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NOMINATIONS FOR THE

## ABSA JEWISH ACHIEVER **AWARDS 2021**

Absa Jewish Achiever Awards

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## Build hope by reaching out and nominating













s the sun rises through the darkness of the pandemic and looting in South Africa, we begin to renew our hope for the future, and with that, we start our search to celebrate our Absa Jewish Achievers in 2021. Nominations are now open.

This year, we will celebrate on 7 November with great 'hope', the theme of this year's event that so perfectly fits our growing sentiments.

The past 18 months have been so incredibly tough on our community, our country, and our world. What with more than 200 Jewish people dying from the COVID-19 pandemic in Johannesburg alone, we have really felt the coronavirus to our core.

We haven't been able to be at loved one's funerals, and have sat shiva alone. We have isolated from our loved ones to protect them. We have put much of our lives on hold because of this illness. Many have lost businesses and livelihoods.

But the end of this pandemic is in sight. We have "hope" again. As we vaccinate en masse, we move towards a new tomorrow.

We survived the wholesale looting and violence of the past month, and people have gone to great lengths to help each other make it through.

As a community, we work best together. We support each other, making us stronger and more resilient.

The Absa Jewish Achiever Awards is all about our community putting heads together and coming up with those unique individuals who stand head and shoulders above others.

We will pull out all the stops to celebrate our 2021 achievers on 7 November. Once again, we'll keep it online to avoid any potential COVID-19 risks. But in so doing, we'll bring your international fantasies to life with our annual revelry. And in so doing, we will enable far more people to participate than can fit in a large hall. Last

award; entrepreneurship; business icon; professional excellence community award winner; a lifetime achiever; a winner in sport, science and culture; and a humanitarian award winner (who doesn't have to be Jewish).

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NOMINATIONS CLOSE AT 17:00 ON 3 SEPTEMBER 2021 SEND NOMINATIONS TO: nominations@sajewishreport.co.za GO TO: www.sajr.co.za year, we took our numbers from 1 000 to 60 000 viewers.

It's time to look around and find those unique individuals, those gems within our community who have performed in their own areas like no other.

You know who they are, and they will be given the *kavod* only if you nominate them for the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards. It's up to you.

"The Absa Jewish Achiever Awards is so important as it allows us as a community to take stock and celebrate our disproportionate contribution to the people of South Africa," says Howard Sackstein, Absa Jewish Achiever chairperson.

"It allows us to create role models for everyone to emulate as we celebrate the extraordinary. In so doing, we encourage others to find greatness in their own fields."

Though we will once again be looking for lifetime achievers this year, a humanitarian champion, and those who have gone way beyond the call of duty for the community, we are also focusing on those who have excelled in the past year.

We want to find those outstanding individuals who have distinguished themselves over this past year with its unique challenges.

We are looking for nominees in the following: women in leadership; business

your nominations, they won't get the acknowledgement they deserve. Although there are judges involved, we need your nominations and online participation in the public vote.



This is a communal event, focusing on our magnificent community, to find the individuals that will become icons for the rest of us. "As you all know, we work best as a community, and in this, we encourage each other to take pride in the achievements of others," says Sackstein.

Nominations are open from today, until 17:00 on 3 September.

Email your nominations to nominations@sajewishreport.co.za





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## Young and old on record-breaking aliyah flight

**TALI FEINBERG** 

amilies, yeshiva bochurs (students), lone soldiers, and a nonagenarian will be among the 87 new arrivals at Ben Gurion in Israel this week in the largest group of South African olim on one flight since 1994.

"I feel incredibly proud to be a part of this recordbreaking aliyah flight. It's comforting to make aliyah surrounded by so many South African *olim* who have different expectations and aspirations, but who all share the dream of beginning a new life in Israel," Eliana Lewus told the *SA Jewish Report* ahead of the flight on Tuesday, 27 July.

When Jared Glass was three years old, he almost drowned. Thirty-six years later, he will be among this group of new *olim*. "I feel like I'm being dragged out of the deep and taken to safety again," says Glass from Johannesburg.

Aliyah is also for the young-at-heart, as Dr Hymie Erlich proves. At 91, he's ready for more adventure (he celebrated his 90th birthday by hang-gliding in his home city of Cape Town). He will join his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. His daughter and son-in-law were among the last to land in Israel in January 2021, when the Israeli government closed the airport due to COVID-19.

Speaking to the SA Jewish Report, Erlich says, "Everything in life is a step, and this is another step onwards." He's sad to be leaving a "beautiful community. I wish everyone b'hatzlacha [good luck] and lehitraot [until we meet again]. See you in Israel!"

His son-in-law, Philip Stodel, says that when planning his own aliyah, "we asked him whether he would consider coming with us, but he was happy to stay. But following the onset of COVID-19, Hymie, who was still active as a medical doctor, was advised to stop working. He also found himself alone at his Shabbat table every week. He started his aliyah process in October 2020. At 91, Hymie's mind is sharp, but he lacks technical skills. I've always been his 'IT support system', so I continued to do this remotely [to help him make aliyah].

"One of his biggest tasks was clearing his apartment of just about everything. We know this was very emotional at times. I feel like I've done aliyah twice, and I can honestly say that it was far easier the first time! As I sit here on a Friday afternoon, approaching what will be Hymie's last Shabbat in South Africa, my immediate concern is for the lastminute pressure that I know await us. I will heave a huge sigh of relief once he is on the plane, and a bigger sigh when we see him on Wednesday!"

"The significance of Israel, aliyah, and a home for the Jewish people remains as relevant today as ever," says recently-appointed Telfed (South African Zionist Federation in Israel) Chairperson Robby Hilkowitz.

"Telfed plays a vital role in facilitating the absorption of new olim," says
Telfed Chief Executive Dorron
Kline. "Our role is to help new olim prepare for life in Israel. Our services centre on this and include guidance in dealing with the first bureaucratic steps; employment counselling; an in-house social worker; rental apartments in Tel Aviv/Ra'anana [depending on availability] at below-market rates; and a volunteer-based scholarship programme. Our regional volunteers welcome new olim to their communities, and are an important source of information for those considering aliyah as they decide

Hilkowitz says all new *olim* are required to go into

quarantine. "For the first time, we will invite new *olim* to join our daily virtual Tea at Ten with Telfed, which details the important steps for the early stages of their aliyah

journey. These webinars
don't just
provide

virtual musical Kabbalat Shabbat.

Liat Amar Arran, the director of Israel Centre South Africa, says many of the *olim* are making aliyah ahead of the new school year in Israel. "Like all flights during the pandemic, there have been challenges. For example, we needed to get agreement from Israel that there is enough space in its quarantine hotels to accommodate them. There has been a lot of work in the past two weeks, and our team has worked around the clock. *Olim* have to fill in many forms just before they leave." Even with

fill in many forms just before they leave." Even with all of this extra administration related to COVID-19, she's excited that the flight is able to go ahead.

Meanwhile, Lewus, who is 20 years old, is making aliyah from Johannesburg by herself. "I will be doing a year of national service in Israel [as an alternative to the army] before starting to study," she says.

While it may seem like this group of *olim* are fleeing the current civil unrest, making aliyah takes time, and they started the process some time ago. "My aliyah process was gradual. I began the process about nine months ago," Lewus says.

She is motivated by "pull factor" rather than "push factor". "When I was in Israel on the Ohrsom gap year, I fell in love with the people, landscape, and feeling of unity. I knew I wanted to go back," says Lewus. "I wanted to be a part of it, to be able to contribute.

"The recent unrest hasn't influenced my feelings about aliyah," she says. "I'm under no illusion that the perfect country exists. However, I do hope for a better future for South Africa. I feel so grateful and privileged to have been brought up as a South African Jew. Our community, culture, and upbringing are unique, and have paved the way for me to embark on my journey.

I feel supported by family and friends in my decision to make aliyah, and my biggest hope is that they will be able to visit me soon."

Tammy Wainer is 34, and making aliyah from

Continued on page 13>>



influence that a strong, connected community plays in a successful absorption. Our ultimate objective is for *olim* to integrate fully, to contribute to the country, but not forget their roots because being a part of a connected and dynamic community is empowering."

sure our new arrivals feel connected. We see the positive

guidance, they make

They will also provide virtual activities for children and welcome packs. And, *olim* are invited to participate in a



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#### Shabbat times this week

Starts	Ends	
17:23	18:14	Johannesburg
17:48	18:42	Cape Town
17:05	17:57	Durban
17:25	18:17	Bloemfontein
17:19	18:13	Port Elizabeth
17:11	18:05	East London

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### Ben & Jerry's chair denies antisemitism amidst froth over boycott

**BEN SALES - JTA** 

ne week after Ben & Jerry's announced that it would stop selling ice cream in the "Occupied Palestinian Territory", the company's board chairperson for the first time publicly rejected the suggestion that the move was antisemitic.

And the brand's parent company, Unilever, disavowed the movement to boycott Israel. The disavowal comes as Unilever faces the prospect of being penalised financially in states that have anti-boycott laws.

Those are two of the developments to emerge in the continuing fallout from the Ben & Jerry's boycott of Israeli settlements. Here's a rundown of what has happened over the past day or two:

On Tuesday, 27 July, Anuradha Mittal, the chairperson of Ben & Jerry's board of directors, tweeted her first comments on the boycott since it was announced last week. She stood by the decision, and denied being antisemitic following Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid's statement that the boycott was a "shameful surrender to antisemitism".

