectually, intergenerationally, and across genders.

He has handed over the lectern to Stern, whom he mentored for 13 years after hiring him as an assistant rabbi with a mandate to serve the shul’s *shtiebel* community and develop its young adult division.

His time at the helm of the shul spans generations and eras, from the depths of apartheid, when the park bench outside Goldman’s Chabad workplace in Berea was race segregated, to today’s South Africa, and all the communal change that has gone with it. During that time, Sydenham Shul became “one of the great synagogues of the English-speaking world”, in the words of the late Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks.

Following almost two years of COVID-19 and a great deal of emigration, this shul – like all others – is facing some real challenges. Innovation, dynamism, and sustainability in the future is a tough ask when its most pressing challenge is how to keep in touch with a community that has mostly stayed home through the pandemic and eventually bring congregants back. Another is how to engage with a youthful generation which seeks relevance and meaning. It’s also tough to be a “big shul” that needs to cater for a diverse congregation rather than a tiny *shtiebel*. But, the Sterns, with their fresh ideas and on-the-ground experience, are well placed to realise these ideals.

“Rabbi and Rebbetzin Goldman have done the thing all good leaders do – ensure transition,” said Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, although he pointed out, “A brilliant rabbi and rebbetzin

cannot, on their own, ensure a flourishing shul. A shul is a community, and a community is a partnership. Shul is a world of kindness, learning, *mitzvahs*, and prayer. We create that in partnership with Hashem and each other.”

Interestingly, both Goldman and Stern are immigrants, Goldman from the United States, and Stern from Australia. They describe South Africa as a “culture shock” and “love at first sight”. In the case of the Sterns, the shipping company in Melbourne laughed when they asked it to transfer



Rabbi Yehuda Stern and Rabbi Yossy Goldman

their belongings to Johannesburg, saying it did business only in the other direction.

“South Africa is the best place for a rabbi to work,” Goldman says. “It’s a warm Jewish community which has *yiddishkeit* – not secular and assimilated like in the United States. Shuls, infrastructure, schools, kashrut, we have so much going for us.”

Rebbetzin Rochel Goldman created programmes over the years which attracted hundreds of women, aiming to nurture women and promote a positive South Africa. Her challah baking classes were legendary. “Rochel taught more women in South Africa to bake challah than anyone else,” mused the rabbi.

“If a woman is nurtured, the family, community, and world is nurtured,” said the rebbetzin.

“I would never have become a leader if not for the [Lubavitcher] Rebbe’s inspiration,” she said. “In 1976, we didn’t know what we were coming to. It was ‘dark Africa’. The Rebbe encouraged us to go out and share the vision G-d had for the world.”

The Sterns share the rebbetzin’s focus on women, believing that “the woman’s role is the most important in the community”. “Men come

to shul by default,” said Stern, “it’s the women we have to tap into.”

Sydenham Shul has focused on the youth for years, realising that young adults “were getting lost, and wanted their own events with their peers – conversations not lectures”. In three areas: Sydkids; Sydyouth; and Young Adults, the focus is on youth-led minyans, education, and inviting speakers on various issues. Indeed, as head of the *shtiebel* and young adult division of the shul, Stern could be described as an expert in this area.

“These days, belonging to a shul doesn’t necessarily mean attending services, it could be by attending shiurim, through involvement in welfare or *chesed* projects, or outreach with the wider community,” Stern said. The legendary Sydenham Shul choir was one of the casualties of moving on to a new generation. Formerly one of the shul’s main attractions, a decision was made to downsize, to make the music “more happy clappy”, in Goldman’s words, though music is still central. Ultimately, although Goldman is stepping down, he’s “not leaving town”. “He’s an incredibly powerful and important leader,” said Discovery founder and Chief Executive Adrian Gore. “He leaves a legacy of a shul with modern corporate governance and succession planning.”

He and Rochel will continue to have a presence at the shul and in the community, and say they are looking forward to being with it at events and simchas.

“I ask you to embrace change, be a part of the new generation. The world is changing, and so are we,” Goldman said.

# Teachers welcome vaccine but remain cautious

TALI FEINBERG

“I’m constantly around people at school, and the spaces are crowded. I know I’m not really protected from COVID-19. I take that risk every day I go to work,” says Leila Emdon. She’s just one of thousands of teachers who will be vaccinated in the coming weeks. While she and many of her compatriots cannot wait to get their jabs, they are adamant that they will continue to be vigilant in the classroom. Emdon teaches history, English, and life orientation at Claremont High School in Cape Town. She’s excited to get vaccinated as her school’s routine and environment has been turned upside down by the pandemic.

“We have 500 pupils, and we are a low-resource government school. Before COVID-19, our normal class sizes for Grades 8 and 9 were 35 kids in a class. Grades 10 to 12 had about 22 to 25 kids in a class. We would each have our own classrooms,” she says.