"I'm proud of @benandjerrys for taking a stance to end sale of its ice cream in the Occupied Palestinian Territory," she tweeted, using the same term for the West Bank that the announcement used. "This action isn't antisemitic. I'm not antisemitic. The vile hate that has been thrown at me does [not] intimidate me. Pls work for peace - not hatred!" (Mittal didn't detail the "vile hate" she has received, though critics of the decision have attacked her on social media.)

Mittal's post came days after a report by NBC News

that her board was unhappy with the text of the statement put out by Unilever announcing the boycott. Ben & Jerry's would "stay in Israel through a different arrangement", it said. That The Unilever logo is seen in Warsaw, Poland, in 2020

clause didn't appear in the announcement drafted by the

Mittal hasn't said that Ben & Jerry's should withdraw from Israel entirely, and the board hasn't voiced that position publicly. But on Twitter, Mittal has previously endorsed the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement against Israel known as BDS.

"The catastrophe continues #Nakba70 years later #palestine bleeds Boycott Divest Sanctions #israel," she wrote in 2018.

On Tuesday, she also tweeted a statement of support from liberal Jewish groups and quoted a passage from the Unilever statement emphasising "a clear distinction between the state of Israel and the Palestinian territories it militarily occupies".

Unilever is also stressing that the settlement boycott isn't the same as BDS. The company's statement, made in nearly identical letters sent to Jewish organisations on Tuesday, comes as a handful of states are considering divesting funds from Unilever under laws that ban the states from doing business with companies that boycott

The letters say Unilever is committed to doing business with Israel, where it employs 2 000 people and has invested nearly \$296 million (R4.3 billion) in the country's market.

"We look forward to investing in our business in Israel long into the future," say the letters, which were sent to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organisations, both of which had criticised Ben & Jerry's West Bank

모음 pull out. "We have never expressed any support for the BDS movement, and have no intention of changing that position."

Both the ADL and Presidents Conference said they appreciated the letter, but reiterated their previous criticism. The latter said Unilever's "response does not go nearly far enough" and encouraged the company to try to override the Ben & Jerry's board decision, though an internal agreement between Unilever and the Ben & Jerry's board appears to make that impossible. The umbrella group also praised the states that are looking into whether the boycott violates anti-BDS laws.

The Presidents Conference said it opposed the Ben & Jerry's decision, "as boycotts of Israel are discriminatory". While the announcement and letter make clear that the boycott applies only to the West Bank, which Israel controls but hasn't annexed, Presidents Conference Chief Executive William Daroff told JTA that the boycott would force the closure of Ben & Jerry's plant in Israel, and that the group feels an "obligation to speak out when Jewishowned businesses are singled out". Daroff said that Ben & Jerry's had made a political decision that singled out Israelis and one "disputed" territory."

The ADL also thanked Unilever for its statement against BDS, but said, "While ADL is a strong supporter of the twostate solution, we believe that it's wrong for any company to single out Israel by refusing to sell its products to Israelis and Palestinians living in the West Bank."

Ben & Jerry's store in New York City opposed the boycott and plans to donate 10% of its profit to Israel.

A Jewish owner of a Ben & Jerry's franchise on Manhattan's Upper West Side has joined a group of local store owners protesting the West Bank boycott. On Monday, Joel Gasman posted on Facebook that, "We feel the recent actions by [Ben & Jerry's] corporate office don't reflect our personal views."

Gasman, whose store is in a heavily Jewish neighbourhood, promised to donate 10% of its profit to "state of Israel educational causes". He did not specify

Continued on page 11>>

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### **Torah Thought**

### Take heel of your character flaws

"If you do obey these rules..."

This is the opening line of the Torah portion this week.

More accurately, the Torah states, "If you *eikev* obey these rules..."

The word "eikev", which, in fact, is the name of our Torah portion, seems to be redundant. Moreover, it's an uncommon use of the word. The root of the word "eikev" comes from the word "akeiv", meaning "heel". There are far more common options that the Torah could have employed in this context.

Rashi, the famous biblical commentator, interprets this phrase to mean, "If even the lighter commands, which a person typically walks upon with one's heels, you will listen to..." Rashi, thus, understands "eikev" as denoting emphasis. One must not only obey and abide by the so-called "big" commandments, but also - and perhaps especially - the "smaller" commandments that one would figuratively-speaking walk over.

The portion of Eikev is a reminder and a warning that we must remain vigilant in regard to all our actions, the seemingly important and the seemingly unimportant. There are, perhaps, things we do every day by rote and by habit without thought. It's how we treat others and how we allow others to be treated. It's about how we regard the world around us.

It's in the realm of the mundane and the ordinary that we must remain particularly vigilant.

In the Book of Proverbs, the wise King Solomon wrote, "In all your ways know Him." It's not only when we are actively engaged in the performance of a mitzvah that we need to bring Hashem into our lives. Every moment and every place should be filled with G-dliness. We shouldn't be so hurried in our journey through life that we pass these moments by.

Yes, the heel symbolises that upon which we step. However, the heel,

Rabbi Rodney Richard, **Emmarentia Shul** 

What defines

more importantly, symbolises what we stand for.

us as individuals isn't necessarily the actions on which we place the highest value. We aren't defined by the length of time we spend in shul over Yom Kippur (please do, though, come to shul this yom tov, and don't keep glancing at the clock) or the size of the annual donation we give to charity. Rather, it's in the everyday moments - the ways in which we interact with others socially, in our homes, and in our places of work - that we are measured.

Our eikev, our heel, indeed our very foundation, is established upon our behaviours that are almost automatic, the ones we may take for

It's here where we need to stand tall.

Shabbat Shalom!

### Jewish

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### SA seethes as Israel scores diplomatic coup in AU

**NICOLA MILTZ** 

he South African government this week lashed out at the recent decision by the African Union (AU) to grant Israel observer status.

After nearly 20 years of persistent diplomatic efforts, Israel last week attained observer status at the AU. The development was welcomed by Israel, who has long held that the Jewish state has much to offer

However, predictably, it has been shunned by the government and local pro-Palestinian groups.

In a statement on 28 July, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO), said it was "appalled" at the decision calling it "unjust" and "unwarranted".

It said that in the context of the recent flare-up of violence in the Middle East, the decision was "inexplicable", and accused the AU Commission of

taking the decision unilaterally without consulting its members.

DIRCO said it would ask the chairperson of the commission to provide a briefing to all member states, which it hoped would be further discussed.

"South Africa firmly believes that as long as Israel isn't willing to negotiate a peace plan without preconditions, it shouldn't have observer status," the statement said.

Earlier this week, the SA BDS coalition slammed the government for its silence on the matter, and for not immediately criticising the move like it has done in the past. The organisation urged the government, as well as other AU member states, to reject Israel's claim to accreditation.

"We are extremely disappointed that our government didn't immediately publicly reject the Israeli claim and announce that it would lodge an objection to the AU chair," it said.

The SA BDS coalition accused Israel of "falsely claiming" that its assistance to African states in fields such as agriculture, technology, and economic development was philanthropic.

"In reality, this is simply opportunistic leverage," it said, adding that Israel's objective was to "muscle recipient states" to support it at the United Nations (UN) and other international fora.

One local pro-Palestinian media organisation tweeted "Remove the Zionist cancer from the AU".

South Africa, along with several other African nations, has long opposed Israel's desire to gain observer status at the 55-member continental organisation. While chairing the AU Commission from 2012 to 2017, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma strongly objected to Israel's rapprochement with the

In November last year on the UN International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, DIRCO Deputy Minister Alvin Botes accused Israel of "vociferously" lobbying African states to support its bid, saying that it was "more important than ever" to ensure that this didn't happen.

Said Botes, "There is a growing and justifiable sense that certain African and Arab nations no longer see the liberation of Palestine as a common objective."

He said Israel, with the support of America, was driving a wedge between these nations. "If Israel continues to score political victories while facing little resistance, it could eventually dominate Africa," Botes

Algeria on Sunday condemned the decision of the AU to grant Israel observer status.

Israel previously held observer status at the



The move will enable stronger co-operation between the two parties on various aspects, including the fight against coronavirus and the prevention "of the spread of extremist terrorism" on the African continent, the statement said.

In a separate statement, Faki Mahamat stressed the

AU's position over the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict, reiterating the bloc's stance that a two-state solution was "necessary for peaceful coexistence".

Steven Gruzd, the head of the and Diplomacy Programme at the South African Institute of International Affairs said it was a pragmatic decision an ideological one,

African Governance by the AU rather than as "Israel has a lot to offer Africa".

"South Africa will feel a little out-manoeuvred on this one, given that during Dlamini-Zuma's tenure as AU commissioner, the proposal was blocked presumably by Arab states in the North of Africa as well as countries like South Africa.

"This seems to be a diplomatic coup for the Israelis. It has been quite a long time coming, and even though symbolic in many ways, it's an entry into a forum where their interests are being discussed, and it will provide a platform for a deeper engagement with the continent."

Since 2016, Netanyahu has been to Africa five times, displaying Israel's keen interest in growing relations with African states, Gruzd said.

"Also, as part of the Abraham Accords process, we've seen normalisation with Morocco and Sudan, both Muslim-majority states. So, Israel's forays into Africa is paying dividends, and I think it will be very pleased about this. South Africa is a strong supporter of the Palestinians, and I guess will see this as a defeat, but

it's not like pressure on Israel is going to be reduced by South Africa."

Rowan Polovin, the national chairperson of the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF), welcomed the development, saying it was hopeful that AU members would work more closely with Israel on issues such as fighting the coronavirus, improving regional security, and implementing water, agricultural, and healthcare technology solutions.

"We are also further encouraged that the AU status may assist other African countries to do the same," Polovin said.

"The SAZF believes that greater intercontinental co-operation with Israel is a sign that the South African government should follow suit in building and improving its relations with Israel. Furthering the partnership with Israel would bring increased positive benefits and impacts for all South Africans, and would help address the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment, and inequality."

Israel re-established relations with Guinea in 2016 and Chad in 2019. In October 2020, Israel also signed a normalisation agreement with Sudan.

In July 2016, Netanyahu became the first Israeli premier in decades to travel to the continent when he visited Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Ethiopia. There has been ongoing collaboration and engagement ever since with a number of African countries.

Meanwhile, the first direct commercial flights between Israel and Morocco landed in Marrakesh on Sunday, 25 July, more than seven months after the countries normalised diplomatic relations in a United States-brokered deal. This is another example of Israel and Africa moving closer together.

Passengers from Tel Aviv arrived on an Israir flight early on Sunday afternoon, and were met with dates, cakes, and mint tea at a welcoming ceremony organised in their honour. A second flight, by Israeli national carrier El Al, landed in Marrakesh later in the day. Both airlines are planning several flights per week to Marrakesh and

Morocco was one of four regional states to agree to normalise ties with Israel last year, along with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Sudan.

The normalisation deals between Arab states and Israel have been deemed a "betrayal" by the Palestinians, who believe the process should follow resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



Organisation of African Unity (OAU), but has long been thwarted in its attempts to get it back after the

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu prioritised Israel's relations with Africa during the latter half of his 12 years in office, including with several Muslim-majority countries on the continent.

OAU was disbanded in 2002 and replaced by the AU.

Besides seeking new markets for Israeli expertise in fields like agriculture, high-tech, and security, Netanyahu was keen to improve African nations' voting record on Israel-related matters in international for such as the UN Security Council.

Aleligne Admasu, the Israeli ambassador to Ethiopia, Burundi, and Chad, on 22 July presented his credentials to Moussa Faki Mahamat, the chairperson of the AU Commission, at the bloc's headquarters in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa.

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid hailed it as a "day of celebration for Israel-Africa relations", noting that Israel currently has relations with 46 African countries.

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## Aliyah interest spikes after unrest

**TALI FEINBERG** 

he director of the Israel Centre South Africa, Liat Amar Arran, says the organisation received "100 enquiries" into aliyah over the past three weeks, and that "at least 50 files were opened" – the first step in the aliyah process.

Comparing these figures to the 30 to 40 enquiries the organisation normally gets every month,

South

African olim

**Johannesburg** 

on their way

from Cape

Town and

to Israel

Amar Arran says although she's happy South African Jews see Israel as an option, we shouldn't make aliyah in a panic.

"Making aliyah in an emergency means the person isn't ready and hasn't had time to do their research. It means they're running away, and it's very hard to settle when you are running away from something. Aliyah is a process." Amar Arran emphasises that while Israel will always be there for South African Jews, it's unlikely it would ever evacuate the community unless lives were truly at

stake.

She says
the Israeli
government was
updated during the
unrest, but didn't see
it as an evacuation-type
situation. Her team and
the Israeli government have
faith that the Jewish commu

faith that the Jewish community will stay and succeed in South Africa for decades to come. "Israel will be there to strengthen, support, and assist," she says.

She points out that Israel isn't a solution to the complex challenges that people might be facing in South Africa. "If you are struggling financially, Israel isn't going to save you. Yes, it gives some support and assistance, but aliyah doesn't mean all your problems are going to be solved. You will probably carry the same problems with you. We want to see *olim* succeed, not collapse. You may get some assistance in the beginning, but eventually, you need to live your life there. We don't want you to look back and say, 'Why did I make this decision?"

If you want to have the option of aliyah in a time of emergency, "then open a file now, and work on it [getting documents]. Don't wait. You want to be ready on your side. Then you know that you have the documents, even if you might never use them. That's your insurance."

She emphasises that the Israel Centre doesn't have the capacity to "hold people's hand", and that it's each individual's responsibility to gather their documents and do their research. While she and her team offer guidance, advice, and support, each person has to take their own steps.

She refers to the joke of a man in a town that's flooding, and people keep offering him help – in a car, a boat, and a helicopter, but he refuses to go with them because he's "waiting". Eventually, he drowns and goes to heaven, where he asks G-d, "Why didn't you come save me?" And G-d

answers, "I sent you a car, a boat, and a helicopter!"

Essentially, she's saying that you can take practical steps like opening an aliyah file if you want to have an option during times of crisis. You can also watch the informative video explaining the aliyah process that the Israel Centre recently released online. There will also be an aliyah Q&A webinar on 5 August, and the Israel Centre hosts these webinars often for prospective olim.

Though the organisation has been stretched to capacity in recent weeks, Amar Arran doesn't expect the high level of interest to continue unless there's more unrest. In addition,

and thinking about the future.

Meanwhile, *olim* who are
making aliyah this week say the
process takes time. "Getting all

when people are at home, less busy,

she says there is always more aliyah interest during harder lockdowns,

my South African documents [to make aliyah] was the biggest challenge, especially during COVID-19,"

Wainer.

"At times
it felt
like I was
climbing
up a
mountain
with no end

says Tammy

had all my South African documents, it was smooth sailing." To others considering aliyah, she says: "Aliyah is a very big

in sight! Once I

she says: "Aliyah is a very big decision. Do your research, and weigh the pros and cons. Israel will be there waiting with open arms, but ultimately, it will be up to you to make a new life for arreself."

The recent unrest in South Africa didn't have an impact on her decision, but "it made it easier for me to say goodbye. I won't miss going to bed at night feeling anxious at the sound of gun shots. But at the same time, it makes me worried about the loved ones I leave behind. Just because we are leaving South Africa, doesn't mean we are turning our back on South Africa. The fire of South Africa lives in all of us, and I will continue to be proudly South African and proud of our incredible Jewish community

Tamar Lutrin is in Grade 10, and making aliyah with her family. "Making aliyah during COVID-19 was both beneficial and hard. It was easier to leave because we weren't spending every second with the people we love, but at the same time, we couldn't say proper goodbyes." To others considering making the move, she says, "Don't prolong it, go as soon as you can. It's hard to break down a life here without building up a new one there."

The recent unrest "made it easier to leave", Lutrin says. "My family and I were never leaving South Africa because we hated it, we love South Africa and the community, but it did make the grass look greener on the other side."

Says Sandra (Sandi) Shapiro, "After the current unrest in South Africa, I can say that I'm fortunate to be one of the lucky ones to be able to leave South Africa in such uncertain times. I leave behind family and friends, and I worry for them all. I can only pray that Hashem will protect all of South Africa, and that peace, harmony, and tranquillity will prevail."

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### Anglican ministers break ranks over church's anti-Israel stance

#### **TALI FEINBERG**

"What do you do when the leadership of an organisation you've spent your whole working life serving adopts a policy or position that your conscience won't tolerate?" asks Reverend John Atkinson. He is one of four local Anglican Church ordained ministers who recently spoke out against the Anglican Church of Southern Africa's (ACSA's) anti-Israel doctrine.

Atkinson, along with Reverends Dave Doveton, Dudley Greenshields, and Allan Smith also wrote a letter to the United Orthodox Synagogues' Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, thanking him for taking a stand against ACSA's approach to Israel, especially in the light of his recent open letter to Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town Dr Thabo Makgoba. In that letter, the chief rabbi said the archbishop was "making a terrible mistake that endangers your own church".

After receiving the letter from the four ministers, the chief rabbi invited them to meet him, which both parties said was very positive. "We wanted the chief rabbi and the Jewish community to know that there are many Anglicans who would find these policies offensive and a contradiction of our faith," said Atkinson. "We may be sanctioned, but we aren't afraid. Standing for the truth and against antisemitism is much more important."

The group believes that ACSA's anti-Israel resolution "expresses the ideological perspective of a small but influential elite, and by no means is representative of the average Anglican in Southern Africa. This is why we have made public our rejection of anti-Israel decisions and policies in our denomination".

Between them, the four ministers have about 160 years of service looking after congregations within their denomination. Two of them were lecturers in theological institutions. All of them have a wealth of experience in their chosen professions.

They are close to retirement, so their careers are unlikely to be negatively impacted by speaking out. "It won't make us popular, but that doesn't worry us," said

Atkinson. "There are more people who would speak out if their careers wouldn't be impacted.

"The average Anglican hasn't thought about the Middle East at all," he said, so the Jewish community needs to know that it's not like three million people have turned against Israel. The ministers will therefore work to

increase education and awareness.

He was moved by the meeting with the chief rabbi, and hopes that it "will open the way for greater dialogue between our communities and a greater appreciation of the values we share".

Delving into why they have taken a stand, he said "this crisis of conscience was precipitated by a resolution that was passed at the highest decision-making body in the denomination in 2019 to support the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions [movement] and call for a

boycott of Israel. The resolution also called on local bodies within the church to adopt these measures.

"Since then, the chief rabbi has had discussions with the Anglican Archbishop, only to be rebuffed. This has been of particular concern because of rising incidents of antisemitism in South Africa," said Atkinson.

In the letter to the chief rabbi, they wrote, "We want to convey our assurance to you that not all Anglicans support the aforementioned [anti-Israel] synod resolution. Indeed, we are appalled that people in our church would even think of proposing such an antisemitic stance and shocked beyond belief that the synod would uncritically and without any debate pass the resolution."

A synod is a council of a church, usually convened to decide an issue of doctrine, administration, or application.

They said they weren't against the criticism of any state and its policies, "but the one-sided diatribe against the government of Israel elected by the people of Israel and the total alignment with certain militaristic

organisations bent on the destruction of the Jewish homeland is beyond belief".