“The building is quite small, with quite small classrooms, so when COVID-19 hit and we had to create a one-metre space between each desk, we couldn’t accommodate all the pupils in each classroom. Plus, the campus in general is small, there aren’t a lot of common spaces, and there isn’t a school field. So, matrices come to school every day, Grades

8 and 9 come only two and a half days a week, and Grade 10s and 11s four days a week. We also split the classes, and teachers move around to different venues to keep the kids from moving around.

“What this means for teachers is that we’ve had a big curriculum to teach in a very short period of time.



We’ve had less teaching time and contact with our kids,” she says. “We also have to move around constantly. It can be quite stressful always being in different venues, spending the whole day running around with your bags and books. Also, we don’t have a normal timetable, so some days we have no break or a very short break. It’s erratic. I used to have one Grade 8 class, now I have two. So I have to teach the same thing twice a week, which is extra teaching. We also can’t do group work or interactive things

because of social distancing. It’s really taken a toll on teachers at my school. We want to go back to “normal”, but still with COVID-19 protocols in place.”

In Johannesburg, where the pandemic has battered the community from all sides, teachers feel that the vaccine can’t come soon enough. “I feel truly blessed and am so grateful to have been given the opportunity to be vaccinated as a teacher,” says Yakira Jacobson, who teaches *kodesh* at Yeshiva College Primary School.

“I teach 40 children a day, and to have a level of protection gives a sense of relief,” she says. “I have always said that I became a teacher to be in the classroom, and this is a positive step to ensuring that the education of our pupils happens there and not behind a screen.”

Jacobson started teaching only this year, and so she’s taught only in a pandemic. While it has been a “baptism of fire”, “the major impact is the inability always to be in the classroom and the need to be online. Teaching should take place in the classroom as that’s how you are able to have the most impact in your pupils. It’s difficult to ensure that everyone is focused and working when online. However, it’s still of utmost importance to keep to all the safety protocols that have been in place since the beginning, and this won’t change in my classroom.”

Tzilla Tannenbaum, who also

teaches *kodesh* at Yeshiva College Primary says, “It feels quite surreal. I felt like I should be saying a *brocha*, and I actually did afterwards. I feel so privileged that I was lucky enough to receive it, and I was in awe of the



efficiency at Discovery [medical aid]. I pray that this allows me, my three children, and all the other children who I teach every day to remain at school where we belong. I also hope that all my friends and family that I love can be vaccinated soon, and we can all be safe.”

She says it’s the little things that she has missed the most as a teacher. “It’s hard not being able to have close contact with the little ones – to give a high five to celebrate an achievement, or a little cuddle when they are sad. It’s also so hard to sing and teach new songs with a mask on. Although

the children are amazing, Zoom is so hard! Please G-d, the vaccine will allow us all to stay on campus and feel slightly less anxious.”

For many teachers, not much will change in their classrooms. “I’ve been vaccinated but I haven’t changed my teaching whatsoever,” says Aliza Amy Lefky who teaches at Hirsch Lyons. “I’m still as cautious and maintain all the COVID-19 protocols.”

Keren Munnell, who teaches Jewish Studies at King David Victory Park (KDVP), agrees. “I was vaccinated, and I’m feeling relieved! In terms of protocols like masking, social distancing, and sanitising, I most definitely won’t let my guard down as it’s still possible to pass it on to others who aren’t yet vaccinated. My teaching practice won’t change, but I’m certainly feeling a lot more protected and calm if I do get COVID-19.”

Shelley Segal, who teaches Grade 1 at KDVP, says, “I had COVID-19 during the first wave, and I’m absolutely petrified of getting it again. The vaccine will reassure the parents in my class when we return to school. I think it’s the correct thing to do, as one cannot replace teaching in person. Knowing I have done my bit for my community makes me feel better.”

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# Local rabbis help Rwandan rabbi with first Jewish burial

NICOLA MILTZ

When one of his congregants passed away last week, Rabbi Chaim Bar Sella of Rwanda turned to local rabbis in South Africa to help him arrange the first Orthodox burial in Kigali. The late George Frank, 78, made history last week when he became the first Jewish man officially buried in Kigali’s first Jewish cemetery. His wish was to be buried near his late wife in the Rwandan capital where the couple had lived for many years. His rabbi, Bar Sella, with whom he had forged a meaningful bond in his later years, made sure his wish came true.

“We met soon after my arrival in Rwanda with my wife and son to set up the Chabad Centre in September 2019,” said Bar Sella. “George came to visit Chabad House, and I invited him for Rosh Hashanah. On *erev* Yom Kippur that year, he laid tefillin for the first time in his life just minutes before the Kol Nidre service. It was very special for everyone there to witness,” he said.

Recalling that moment, he said, “I told George to put on tefillin, and he said to me, ‘What’s that?’ I said, ‘Just do it, and we will talk afterwards, there isn’t time’. That Yom Kippur was significant and touching, it was like his Barmitzvah, like the birthday of his *neshoma* [soul].”

Since then, Frank and the rabbi became close. “I would visit him on Fridays with challah for Shabbos, and lay tefillin with him,” said Bar Sella.