It had caused "much grief and disappointment, as it casts a slur on all of us. The simplistic analysis ignores the role of other countries and organisations who play a direct and indirect role in geopolitics and conflict in



**Reverend John Atkinson and Reverend Allan Smith** 

the region, and one suspects is meant to advance a propagandistic narrative and shut down other points of view. Certainly, no representative of the Israeli state was invited to give their perspective at the synod."

The ministers said that "to lay all the blame on the Israelis amounts to scapegoating, which as you are all too painfully aware, is a classic hallmark of the scourge of antisemitism". They were also deeply disturbed by the resolution calling on them to boycott Israeli companies. "What a terrifying reminder of the horrific genocidal acts against the Jewish community in Europe," they wrote.

They disagree with the assertion that the present state of Israel isn't tied to "the historic Jewish nation recorded in the sacred scripture that we as faith communities share. We believe that it's a thinly veiled attempt to undermine Israel's right to exist, and is against the historical record. This, too, is a mark of antisemitism."

They questioned why a church which is based thousands of kilometres away from the conflict "should be so committed to the promotion of one narrative and the total exclusion of the other. If our church is so

concerned about the lives of Palestinians, why was it silent about the deaths of 3 383 Palestinians in Syria? We believe the answer is obvious.

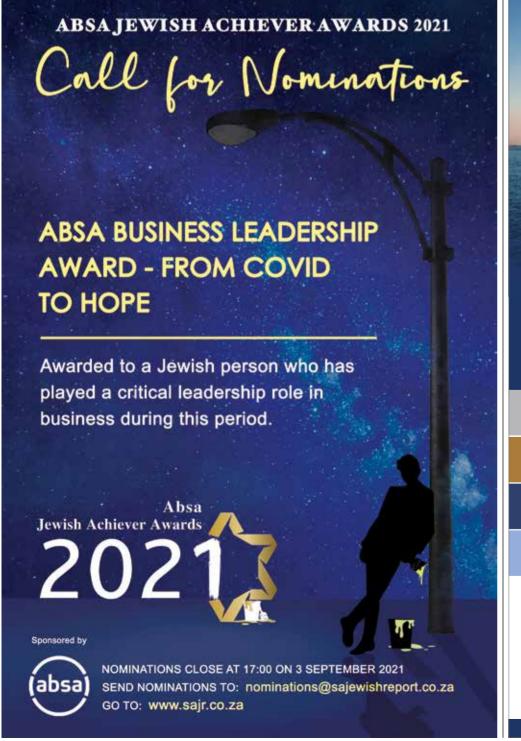
"We would like to assure you that we will remain faithful and vocal about Israel's right to exist and defend itself against attack," they said. "We will continue to engage with other Christians on these issues to ensure that the pro-Palestinian narrative isn't the only voice that

"The significance of their letter struck home to me powerfully," Goldstein said. "It shows that there is another voice within the Anglican Church and the Christian community in South Africa, so many of whom love and support Israel and appreciate its role in the world.

"We can easily make the mistake of thinking that certain politicians or religious leaders speak for the country when they come out with such anti-Israel vitriol," he said. "This letter is indication of a much broader movement of South Africans who have a completely different view. It's important for us to know that we have many allies and friends across the length and breadth of this country. That's why I wanted to meet with this group who wrote to me, to express to them on behalf of our community how much we appreciate their friendship and their partnership in getting this message out.

"I'm sure that their letter will encourage others to come forward. Often people feel intimidated and don't want to speak out. We need to create an environment in South Africa where all citizens can come forward and show their support. There is an enormous groundswell of the silent majority of South Africans who support Israel. I met this group to encourage them to get the message out so that more people can come forward and express their true views."

Going forward, the ministers will work to "encourage the support [of Israel] in the Anglican population and beyond", according to Atkinson. "The Jewish community can assist us in this endeavour by communicating with Christians they know about Israel and the Jewish perspective of the Middle East."





## Jewish Report

### It ain't so bad here

can't say I'm surprised that people get nervous when they read that aliyah figures are at a record high. They aren't worried about those leaving the country, but about those of us staying behind.

I understand if you might be wondering if you are missing something. Are you not reading the writing on

I will stick my head out and say that there's no writing on the wall. We are a country that, like many others, has crises.

And if there are people running away, I believe they take their troubles with them. Those people who are

pulled to go to live in Israel or somewhere else, I'm sure they will find happiness. Emigration happens around the world, and it's healthy.

Having spent three and a half fabulous years in Israel, I know the pull of that country, but I also know that despite everything we have and are experiencing, we have a wonderful life

There is a strange belief that Israel will come and rescue South African Jews if things get tough here. I was glad to hear the Israel Centre's Liat Amar Arran say this week (on page 1 and 4) that Israel isn't waiting for us. She also said Israel isn't going to come and rescue us,

Israel is the Jewish homeland, but it's a tough country to live in and competition is rife. So many of the niceties and luxuries we take for granted here aren't readily available in Israel. Olim don't arrive in Israel and have the pick of their careers. Nobody is waiting to hire us. Those tiny flats in Tel Aviv that you would have snubbed in South Africa are extraordinarily expensive and difficult to come by.

Far be it for me to dissuade anyone from making aliyah, I would be loath to do that because I love Israel. All I'm saying is, don't romanticise living in Israel because it isn't easy. It may be wonderful and challenging, but not a walk in the park.

After what we have experienced this year in South Africa, what with the pandemic and the recent violence and looting, it's easy to be disheartened enough to say you want to leave.

But don't leave in a panic. Don't leave in desperation. Know that the grass isn't always greener on the other side unless you have done your research, made your plans, and have a clear idea of what is on the other side for you.

And know that while Israel is an exciting place to live, it's difficult to move away from everything you know and love, not least of all friends and family.

Though your parents and grandparents put on a brave face because they believe you're doing the right thing, leaving them behind will be tough for all of you.

Just this week, I read a Facebook post written by a woman I shared a tent with when we were teenagers at Habonim machaneh. She has been living in Australia for many years. I shed tears reading her heartache in losing her mother and not being able to be with her. I took it that her mother was here in South Africa and died from COVID-19, because I could feel her frustration in not being able to say goodbye, not being at the funeral, and so on.

That's part of the sadness of emigration.

Once again, I consider what we have here, and I'm grateful. I recognise that there are many who may have been well off or comfortable who are now really battling for money.

I also acknowledge that our communal organisations may not be getting the kind of finances they used to get or would like to get.

I also know that for most of us, life is a lot more challenging than ever before.

However, we have the most incredible community in the world – and I say that with complete conviction.

Look around you, we support one another without question. We have communal organisations that literally ensure that we have ambulances when we need them, medicine when we need it, and that we are protected. We have organisations that will take care of us in times of need. I can go on and on because our communal structures are world class.

I know of family and friends overseas who may be content and happy in their new homes, but they long for the communal life we have. And with good reason.

We are a real community! We fight with each other, but when push comes to shove, we back each other and stick together.

Over the past year and a half during the COVID-19 pandemic, it wasn't just Hatzolah and our doctors that rallied around to support the sick in the community. Jewish women created groups to make sure that those who were sick were supported and didn't feel alone. Others made sure they had food.

Which other community had someone checking on those at home with COVID-19  $\boldsymbol{a}$ number of times a day? If you needed oxygen, it would arrive. If you needed to go for x-rays, you would be taken.

And now, in the case of vaccinations, a young Jewish doctor arranged a slick, fast-paced drive at The Base Shul in Glenhazel on Sunday, where more than 3 000 were vaccinated in one day. And, this wasn't the first time. Now, The Chev and Hatzolah have set up their own vaccination sites to get the rollout done and dusted so we and everyone else can move on out of this pandemic.

That's our community. I'm not sure there are others in the world quite like us, and that makes me proud and so hopeful.

So, yes, times are tough. Yes, there are many of us leaving South Africa to go to Israel. May all those who have gone be happy and healthy. May they find what they are looking for

But for those of us who remain behind, I feel confident that we will be far better than just okay. We will thrive as we have done before.

And as we launch our nomination drive for the Absa Jewish Achiever Awards, please nominate those incredible people in our community. Let's give them the acknowledgement and *kavod* they deserve.

**Shabbat Shalom! Peta Krost Maunder Editor** 

### No evidence that COVID-19 vaccines cause infertility

■ighting misinformation and a pandemic is taxing. ■ However, it doesn't help for Reform UK leader Richard Tice to make misleading claims about COVID-19 vaccines and fertility.

In a widely shared and now-deleted tweet posted on 19 July, Tice claimed that "forcing" young women to have the COVID-19 vaccine is "almost certain" to lead to "increased stillbirths, miscarriages, disabled children, and infertility". There's no evidence to support his claim.

There's no evidence that new vaccines against COVID-19 cause infertility, yet that's a worry that's been cited by some healthcare workers as a reason why they're reluctant to be first in line to get the shots.

Unfortunately, there was already a bunch of people out there saying there's no such thing as COVID-19. "It's no worse than the flu," said some. Many of these people gained substantial followings for themselves on social media. When the vaccines came along, they used these platforms to stir up conspiracy theories.

Claims that the vaccine can affect a woman's fertility due to the generation of the spike protein have been circulating since the start of the rollout of the vaccine.

In early December 2020, a German doctor and epidemiologist named Wolfgang Wodarg, who has been sceptical about the need for vaccines during other pandemics, teamed up with a former Pfizer employee to ask the European Medicines Agency (the European Union counterpart to the United States Food and Drug Administration) to delay the study and approval of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

One of their concerns was a protein called syncytin-1, which shares similar genetic instructions to part of the spike of the new coronavirus. That same protein is an important component of the placenta in mammals.

If the vaccine causes the body to make antibodies against syncytin-1, they argued, it might also cause the body to attack and reject the protein in the human placenta, making women infertile.

Their petition was picked up by anti-vaccination blogs and websites, and posted on social media. Facebook eventually removed posts about the petition from its site for spreading misinformation.

The idea that vaccines could be deployed for population control was also woven into the plot of a recent, fictional mini-series on Amazon Prime Video called Utopia. In that

reviewed by the MHRA has raised no specific concerns about safety in pregnancy.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists states on its website: "COVID-19 vaccines don't contain ingredients that are known to be harmful to pregnant women or to a developing baby." It goes on to say that studies of the vaccines in animals to look at effects on pregnancy have shown no evidence that the vaccine causes harm to the pregnancy or to fertility.

It's clear that getting the COVID-19 vaccine won't affect your fertility. Women actively trying to conceive may be vaccinated with current COVID-19 vaccines. There's no reason to delay pregnancy after completing the vaccine series.

Importantly, COVID-19 can be severe in pregnant women. The Centre for Disease Control includes pregnant women as a high-risk group for severe COVID-19 illness, therefore we need to see pregnancy as a comorbidity for

Therefore, getting vaccinated against coronavirus is an important consideration for pregnant women. Recent data report an increased risk of intensive-care admission, the need for mechanical ventilation and ventilator support, and both intra-uterine foetal death and death in pregnant women with symptomatic COVID-19.

We can gain perspective by looking at the available statistics. By January 2021, consider that more than 22 million people in the United States had been infected by SARS-CoV-2. In fact, experts believe that number is much higher because 22 million is just the number tested and found positive.

Most think the real number is at least three times that. Therefore, consider that 70 million Americans have been infected, or about 20% of the population. If the infertility theory was true, we would expect that the body making antibodies against natural infection would show up in the fertility statistics. It hasn't.

The incidence of infertility in any population is one in seven couples. There is no evidence that this pandemic has changed fertility patterns, so if the raw viral illness doesn't appear to affect fertility, why should vaccination

Although there's no reason to believe that the vaccine poses a risk to women who are pregnant or are trying to conceive, there is evidence about the danger of COVID-19 infection for pregnant women, which is a

reason we should embrace rather than avoid vaccination.

Pregnant women get sicker when they get COVID-19 compared with other people their age, and pregnant women with COVID-19 are more likely to experience pre-term delivery. The effect of COVID-19 disease on pregnancy is real, and it's important to prevent it.

A recently published peerreviewed journal article discusses the potential negative impact of the COVID-19 disease on testicular function, sperm production, and

Some studies have shown that the SARS-COV-2 virus has been found in the sperm of men with COVID-19 infection, and it may have an impact on the male hormones necessary for normal sperm production. Also, there are numerous reports of men with testicular or scrotal pain after getting COVID-19.

Men who are worried about their fertility should probably get the COVID-19 vaccine as there are some concerns about the potential effect of COVID-19 disease but not the vaccine - on male fertility.

In all the data thus far, we don't see any increased risk of developing infertility, either in the near or distant future, with getting these vaccines.

We need to get everyone vaccinated as soon as possible, otherwise we're going to completely muddle through an ongoing pandemic.

This article doesn't replace the option of discussing COVID-19 and vaccination with your primary healthcare provider.

 Dr Lawrence Gobetz is a reproductive medicine specialist and the medical director of Vitalab, a centre for assisted conception.



creates the illusion of a flu pandemic to convince people to take its vaccine, which doesn't prevent infection but acts against human reproduction.

A spokesperson for Amazon Studios says the series is pure fiction.

The coronavirus's spike protein and syncytin-1 share small stretches of the same genetic code, but not enough to make them a match. This is like two people having phone numbers that both contain the number 7. You couldn't dial one number to reach the other person even though their phone numbers share a digit.

Looking at the two largest systems currently monitoring adverse reactions to COVID-19 vaccines, the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the United Kingdom, and the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System in the United States rely on voluntary reporting from medics and members of the public, and are intended to provide early warning of any previously unknown risks.

There is no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines affect fertility. The Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines have been widely used during pregnancy in other countries and no safety concerns have been identified. Evidence

### The miracle of the maroon handkerchief

TALI FEINBERG

eventy-eight years ago, a Jewish man gave his 17-year-old daughter a maroon handkerchief as a way to remember him. She never saw him again – he died in the Holocaust. But she survived, went to America, and recorded her testimony in 1984.

Fast forward to 2020, and 14-year-old King David Linksfield pupil Noa Nerwich is asked to write a poem for a competition based on a Holocaust survivor's testimony. She came across Ruth Halbreich's recording, which includes mention of the handkerchief. Nerwich wrote a poem about the handkerchief and won the competition.

A year later, Halbreich passed away. Shortly thereafter, her grandson, Reg Tigerman, came across the poem in a newsletter he received, and realised it was about his grandmother. But that's not all: soon after that, he also found the maroon handkerchief. He made contact with Nerwich [who is now 15], bringing a story that has spanned generations and continents full circle.

Speaking to the SA Jewish Report from Los Angeles,

Tigerman says, "When I discovered the poem, I was shocked. Ruth, who we affectionately called Nanny, had just passed away a few months ago. The maroon handkerchief had been a topic of conversation within our family because my wife and I revisited her testimony right after she died and talked about trying to

"My mom, who was going through Nanny's things, did end up finding it. So, not only did Noa write a poem

find it.

inspired by my grandmother's testimony, which is an honour in and of itself, but she picked up on an item she mentioned at the very end of her testimony (proving that Noa was paying very close attention), and it was something that a lot of time and attention had been spent on recently. It was a series of *dayenus* [it would have been enough]. A true miracle. It felt like the world was telling us how important Ruth and her story is, and how important it is to continue to share

According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Halbreich was born in 1926 in Warsaw to a well-to-do family of three sisters and one brother. In 1939, their father fled with them to the Russian part of Poland, where he continued his work in the paper business. She, her father, and one sister crossed back into Warsaw, but her mother and two other siblings were sent to Siberia.

Halbreich and her family moved into the Warsaw ghetto in 1940. When the Germans started sending people from the ghetto to the camps, she and her sister were sent outside the ghetto to live in a convent. After the Warsaw ghetto uprising, Halbreich and her sister were sent to a slave labour camp in a small town in Germany. They were liberated in April 1945. She found out that her father had died in the ghetto in 1943, fighting in the underground. She met her husband, a fellow Holocaust survivor, at a displaced-persons camp. She also found out that her mother and two siblings had survived in Siberia.

In her testimony, Halbreich says, "The uprising was in April 1943. My father had left the ghetto in the trucks carrying merchandise. I met him in his office. He



gave me a handkerchief of his

to remember him by.
My father's biggest
wish was to be able to
save his children, and
he was able to do
this. He went back
into the ghetto,
and no one really
knows what might
have happened to
him."

A million miles away from that time and place, Nerwich entered the 21st Annual Holocaust Art &

Writing Contest run annually by Chapman University and The 1939 Society (a community of Holocaust survivors, descendants, and friends). "The brief was for a piece of creative writing based on the testimony of a Holocaust survivor," she told the SA Jewish Report.

The maroon

handkerchief

found after Ruth

Halbreich's death

The poem describes the handkerchief as the only thing Halbreich has left from her father as her world is destroyed, and how it symbolises the flames of destruction and her father's deep love.

"Hearing her story and writing the piece itself was an enriching experience," says Nerwich. "I was thrilled when I was awarded first place, a first for King David High School. I always smile just thinking about my poem. However, a small part of me always wished that Ruth would be able to read the poem and know that her story is being shared, that she is being heard."

So, when she received the email from Tigerman on 15 July, "it changed my life. I read it and re-read it because I was sure my eyes were deceiving me," says Nerwich.

She was shaking as she read the email. "I felt a deep sense of loss to learn that Ruth had passed away, but I was also deeply moved to learn that her family had the gift of this poem and that Ruth's story continues to be told. Seeing the actual picture of the maroon hankie – the last memory that Ruth had of her father, the piece of fabric that guided her throughout the horrors she endured – is an image that will be permanently engraved in my mind."

She says she chose to reflect on this story in her poem "because I could relate to Ruth. I'm a very sentimental person. Just like Ruth's dad gave her

a red handkerchief, my dad made me red roses out of Lego, which I keep in my room. So, the fact that she mentioned the maroon handkerchief that her dad gave her really resonated with me. It made it so much more real. It's a symbol of her story, and what she and so many others went through."

Her mother, Daniella Nerwich, says she felt breathless when she read Tigerman's email. "All this really shows the value of Jewish education. We are so fortunate that King David creates opportunities like this [to enter the poetry contest]. This just shows how it can be so far-reaching. So huge credit must go to King David for creating this opportunity. It has been life changing."

Because of the pandemic, Nerwich was unable to travel to the United States to collect her prize, but Tigerman's message has made up for that disappointment. They hope to meet in person one day, and possibly even work together to share the story of the maroon handkerchief as a form of Holocaust education.

Says Tigerman, "While my grandmother didn't often share her story (she would if you asked, but she wasn't very proactive about it), my grandfather [Siegfried Halbreich] was a regular speaker. He was a survivor of multiple concentration camps over the course of five and a half years. He served as president of The 1939 Society, the organisation that published Noa's poem, and was a founder of the Los Angeles Holocaust Museum. Everyone's story is worth telling and remembering, which has made the oral histories and recorded testimonies so important."