On Frank’s passing, Bar Sella turned to Chabad of Central Africa, led by Rabbi Shlomo Bentolila in Kinshasa, the Democratic Republic of the Congo for guidance.

“Travel between various African countries is restricted, so Rabbi Bentolila advised me to get in touch with the Chevrah Kadisha in South Africa as the country was still allowing travel to Rwanda, and it would help,” said Bar Sella.

This led him to Rabbi Jonathan Fox of the Chevrah Kadisha in Johannesburg, who put him in touch with the travelling rabbi, Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, rabbi to the newly established Small Jewish Communities Association, who it was hoped would fly there and assist.

“Rabbi Fox called me about this rabbi needing help arranging a Jewish burial in Kigali. The initial idea was for me to fly out there and assist him, but COVID-19 put an end to that, so I landed up helping him online with all the arrangements,” Silberhaft said.

As far as he is aware, there has never been a Jewish cemetery in Rwanda, and the majority of Jews living there are Israelis whose burials take place back home in Israel following their deaths.

“We did all the planning online,” said Silberhaft, who explained that Bar Sella first needed to secure land from local authorities.

Bar Sella met the manager of the Rusororo Cemetery to explain what was needed. “He was very understanding and respectful, and allocated a separate and large area of land at the cemetery,” he said.

Silberhaft explained how to consecrate the land for Jewish burial.

Bar Sella gathered a *minyan* of men, and the land was consecrated



Rabbi Chaim Bar Sella and the late George Frank with Rebbetzin Dina Bar Sella and Frank’s daughter, Cleo Frank

in a special ceremony according to Silberhaft’s advice. [washing and purifying the body] and all the specific coffin requirements. His daughter brought with her a

special shroud from the London Chevrah Kadisha which was used. I was very encouraged by the rabbi’s positive energy and for reaching out. It was a memorable learning experience for him,” said Silberhaft.

The deceased, who was born in France in 1943, spent many years in various African countries for work. His four children live in the United Kingdom, and three of them were present when he was finally laid to rest last Wednesday in the presence of a *minyan* and several congregants and locals.

“It was my first time doing something like this, and it was a very moving ceremony. I’m grateful for Rabbi Silberhaft’s help, and I’m pleased that my friend George was buried according to Jewish tradition,” Bar Sella said.

Rabbi Bar Sella, his wife Dina, and their son, Shneur, arrived in

Rwanda in 2019, and set up the first synagogue in the country served by a permanent rabbi.

In the past, yeshiva students have made visits to Rwanda to run occasional Jewish events as part of Chabad’s Roving Rabbis programme.

Bar Sella said that the Chabad centre served Jewish humanitarian workers and visiting businesspeople, many of whom were Israeli, and tourists coming to see the famous gorillas.

“Rwanda is a great place. It’s safe, and you can walk in the streets anytime, day or night. It’s clean, with no pollution. We don’t use plastic here – it’s a green country. Our community usually gets its meat from Johannesburg and chickens from Israel. During COVID-19, it has been difficult. But I’m pleased to say now there is a special little place reserved for Jewish burials in Rwanda.”

## Taking calls from the other side – the work of mediums

MIRAH LANGER

“While other mothers will brag about their children’s abilities, my mother doesn’t say, ‘Well, my daughter speaks to dead people!’”

This is how Tali (Mansur) Janet jokes about the unconventional role of being a medium, a role which, over time, she has come to accept as tremendously positive. “I’m blessed with an amazing gift, but I always tell people I’m just the telephone box – the souls pass messages through to me.”

Janet, along with Bev Kaplan and Lara Katz – the latter has asked for her name to be changed for anonymity – are all Jewish women who are able to practice what they describe as the channelling of various energies which includes those of people who have died, and connecting with spiritual guides.



Tali Janet

As a child, Janet remembers being terrified of birds and the dark, “lining up my fluffy toys as protectors”. She also used to see things that “I would try and touch but I couldn’t”. Kaplan remembers her first encounter at the age of 14, sensing a “masculine energy” in a room, yet she remained calm.

“The only person I shared the experience with was my late mother. She actually had the gift as well but she never told anyone. The subject was very taboo in those days.”

Both Kaplan and Janet tried to block out these early experiences for years.

Kaplan said she began to work with it only after her mother died in 2005. After her mother’s funeral in 2005, she remembers walking to her car when “there was something that made me look to my left. I saw her standing next to her mother, and they both looked younger, happy, and healthy. I could see them with my eyes like I would see a person standing in the room next to me.”

In 2009, her father died, and a few months later, she went for a spiritual reading herself in which she received a message from her paternal grandmother that it was time “to follow my heart and do what she never did”. Kaplan discovered the abilities existed on both sides of her family.

Janet jokes that she “went through a lot of electronics” before she accepted what her abilities were. “I went through four video machines, digital cameras, laptops, a stove top, tumble dryer, gate motor and iPad. My energy was frenetic. I was so freaked out at the beginning. I realised I would have to calm down, but it wasn’t easy because there are very few people who will talk about this.”

She said at first, she was worried she was losing her mind, a feeling Katz echoes. “It was disconcerting when I found out I could do this. When you start seeing the departed and hearing messages, it’s shocking and you think you are crazy.”

However, for Katz, once she began passing on these messages and the information was verified, she knew “it was real”.

“Over time, you learn to trust the information and learn

that it’s about ‘tuning in’ to experience the connection,” she says.

All three have come to see the profound benefit of their gift, but also the extreme caution with which it must be practiced.

They each “channel” in different ways based on different sensory experiences and strengths, whether it’s seeing, hearing, feeling, or even smelling a presence. Katz said souls come to her in different forms, sometimes simply as light, others in detailed human form. Janet specifically asks the soul to come through in human form “at their best stage of their life”. Janet said the process was further complicated because the medium is then offering their interpretation of the stimuli they receive.

What they have in common is that they will never call on souls, but rather souls come to them. “It’s like a sneeze – you let what comes, come; you surrender to the process,” said Katz.

Janet said she also warned clients that on rare occasions, no soul presented itself, in which case the session wouldn’t proceed.

What none of the mediums is willing to do is tell fortunes or read the future. “A true psychic will never ever show the future because the future can change,” said Katz. Kaplan explains that it can be dangerous in that it interferes with a person’s free will. Moreover, some difficulties are part of the growth the soul is expected to experience in life. Ultimately, said Janet, “The reality is you have to define your life; it’s not for someone else to do.”

Instead, they offer messages of closure, guidance, and confirmation that loved ones and spiritual forces watch over us.

Chereen Marcus was given advice in a channelling session that helped her to reflect on the choices she was making in her life. The experience gave her “such a sense of faith that as much as it says it’s against the [Jewish] faith, actually I have more faith in Hashem and the spiritual world because of it.”

Another client said that receiving affirmation that her father continued to protect the family and noticed and appreciated the care she gave her mother who was still alive manifested in a visceral experience of warmth surrounding her, even his presence hugging her. She also received confirmation about a miscarriage she had had, about which the medium had no knowledge. She was told the soul was being cared for, and that the child she lost had been the presence which her daughter had described as an imaginary friend during childhood. The session left her with “such an incredible sense of peace and comfort that I felt I didn’t have to do another channelling again. I walked away so fulfilled.”

The mediums relate to their Jewish identity and the work they do in different ways. They all emphasise that their practices aren’t bound by religion. According to Kaplan, they work on an elemental level with energy. “The universe is made of energy. Energy can never be destroyed, it can only

be transformed and transmuted. So the truth is we never die; we literally transform. When someone transitions, it’s literally an aspect of their consciousness that communicates with us.”

“The Torah forbids us to communicate with the dead,” said Rabbi Ari Shishler, referencing Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Judaism believes that “souls leave residual energy, almost like DNA markers in places where they have been”, said Shishler. This “energy stamp” might be what psychics connect to.

Although practice in this realm is forbidden, in terms of belief, Judaism does affirm that there is a reality after death, Shishler said. “We believe that relatives are aware of some of what happens to their descendants. Our tradition teaches that up to three generations of ancestors join us at family *simchas*.”

Furthermore, Judaic belief is that “should there be a value in a spirit communication, the spirit would reach out to us [as you often hear from people, especially through dreams], rather than us choosing to disturb them.”

Moreover, Judaism doesn’t believe that our personal development on earth is connected to the experience either of our souls before birth – such as through ideas like past-life regression – or with the journey of other souls after death.

“All we need to grow spiritually and to heal is available within our world, here and now. In the words of the Torah, we are to have simple faith and sincerity in order to come close to G-d.

Trying to cross over or work out all the answers may well drive us away from Him.”

Janet said she was aware of Jewish thought on the topic, and respected this opinion completely. An important boundary for her is that she will never disturb or call a soul, only receive a message if it’s given to her.

This is a key point for all three, who caution that there are extremely dangerous aspects to the realm which no one should dabble with. “It’s not okay is to go and conjure the dead. You don’t play with Ouija boards. That’s delving into hectic dark stuff; you don’t mess with that,” said Kaplan.

They hope their work affirms that death isn’t the spiritual end point. Katz said she hopes her work gives people gentle guidance and comfort in knowing that no matter how sick and damaged the body was, the soul is free and pain free.

“Many people feel so disconnected, and this lets them know that they aren’t alone. Even though people aren’t physically present, their love is always with the living.”

For Kaplan, it’s important for people to realise that in their own lives, they have “no competition” when it comes to their journey. “It’s your own growth and spirituality; your own way in life. Everyone has healing to do; otherwise they wouldn’t be here.”



Bev Kaplan

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# The show must go on

NICOLA MILTZ

If all the world's a stage, Daphne Kuhn of Theatre on the Square is now playing the role of a lifetime trying to save her cherished independent theatre, which faces imminent closure if she doesn't secure funding or sponsorship.