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## Vaccination is the *mitzvah* of the moment

MOUNTAI

CHIEF RABBI DR WARREN GOLDSTEIN

n Sunday, amidst all the challenges and trauma of this pandemic, I had a most inspiring experience. I decided to visit the pop-up vaccination site at Rabbi Aharon Zulberg's shul, The Base, just to see what was happening. I witnessed a truly heart-warming spectacle: scores of passionate volunteers from our community helping people of all backgrounds register on the Electronic Vaccination Data System and get vaccinated.

The pop-up site was part of a wider initiative called GiVV (Gauteng Vax Volunteers). Set up and run by Dr Menachem Hockman, Josh Falkson, and Raphi Segal, in partnership with the Gauteng health department, it involves high school and university students volunteering at vaccination sites and government hospitals across the province to speed up the datacapturing process and improve efficiency at these sites.

The kindness and selfless concern for others; the ingenuity to come up with innovative solutions to tough challenges; and the determination to see them through – this initiative represents the best of our community, exemplifying everything we stand for. And all in service of that most sacred of Torah principles – pikuach nefesh – the mitzvah to protect and preserve life.

In one day, the team at The Base vaccinated 3 000 people, which is truly remarkable. That's 3 000 people now protected from the worst effects of COVID-19, with all the positive knock-on effects that it entails for our society.



It also serves as a reminder of the urgency to get vaccinated. Vaccination is the *mitzvah* of this moment. It falls squarely within the parameters of *pikuach nefesh*, and we need to seize it with both hands. Every day we delay can potentially cost life.

We have a *mitzvah* to preserve our own life and take care of our health, and to save the lives of others. By getting vaccinated, we fulfil this vital *mitzvah*. We take steps to prevent ourselves from becoming seriously ill, and we protect those around us from a potentially deadly disease which, in its current Delta variant, is particularly contagious.

And, it goes well beyond the people we come into direct contact with. As a country, as a society, the sooner we reach societal immunity, the sooner we rid ourselves of the suffering and death of COVID-19. Every immunisation is a step towards freeing ourselves of this pandemic. Vaccination is the only way out. Like polio and numerous other diseases humanity has overcome, the only way we will get past coronavirus is to vaccinate the disease into oblivion.

By getting vaccinated, we also fulfil our role as Hashem's partners in creation.

The Talmud teaches that G-d gave doctors permission – and in fact, a mandate – to heal.

The commentators explain that G-d wants our partnership in healing the world. Doctors, nurses, virologists, immunologists, all of those involved in the holy work of healthcare are, in fact, Hashem's partners in creation.

Having faith in G-d doesn't mean that we can sit back and do nothing and expect Him to take care of us. Of course, we recognise that no doctor can heal and no vaccine can protect from disease without Hashem's blessing. But our sages teach us explicitly that G-d wants us to work as His partners in creating a better world by using the laws of nature that He, Himself created. And we daven to Hashem and acknowledge that even our best efforts cannot succeed without His will and partnership. There is no contradiction. Both are essential.

And so, at this pivotal time, we need to act with speed and urgency. We need to fulfil our obligations to Hashem, our community, our fellow countrymen, and to ourselves. We need to embrace this *mitzvah* and get vaccinated if we are eligible. This isn't a *mitzvah* that can be delayed even for a moment. *Pikuach nefesh*,

the opportunity to preserve life, isn't something we stand around debating.

The virus won't burn itself out, no amount of wishful thinking will make it magically disappear. SARS-CoV-2 will constantly reinvent itself, mutating into new variants, wreaking fresh havoc on our lives, our livelihoods, and our health. The only way to stop it is the vaccine. The data is conclusive. Countries around the world with advanced vaccination

programmes have shown us that even when infections start to rise again, hospital admissions are lower by orders of magnitude relative to previous waves. In effect, through vaccination, we transform coronavirus into a manageable form of flu.

I'd like to take this opportunity to call on everyone who is eligible in our community to vaccinate themselves and to assist and encourage those who haven't. The options are plentiful, the process is easy. Our own Hatzolah and The Chev have just launched a programme: you make a booking; you arrive; you are in and out of the door in minutes, with very little paperwork and at no cost.

The vaccine is our ticket back to the life we knew. We must take it.

## COVID-19 vaccination could be compulsory at workplace

OPINION

MICHAEL BACDAIM

s vaccination becomes more freely available in South Africa, questions arise such as can you make vaccination compulsory and can you dismiss someone if they refuse? Do you have to allow time off to get vaccinated, and what happens if an employee has an adverse reaction? These questions and many more are new to our labour law, and will be subject to litigation over the next many years.

In terms of the department of employment and labour's latest regulations, the minister has recognised that employers may in terms of their own internal rules make COVID-19 vaccination compulsory.

Obviously, the compulsion must be subject to certain oversight, and must be reasonable in all circumstances. The employer would have to take into account their own operational

requirements, and must be able to justify that in terms of these requirements, they would expect employees to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Over and above this, each case must be carefully explored, discussed, and subject to proper consultation, taking into account the employee's circumstances. These circumstances can include medical, religious, bodily integrity, and any other factor reasonably raised by the employee or the employee's representative.

Obviously, each particular employer would develop a set of guidelines and rules which would be read with the disciplinary code and would be properly implemented after consultation with the employees or their representatives.

These rules must be made subject to the abovementioned criteria, and would probably be differently implemented in accordance with the operational requirements of the position of the actual employee.

For instance, if a buyer for a company has the duty to travel abroad and can do so only if vaccinated, then there would be a compulsion to be vaccinated. It would be incumbent upon the employer to explore whether there are other ways of doing the job or whether an employee is willing to accept another position which doesn't require vaccination.

It's absolutely vital for every employer to read the regulation, and to advise all the necessary parties within the next three weeks of their intention to make vaccination mandatory and which employees will be

Obviously, even once vaccination has been made mandatory, it would be subject to the employees being able to obtain the vaccination, and might require the employer to help obtain them. The employer's policy will take into account various factors such as consultation with all the representatives at the workplace, and will respect bargaining council agreements and any other collective agreements with trade unions.

If there is an informal committee representing the staff and/or a workers forum, these bodies must also be consulted.

The minister of health has published draft regulations for the establishment of a no-fault compensation fund for injuries caused by the COVID-19 vaccination. The Vaccine Injury Compensation Fund will be established in terms of the regulations as an amendment to the regulations of the Disaster Management Act of 2002.

Although this compensation fund for vaccine injury

hasn't been formed yet, the various ministers involved are taking into account commentary from the public, and will be getting legal advice from parliament's legal advisors.

The injury must be related to vaccination. An injured person may not institute a claim through the court process against the national or provincial government until the claim has been adjudicated by the relevant



panel through the compensation fund.

Only if the person is dissatisfied with the outcome of the adjudication or the amount awarded can that person lodge an appeal, and the appeal must be determined by the relevant decision maker. Only after pursuing a claim with the scheme can a person look to the courts if that person is still dissatisfied.

Businesses are urged once again to warn their staff that protocols are in place, and breach of COVID-19 rules and regulations will lead to spread of infection and almost inevitably disciplinary action.

I'm involved in no less than a dozen cases where employers have reported and taken action against recalcitrant employees. It's time, once again, to reiterate the fundamental, basic rules such as social distancing, mask wearing, and sanitising. Over and above this, any staff member exhibiting symptoms must report these symptoms to their health officer or senior management, and should immediately take sick leave.

The consequences of a staff member remaining silent could be loss of their position and more seriously, the spread of infection.

Employers will have to educate staff about the value of vaccination along with normal social distancing, masks, and hand sanitising. Education in these circumstances, I believe, will be the strongest factor in convincing all staff to get vaccinated.

A consolidated direction on occupational health and safety measures in certain workplaces was gazette on 11 June 2021. This contains new requirements with regard to vaccination.

It's clear from this that an employer must give employees time off to be vaccinated. The employee may be required to provide proof of an appointment to be vaccinated. Time off shouldn't be regarded as sick leave, but should be given as a form of special leave.

If there are negative effects from vaccination, the employer will grant paid sick leave in terms of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. If the sick leave has been exhausted, there could be a claim in terms of the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act. Employees will produce the vaccination certificate thereafter, and a medical certificate if they've had complications.

 Michael Bagraim is an attorney specialising in labour law, and advises nationwide on the restructuring and management of labour forces. He is also a Democratic Alliance member of parliament.

## Gauteng VAX Volunteers



Volunteers needed for admin Volunteer for shifts when you are available



### Mental health – the pandemic behind the pandemic

n addition to the health pandemic we are, unsurprisingly, in the midst of a global mental-health pandemic. Instead of hiding behind whispers and closed doors, mental health has, unfortunately and out of necessity, become a pervasive hot topic. The stigma has, in part, been eroded, as we have a sense that the uncertainty and huge challenge of our times effects all of us, albeit in different ways.

Mental health isn't just the absence of mental illness, it also refers to functionality, resilience, and ability to cope and selfregulate at least most of the time. Of course, there are bad days, but generally, if functioning at work, at home, or in regard to other relationships isn't impaired, we experience "normal" reactions to an unprecedented, abnormal global situation.

Having said this, the pandemic has served as an incubator, with high levels of depression and anxiety launched by loss and uncertainty.

Initially, I resented the term "new normal" and would talk only about "now normal", which encompassed the belief that we wouldn't be forced to settle for this, and that our world mostly as we knew it was awaiting us on the horizon.

What has transpired, however, is that the horizon is being extended and in addition to the anxiety, sadness, and fear that spills out everywhere, there's also an identifiable unnamed feeling precipitated by the extent and duration of unfamiliar and scary ways

The losses and feelings are expected and obvious. Fear of contracting the virus, fear of isolation, uncertainty about the



future, and loss of control. The losses are unprecedented. Unquestionably, most of all is the loss of life without the capacity or necessary rituals associated with severe illness, death, and mourning. Beloved family members are on their own at a time when they need us most.