After a lengthy hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the producer, owner, and artistic director of the theatre, which is on Nelson Mandela Square at Sandton City, is seriously battling to keep the stage lights on. "We simply cannot see another theatre close," said Kuhn this week. "Now more than ever when we need healing and compassion, the power of theatre has to survive in our country."

The curtain came down temporarily last March with the onset of the pandemic, which has all but devoured the arts and culture sector. Kuhn is now desperately trying to revive the award-winning independent playhouse, which has thrilled theatre and music loving audiences and staged many Jewish performers, musicians, and comedians for years.

"The Jewish community in South Africa has played an enormous role in contributing to arts and entertainment for well over a century in South Africa. It's a subject close to my heart," she said.

"It's therefore so important amongst many reasons including cultural and

spiritual upliftment, entertainment, education, and development that we keep the theatre alive."

The doors may be shut during this dark period, but Kuhn, with her trademark positivity and passion, believes, "It ain't over till the fat lady sings."



The sad reality is that the intimate 200-seater needs an injection of cash to ward off closure. It may be a unique Jozi entertainment hub, but with zero ticket sales over the past year, it has brought in no income and it doesn't have a naming rights sponsor nor access to any government or provincial subsidy due to it being privately owned. Thankfully, Kuhn has received rent relief from the landlord. Now, her theatre and performance space, which has brought more than 2 500 shows to life in its 27 years of existence, is launching a fundraising campaign to prevent it from closing permanently.

"This isn't only for entertainment and the cultural upliftment of all, but almost more importantly to keep our industry alive,

for the benefit of our struggling artists, actors, directors, technicians, playwrights, musicians, dancers, choreographers, and all creatives," Kuhn said.

Over the years, she has created work for thousands in the sector. She has always been a strong believer in theatre development, and has a passion for giving back to the industry. It has resulted in her taking financial risks few would dream of by giving a platform to new playwrights and performers to present their works, funding their productions, and lending a hand.

"During a year of COVID-19 closure, we tried to retain and pay our staff, but the theatre can reopen only if our fundraising campaign generates enough cash to cover the bills and pay artists who are desperate to perform again," she told the *SA Jewish Report*.

"The silver bullet would be to secure a new sponsor for the full naming rights at R2 million a year, with the company name displayed above the theatre and on advertising materials, free tickets for staff and clients, and use of the venue for corporate functions," said Kuhn.

"I'm hoping that companies with a vision will help sponsor more theatre in South Africa, and so help the industry to survive," she said.

Over the years, Theatre on the Square has survived as an independent concern in spite of hard times.

"We have had a sponsor with full naming

rights since the theatre's inception. This helps to cover enormous running costs, like rent, resident staff salaries, in addition to assisting with new production costs," she said.

"We have had no income for 16 months, and many of these costs had to be paid. The big, subsidised theatres in this country get a minimum of R60 million a year, and most aren't producing. We produce plays, shows, and concerts prolifically in all the genres, offering work opportunities to so many in the industry and providing a variety of entertainment to the public."

As the recipient of a number of awards including the Naledi Executive Director's Award for her contribution to theatre, Kuhn said, "Theatre has given me immense pleasure my whole life, and I'm determined to continue paying back by helping in my way to keep arts and culture alive.

"We have produced so many local and international plays, lunchtime musical concerts, comedy shows, and events. I'm filled with immense gratitude to all our patrons and sponsors, and I'm very proud of all our achievements, particularly having launched the careers of many local actors and producing plays that embrace our country's rich cultural diversity," she said.

With a lifetime working in the dramatic arts, Kuhn opened a small theatre in Rosebank before setting her sights on Sandton, where she has devoted her passion



and energy for the greater part of her illustrious career.

The fundraising programme has various tiers of support such as individual membership of the theatre club at R500 per year; seat sponsorship at R1 200 a year per seat, which includes having your name inscribed on a small plaque on a seat and the benefits of individual theatre membership.

Theatre goers can also buy life membership, which includes two complimentary tickets to every show produced by the theatre at a show time that's available and convenient. The names of life members will be inscribed on a board in the theatre foyer. Lastly, the theatre also offers corporate membership of R10 000 a year, which includes 12 complimentary tickets a month for corporate entertainment (the average ticket price is R100 to R150). Company names will be inscribed on a board in the theatre foyer and logos included in theatre programmes.

# Weapons of mass creation

OPINION

DAVID JAFFE



Trees are an extremely important part of the earth's ecosystem. They perform a multitude of functions. They produce oxygen and process carbon dioxide which is the basis for all life on earth. They hold water and stabilise weather patterns, they provide a home for various types of animals, produce food and timber for building and paper production, and they mitigate pollution as they beautify the world.

All trees fulfil the above functions to varying degrees, but an indigenous tree will naturally do a better job. This is because trees have evolved over millions of years in conjunction with the nature around them. That means that certain plants can be fertilised only by certain insects, or certain birds can nest or feed only on certain trees. Because of this, an indigenous tree is better suited to the flora and fauna that inhabit an area.

Many animals are found throughout a continent or country, and so many indigenous trees can be planted in a large variety of places and they will still support the local ecosystem. An endemic tree, however, is even better suited as some animals are so geographically isolated, they may be found only in a very small area in which case, an endemic tree is ideal as it can play host to the rarer species of the land.

It could be argued that plants are the most important part of an ecosystem. This is because plants provide food for herbivorous creatures. These creatures are then consumed by the carnivores and eventually returned to the soil where they feed the plants, and so the cycle continues. When you plant an indigenous or endemic tree, you are adding a piece to the puzzle. Every tree is an ecosystem in its own right providing a home and food for birds, insects, mammals, and reptiles, which makes it a microbiome.

When many trees are planted together to create a small copse of trees, it allows for a greater abundance of species as well as for more members of a single species to take up residence, which increases the genetic variability of that population and strengthens the species as a whole. When enough small copses are combined, we see the creation of jungles and forests.

In recent years, saving the planet has become a hot topic. With key words like "global warming", "sustainability", and "save



the trees" floating around our social media and news feeds, it's clear that we, as a human population, have realised the necessity for huge reform regarding the way we go about our business on this planet. We've heard of the legendary speech made in 2019 by the young Swedish activist, Greta Thunberg, where she beseeched that world leaders seriously regard the dire environmental situation on our planet. We've heard about the ice caps melting, and the polar bears that are suffering and struggling to survive the uncharacteristic rising heat in their habitats. We know that burning fossil fuels is an environmentally unsustainable

way to recover energy. We know that solar and wind power is "greener". We've all come across the opportunity to recycle, whether it's in our own households or somewhere in a public space. We know that plastic bags have been banned in more than 15 countries in Africa, and even more so in other parts of the world.

However, the thing about nature is that it's operational on every level. From the very tiniest subatomic quarks all the way into the enormous galaxy that encompasses the earth, nature is at play. It's all around us, in just about every shape and size. We can therefore be assured that even by planting a flower or not littering, we are positively affecting nature on some level.

One of the most impactful ways to contribute to the well-being of our environment is to facilitate natural life. One such organism stands out from the rest because it not only absorbs and stores environmental

lifespan of a tree, then at least because they contribute to the organic leaf-litter layer of your garden soil, or provide you with flowers, fruits, or nuts.

It's no secret that there is a great need for reforestation and individual tree planting in the world, due to the infamous stripping of our forested landscapes. Whatever the reason, and whatever the scale, the unmitigated and reckless removal of indigenous trees from areas throughout the world has resulted in huge problems for our environment. Deforestation and the loss of trees has been linked to climate change, desertification, soil erosion, fewer crops, flooding, increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and a host of problems for indigenous people.

The good news is that planting trees has never been easier. With the growing global concern for our planet and the forests disappearing from it, organisations all over earth have been created to facilitate the common intention of planting trees. By selecting appropriate species, areas, and planting periods, these organisations provide the opportunity to put a tree (or several) in the ground without them being deterred by the limitations they may face such as lack of knowledge on dendrology or ecology. Nature is a dynamic, complex living system, and we are indeed a part of it.

Now is the time to participate in the process of healing our planet, a process that does start with each individual. By choosing to get involved in regreening and environmental restoration, you acknowledge that every creature, tree, blade of grass, and drop of water has its impact, and so do you.

• David Jaffe is the founder and director of PlantNation.



Letters

CHRISTIANS HAVE RESPONSIBILITY TO SUPPORT JEWS AND ISRAEL

As a Christian who believes in the authenticity and authority of scripture, I’m compelled to express my support for the arguments put forward by Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein in the front-page article of the *SA Jewish Report* (10 June 2021).

I find it disturbing and tragic that any church leader could show bias against Israel, especially with regard to the recent conflict in Israel and the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement. It’s ironic that it was Anglican Church leaders in Britain in the early 20th century who advocated the return of the Jewish people to their own land. In fact, they played an active role in the formulation of the Balfour Declaration. They clearly understood that according to the covenantal relationship with the Jewish people, the land of Israel had been promised to Jacob and his descendants. They also believed Biblical prophecies that the Jewish people would return to their land.

As Christians, we owe our entire heritage to the Jewish people, without whom we would have no patriarchs, no prophets, no Messiah, no apostles, no teachings, in fact, no Bible (including the New Testament). The Bible clearly teaches that the Jewish people were sovereignly chosen by Hashem

JOBURG, LIVERPOOL AND BEYOND

There is an undeniable bond between sons and their mothers. Jewish mothers have amplified this post-birth umbilical-cord dynamic into a relationship that can only be exceeded by a Jewish grandmother’s *nachas* about their grandchildren.

My mother, Margot, is no exception. When my brother sent me a link to an online article from the *SA Jewish Report* recently, I expected the usual – another load shedding meme, some horrible crime statistics, a new low on corruption, motivation from the chief rabbi, but no. My mother had poured out our mini life story and her soul in a letter (“Emigration leaves me empty”) to the editor of the *SA Jewish Report* (10 June 2021).