Often, there is the lack of closure and the inability to pay our respects according to our culturally comforting way. Then there is the overwhelming sadness and anger because "it's just not fair!"

There are also job losses, which generate a lack of purpose and money, fuelling fear of survival. All of this is in an environment of loss of predictability, certainty, routine, physical contact, and some degree of emotional connectedness.

Boundaries have become blurred. We don't work "from home", we work "with home", parents becoming teachers, children online, limited socialisation, adults having

no transitional time, teenagers skipping milestones and rituals concerned with the development of their identity. All of this has required courageous conversation, task negotiation, and often an unsuccessful attempt at establishing any kind of personal boundaries or appropriate self-compassion.

Often, our clients are embarrassed to step forward as what they're feeling may be unnamed. "It's just a lack of motivation and energy" they say, a lethargy, a tiredness, and an inability to flourish, a sense of resignation.

In this way, so many of us feel dissociated and de-personalised, not connected enough with "my life as I knew it" and with the outside world. "Who am I?" is a regular

These feelings are usually associated with diagnosable mental illness but at these times, appear societally contagious. All you need to do is state your case with openness,

**Enquiries:** 

32 Fricker Road, Illovo, Johannesburg

vulnerability, and authenticity, and you will open a floodgate, if not an echo chamber, of people who tell you they know exactly what you are talking about

So what do we do? First, to tame it you have to name it. It's counterproductive to try to dismiss or deny your personal reality. If you don't own the story, the story will own you,

and will manifest through disassociation withdrawal, or prolonged sadness that can become depression, irritation, low frustration tolerance, and the inability to self-regulate. There may also be physical symptoms like headaches, lower back pain, and appetite and sleep disturbances.

Now, more than ever, we need to experience the immeasurable power of empathic support. This means to develop trust in the people who "have your back", who will listen to understand, who will really "get it", and won't pre-empt you with their own story, at least not initially.

Your tribe, and it can be a tribe of one, will check in, show genuine interest, and understand that love and care are verbs doing things, not just talking about things. And, usually the "doing thing" is being there and listening. You feel recognised, validated, understood, and not crazy! Taking care of yourself isn't selfish, it's

essential. You cannot be available for anyone

else unless you feel worthy of your own compassion and self-care. This starts with the basics. Good nutrition, enough sleep, and understanding the importance of exercise - which should never be underestimated in relation to mental health. Take care of your children's parent, of your parents' child, and of your boss's employee.

Conflict often manifests when you have time and space in your head, and unresolved issues and relationships emerge and become toxic. It's difficult to remember that it's always more important to be happy than to win.

The pandemic has made us realise that life can change in a heartbeat, and what we thought was under our control might not be. It also has resulted in a priority shift. Mostly, a new priority of relationships and gratitude for connection that we now realise is more important than anything. So take a risk, and make the first move, even without a quarantee. People can't hear what you don't say.

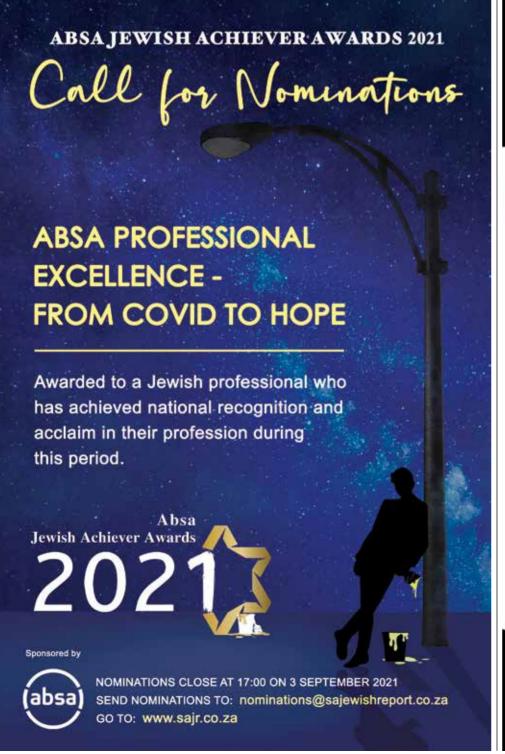
And please, cut yourself some slack. Recognise the resilience that you have displayed, the obstacles that you have overcome, and the value that is uniquely

We move on by remembering the past, using our experiences and memories, and reimagining and creating a better future the horizon is getting closer!

We will navigate the journey together.

• Dorianne Weil (Dr D) is a clinical psychologist.

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## Convoy of hope feeds thousands

NICOLA MILTZ

peration Mercy will go down as one of the most remarkable human chains of support to take place in post-democratic South Africa.

In the days and weeks following the bleak moment in our history when mayhem and destruction were visited on Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, ordinary people from all walks of life – including many within the community – stepped up to help dozens of charitable initiatives big and small.

The one initiative that beggars belief is Operation Mercy – Compassion in Action. It took a week of off-the-charts planning to harness the collective empathy and power of hundreds of everyday folk determined to make a difference during a tumultuous time of unprecedented crisis.

"It was a mammoth adventure," said Advocate Jean Berdou, one of the head co-ordinators, explaining how Operation Mercy unfolded.

"It's difficult to give a blow-by-blow account because so many things were taking place at the same time. But it was all in the detail, that's how we managed to pull this off," he said.

The multiple connections locally and abroad of Kim Kur, the founder and lead volunteer of Community Circle SA, helped pull off this gigantic task, he said.

"People networked and did whatever they could in their own way," Kur told the SA Jewish Report.

It started with multiple calls for support and donations as soon as images of the frightening looting and destruction spread. Following radio and newspaper



appeals, voluntary offers of assistance and donations started to pour in from various church congregations and members of the public.

"It was an umbrella initiative that was spontaneously put together," said Berdou, "and things just snowballed. One thing about this place, when a crisis presents itself especially involving South Africans, people just roll up their sleeves.

"People from all walks of life put their differences aside after they felt helpless and hopeless. This initiative gave them a way of doing something," said Kur.

Kur joined the picture somewhere along the line after her name was mentioned as someone good at planning and logistics.

Using her network, she contacted shadow

ministers, premiers, and deputy ministers for a range of things including permission to use a stadium, the services of the South African Police Service (SAPS), security personnel, and transport.

"I was just pushing for everything we could get in such a short space of time," said Kur, who helped secure funding for things like the money for tolls to bring the trucks through, which amounted to several thousand rand.

The multi-million rand interprovincial

operation resulted in the safe delivery (during the most volatile days following the looting) of nonperishable goods from Gauteng to KwaZulu-Natal.

"For days, goods such as maize meal, bread, canned food, toilet paper, nappies, and water were collected and collated at various collection sites in Johannesburg, Pretoria, and Bloemfontein," said Berdou.

"Joint Aid Management collated the goods. Parcels were individually wrapped in plastic and boxed to be delivered as a unit to victims specifically identified as having been impacted.

"A truck hauling company in
Botswana supplied trucks with
amazing drivers and fuel for the operation.
The SAPS and Fidelity Security Services
provided aerial and road support for the
convoy," he said.

"In the very cold, early hours of last Friday, 23 July, our convoy of seven 20ton link trucks, 16 SAPS, a Fidelity fleet of six, air support by Fidelity's helicopters, an ER24 ambulance, fire ops and our coordination vehicle left the grounds of the Christian Revival Church in Fourways, Johannesburg, at about 03:00," said Kur.

It was a convoy of hope that managed to feed more than 11 000 people in KwaZulu-Natal severely impacted by the looting and destruction.

"Jean and I were accompanied by police reservist and medic Ariel Marcus, who came on board at the last minute to make sure things ran smoothly. He communicated with police and security on the ground making sure the convoy made it safely to Durban. Helicopters made sure our passage ahead was safe," she said.

Travelling at a speed not exceeding 80km/h, the convoy didn't go without hiccups.

"One of our trucks started smoking after experiencing brake

issues on the Van Reenen's Pass and had to stop. Fortunately, we had fire ops on hand to help while the driver waited for a technician," said Kur.

After 11 gruelling hours, the convoy, which had travelled through the night from Gauteng to Bloemfontein, ended at Kings Park Stadium.

"On arrival in Durban, we were met by additional Metro police cars and ER24 vehicles and ambulances who escorted us non-stop through the city's intersections to



our final destination, Kings Park Stadium, where we arrived to find hundreds of cheering volunteers to welcome us. The feeling of gratitude was palpable, and each member of the convoy felt proud of what we had achieved," said Kur.

"You can't imagine the reaction on the faces of some of the recipients, people who have lost everything, from small spaza shops to their entire livelihood. It was priceless," she said.

"Through all the darkness, this incredible spirit of *ubuntu* has shone through," said Berdou.

"We are grateful to all the donors and organisations such as Future City Fourways NPC, Community Circle SA, Rhema Ministries South Africa and their Hand of Compassion teams, and Christian Revival Churches South Africa," he said.