It was and still is heart wrenching to read, in spite of being very well-written.

This isn’t the first time I have left South Africa. Heraclitus said that no man ever steps in the same river twice, for it’s not the same river, and he’s not the same man. The previous times I travelled, I was young, single, ignorant,

ANC CADRES SHOW SELECTIVE MORALITY TO “FRIEND” NATIONS

On 22 June, the BBC presented a programme showing the human-rights abuses perpetrated by China on its Muslim Uighur people – how it deliberately separated children from their parents, and how it detained thousands of Muslim adults in “re-education” camps. The BBC investigation revealed China’s shameless use of apartheid practices including racial profiling and the detention of hundreds of thousands of Muslims against their will in secret camps, from which reports of torture and worse have been leaked.

*The New York Times* (28 June 2021) in an “investigative report” says that “Russian operatives in the Central African Republic (CAR) who had been billed as unarmed advisers are actually leading the fighting, including massacres of civilians”. The United Nations Security Council has documented Russian “mercenaries” killing civilians, looting homes, and shooting worshippers in a mosque in a major military operation.

The United Nations has well documented accusations of atrocities by these Russian mercenaries, who are blatantly committing human-rights abuses against unarmed civilians, including indiscriminate killings, looting, and occupying schools. All these crimes are corroborated by photographic

to be a light to the world and a blessing to the nations, and that the land of Israel was given to them as an eternal, inalienable inheritance.

Given this understanding of the scriptures, we can never justify supporting any point of view that can potentially harm the state of Israel. Christian leaders should teach a correct understanding of the scriptures, and the unique significance of the Jewish people and Israel in particular. Their role should be, above all, to seek truth, peace, and reconciliation.

While we are deeply concerned about the plight of the ordinary Palestinian citizens, joining in the propaganda war against Israel only adds grist to the mill of those extremist groups whose avowed intent is to commit genocide, and it will in no way alleviate the suffering of the Palestinians who are pawns in this conflict.

Of course, we are all entitled to express our political opinions in a free democratic country like South Africa, but it’s extremely dangerous to simply tow the party line, as church leaders did (with some notable exceptions) in Nazi Germany. We cannot afford to support any dominant political ideology unless it lines up with the truth of the Bible, our highest authority.

- **Lawrie Barnes, Pretoria**

curious, but also carefree. Emigrating now, as middle-aged parents, carried significant responsibilities and baggage, physical and emotional.

It was never an easy decision, there’s no right answer or ideal outcome.

I was fortunate to grow up with many advantages and privileges in life as a white South African and from my experiences, education, life lessons, and opportunities, I draw inspiration on a daily basis. However, they would have been hollow without the accompanying love and support of my parents, Margot and Clive, and brother Stuart, and his family. Home will always mean Joburg. Family will always be Friday nights at my parent’s magic table (where food is mysteriously always present and replenished). Being Jewish will always mean reaching out and finding a caring community, Joburg, Liverpool and beyond.

Mom, this is just a new chapter, Everything Is Going To Be Ok. - **Douglas Cohen, Liverpool**

evidence and witness accounts.

Reports tell of more than 2 000 Russian “advisers” in the CAR, and further reports reveal the forcible recruitment of child soldiers, sexual assaults on women, and regular indiscriminate shooting of civilians. Violations against citizens mentioned in the reports include, but are not limited to, rape, summary execution, targeted killings, torture, and forced disappearances.

In only one week, the most dastardly human-rights abuses by two of the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) partners have been exposed, yet the various senior ministers of the African National Congress (ANC), who just a few weeks ago were incensed and vociferous about human-rights abuses against civilians, who led demonstrations at certain embassies, and who called for the severing of diplomatic relations, remain absolutely silent about the victimisation perpetrated by their “friends”.

The flagrant persecution of their African brothers in the CAR raises not the slightest comment, criticism, or even a modicum of concern by these ANC cadres. Isn’t it time for those like Jesse Duarte and President Cyril Ramaphosa to stand up for the morality they demand not only of selective countries, but of all? - **Allan Wolman, Israel**

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Pepuda and prejudice

When the so-called Equality Act (the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, or Pepuda) was passed back in 2000, it was a game-changer in terms of providing victims of prejudice with suitable delineated legal guidelines which they could rely on to seek redress.

Through its constitutional and legislation committee, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) made significant input into the Act at the time. Since then, we have relied on it, particularly those sections dealing with prohibited hate speech, for the majority of the antisemitism cases we have brought, whether to the South African Human Rights Commission, the Equality Courts, or regulatory bodies such as the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa.

A number of proposed amendments to Pepuda were announced and opened for public comment. The Board, in consultation with its legal advisors, local and international academics, and engagement with the justice department, has considered the amendments, and this week, put in a submission to the relevant portfolio committee. Our view is that the amendments essentially clarify various definitions and terms of reference within the existing Act rather than altering its main thrust to any significant degree. It is, however, likely that in the future, more substantive changes will be put forward, in the event of which we will again take up the matter and consider the aspects we need to take up.

**Restorative versus punitive justice**

When dealing with cases of offensive speech and/or behaviour, it’s always important to bear in mind the intent of the perpetrator. Sometimes, insensitivity or plain ignorance rather than outright malice is behind the offensive behaviour in question. Even when genuine malice is involved, moreover,

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ABOVE BOARD

Shaun Zagnoev



we regard those responsible coming round to acknowledging and understanding what they did wrong and sincerely apologising for it (restorative justice) as preferable to them being formally punished (punitive justice). First prize is always to change hearts and minds.

A successful case of restorative justice that the Board was recently involved in concerned the multiple daubing of swastikas and other Nazi-themed imagery on school property by three pupils at a high school in Nigel. It’s noteworthy that the original complainant was a non-Jewish parent (there are no Jewish pupils at the school), showing as it does how the propagation of the Nazi ideology is regarded as unacceptable even by people outside our community. Last week, following extensive interaction with the school leadership, the pupils in question visited the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre, where they were given a structured education tour by the staff. In a debriefing with SAJBD Gauteng Chairperson Professor Karen Milner, all three were open and willing to learn, and the sincere, insightful feedback about what they had learnt was very encouraging.

It would be remiss of me to conclude without commenting on the new COVID-19 restrictions. Gauteng remains the epicentre of the “third wave”, and we are receiving concerning reports from Hatzolah about the number of community members who are infected. I can but reiterate the critical need for people to abide strictly by all safety protocols, to remain at home where possible, and in general, do whatever they can to limit the risk of exposure.

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

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# Later better than never

I didn't check how old Tjaard was turning last Monday, but the day that followed the move to level 4 lockdown was his birthday. It so happened that he was also attending a virtual meeting that I was on that began with everyone wishing him the best for the year ahead. I don't recall who, but someone asked him if he was doing anything to celebrate the day. And he answered that as we had just moved to higher restrictions, he would wait until later to celebrate it.

It's often the smallest comments that have the most impact – for me, in any event. And although the discussion moved on to the agenda, I was left with the feeling that I needed to go back to his statement. Because, in many respects, it has been 18 months of "there will be another time to".

Tjaard is being responsible and doing what we all should be doing and have been doing since March 2020. In my world, we have celebrated our 30th anniversary without going away or getting together with family and friends. The birth and subsequent naming of our granddaughter, Chloe, went by with the words, "There will be time to celebrate." So, too, was the engagement of our son in December, a few days ahead of beaches closing, where a limited few dropped past at designated times so as not to be there together.

It's not just the good things that have been altered. My father's passing in October last year, the funeral that followed, and subsequent mourning period became a choreographed affair. We monitored who would attend physically or join by Zoom, who visited the house, that they were COVID-19 compliant, and where they sat.

## INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



There would be time, we thought, for a different type of mourning later. And so, it was added to the list. My ability to recite kaddish has been delayed by the closing of shuls. Hopefully, I will be able to do it again as soon as they open. Later. In the interim, the 11 crucial months when I am able to do so, passes by.

Holidays not taken, birthdays, school concerts, matric farewells, prize giving, anniversaries, Barmitzvahs and Batmitzvahs, work celebrations, and a simple evening or meal with friends we haven't seen. All added to the list under the heading, "There will be time to do that later." The visiting of children in other countries and children from other countries visiting us, all delayed to a later date. When there will be time.

But here's the thing. As important as it is to be honest with each other, it's important to be honest with ourselves. As vital as it is to be true to our word to our children and spouses and friends, it's as crucial to honour ourselves. Meaning, if we intend to celebrate later, then we are obliged to do so.

This is the plan. From now onwards, if we say that there will be time, then we need to make sure to make the time. We need to write a "there will be time list", so that we don't forget. Also, we need to believe that the time will, indeed, come when we will be able to celebrate, mourn, and live the hell out of every experience that we might have missed. I just hope that Tjaard remembers to include me in whatever he does. Later.

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## Memorable workshop on Rwandan genocide at KDL

Grade 11 students at King David Linksfield were recently given an informative and disturbing overview of the 1994 Rwandan genocide in a workshop facilitated by the Johannesburg Holocaust & Genocide Centre (JHAGC). Pupils weren't able to travel to the centre as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, so the workshop was held at the school by JHAGC facilitators Mdu, Catherine, and Nenhle.

The workshop explained the genocide as an attempt by extremist government-led Hutu militias to carry out a long-planned campaign to murder all Tutsi living in the country. It took the form of a short video, a lecture, and a question-and-answer session. Following this, the



Grade 11s were split into much smaller focus groups to discuss the roles played by perpetrators, victims, and bystanders. The pupils were also given time to view exhibition panels brought from the JHAGC, which were eye-opening in content and illustration.

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