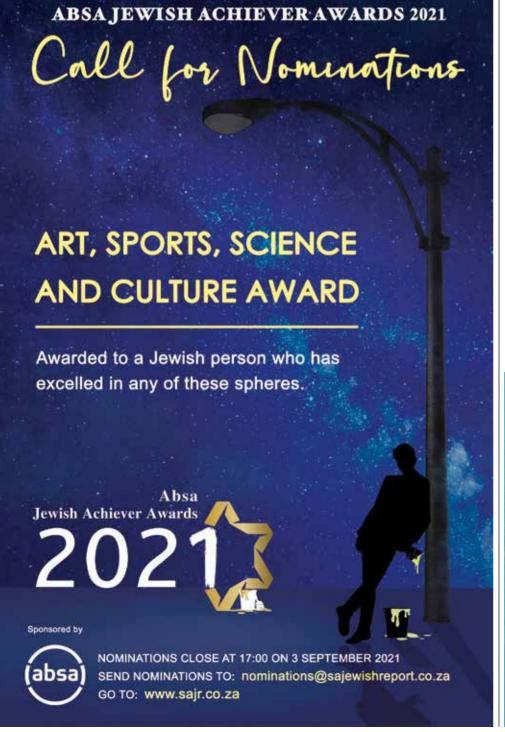
"Donations came in from Cape Town, Bloemfontein, Kimberley, and Pretoria, Joint Aid Management (JAM), Hot 102.1 FM, Hot Cares NPC, Chai FM, Dovetail Internet Solutions, Tintswalo Property Group, Riversands Incubation Hub, Telesure Holdings, Pick n Pay, Dis-Chem, Fidelity Group, and many more. Together we will recover," he said.

Kim Kur founder and lead

SA one of the many

volunteers who helped

coordinate Operation Mercy



### Princess Diana's niece marries South African fashion mogul

NICOLA MILTZ

ady Kitty Spencer, the niece of the late Diana, Princess of Wales, tied the knot last weekend with her billionaire beau, ex-South African fashion industry mogul Michael Lewis, in a lavish ceremony in Italy.

In what has been dubbed the society wedding of the year, the fashion model and British aristocrat said "I do" donned in one of many spectacular custom gowns by Dolce & Gabbana, for whom Kitty is a brand ambassador.

The glamorous couple got engaged in 2019, and it's believed that they delayed their original wedding plans due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

According to Hello! magazine, Kitty and Michael's big day had special meaning for the couple as it fell on the weekend of Tu B'Av, the Jewish holiday of love, which is said to be a great day for weddings, the renewal of vows, or proposing.

Michael, the chairperson of The Foschini Group (TFG), is Jewish, and it has been reported that Kitty converted to the religion before their nuptials.

This week, every glossy magazine and celebrity online newspaper edition filled pages with photographs of the fairy tale wedding fit for royalty. The ceremony took place at a 17th century Italian castle near Rome before a shimmering guest list that included amongst many others Elon Musk's mother Maye, as well as members of the British aristocracy, well known DJs, celebrities, and catwalk stars.

Lady Kitty, 30, the daughter of Earl Spencer and his first wife, former British fashion model Victoria Aitken, grew up in Cape Town, and attended the University of Cape Town (UCT). Lewis, 62, who is five years older than his new father-in-law, is also a graduate of UCT.

Also in attendance were Kitty's fashion model twin sisters, Lady Eliza and Amelia Spencer, with their South African partners.

The Spencer siblings – first cousins to Princes William and Harry – spent their early years in the Spencers' family home, Althorp, in Northamptonshire, before moving with their parents to South Africa in 1995, two years before Diana's death.



When Kitty's parents divorced two years later, Earl moved back to the United Kingdom, while Kitty and her siblings stayed in South Africa with their mother. Lewis, Kitty, and her siblings maintain very close ties to South Africa, especially Cape Town.

Amelia got engaged to her water polo instructor boyfriend, Greg Mallett, on 22 July last year. Mallet, who works as an estate agent, has been on the scene for 11 years and is the nephew of former South African national rugby coach Nick Mallett. The couple first met while studying at UCT, and he reportedly popped the question at the Clouds Wine and Guest Estate in Stellenbosch.

Lewis is a fashion tycoon and multi-millionaire whose family previously pledged £3 million (R61.5 million) to Oxford University to fund the appointment of a professor of Israel studies. He also owns a multi-million pound mansion in central London, as well as his apartment in Cape Town.

According to *The Mail On Line*, Kitty was escorted at the wedding ceremony, held in the gardens of the Villa Aldobrandini, a stunning mansion in Frascati, by her brother Louis Spencer, Viscount Althorp, and half-brother Samuel Aitken, whose father is businessman Jonathan Aitken

There was no sign at the celebration – which spanned three days – of her father, nor Princes William and Harry, whose weddings in 2011 and 2018 Kitty attended.

It's believed that Lewis' three grown-up children from

his marriage to ex-wife Leola were present.

The couple began dating sometime in 2018. Lewis proposed in Cape Town before Christmas in 2019.

Kitty grew up out of the limelight in the Mother City, and attended Reddam House Constantia. She lived with her mother and siblings in a gated estate in Constantia. She reportedly spent several holidays with her father at Althorp, the family's ancestral home, where her aunt, Lady Diana, is buried.

Lewis' late grandfather, Meyer Lewis, founded the Lewis furniture retailer, the Lewis Group, in the 1930s, and his late father, Stanley, acquired a controlling share in Foschini years later when Foschini was experiencing financial difficulties, turning the business around completely.

Michael followed in his entrepreneurial father's steps on the Foschini board, and according to *Business Insider*, sold 16% of his stake in the group in 2016. He has served as TFG chairperson since 2015.

Some of the brands in the TFG stable include Foschini, @home, @homelivingspace, American Swiss, Fabiani, G-Star RAW, Duesouth, Sportscene, TotalSports, and Markham

According to media reports, Lewis, who moved to London from Cape Town in the 1980s, founded the family's investment vehicle, Oceana Investment Corporation, and Israeli biotechnology company Prochon.

The late Stanley was described by many as a businessman extraordinaire and a generous benefactor. He passed away in London in 2009, and is survived by his wife Zea and four children, Renee, Michael, Wendy, and Cheryl. The family set up the Stanley and Zea Lewis Family Foundation, which makes grants focused on Jewish causes as well as other charities. Together with Telfed (the South African Zionist Federation, Israel), the foundation has provided hundreds of scholarships for southern African students in Israel.

It has awarded grants to a number of organisations including several synagogues, the community security trust, DALAID (Relief of Poverty and Advancement of Jewish Education), the Holocaust Educational Trust, Chai Cancer Centre, Jewish Care, and WIZO (the Women's International Zionist Organisation), to name a few.

Kitty's exquisite Dolce & Gabbana outfits stole the show, starting with her lace wedding gown, a picture of which she shared on her personal Instagram account. Lewis looked dapper in a white tuxedo with a black bowtie.

"Amore. Per Sempre," Kitty captioned a photograph with her husband, which translates to, "Love. Forever."

## Ben & Jerry's chair denies antisemitism amidst froth over boycott >>Continued from page 2

which ones.

"We're saddened by the impact that this has had on our business and the Jewish community," he wrote. "We are proud Jews, Americans, and active supporters of the New York Jewish community and state of Israel."

Gasman told JTA in an email, "We have lost catering jobs for corporate offices, schools, and synagogues over the past week due to Ben & Jerry's statement."

Multiple supermarket owners in New York City have pledged to limit or stop the sale of Ben & Jerry's in the wake of the announcement. The organisation that certifies Ben & Jerry's as kosher, Kof-K, also said it was in communication with Israel and an umbrella group for the settlements "to determine the most effective way to respond", but won't be removing its certification from the ice cream – a move that some Israel advocates have sought – according to *Yeshiva World News*, an Orthodox publication.

Israel's leaders, as well as the leaders of legacy American Jewish organisations, have come out fiercely against the boycott. On Tuesday, Axios reported that Israel has set up a task force to counter the Ben & Jerry's boycott, and encouraged its diplomats to start a pressure campaign against the decision by fomenting protests in front of Ben & Jerry's and Unilever offices.

At the same time, a growing chorus of progressive Jews in Israel and America is praising the boycott.

On Tuesday, a coalition of Israeli progressives took out a full-page ad in *Ha'aretz*, a left-leaning newspaper,

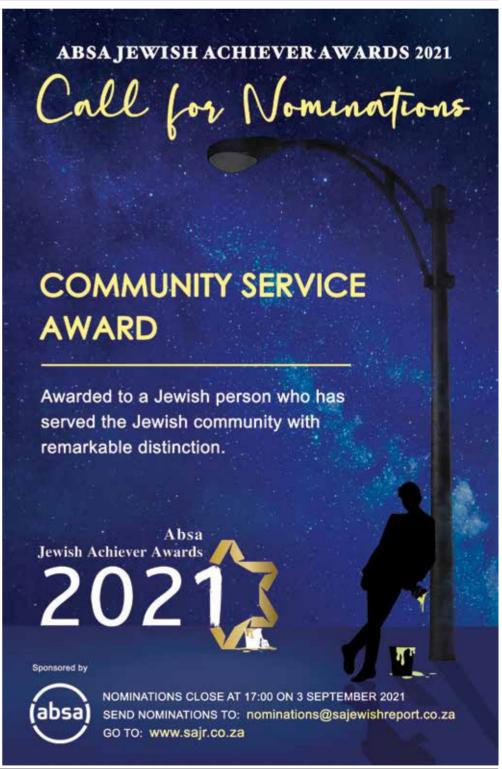
to thank Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, the Jewish founders of the eponymous ice cream company. The pair haven't been involved in the company's operations since 2000, and haven't commented on the West Bank decision.

A range of Jewish and Arab public figures signed the advert. Some of the Jewish signatories are Zehava Galon, the former head of the left-wing Meretz party; Naomi Chazan, a former Meretz legislator and deputy Knesset speaker; Dana Olmert, the daughter of former centrist Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert; Michael Sfard, a prominent Israeli human rights attorney; and Ohad Naharin, the famed Israeli choreographer.

"We are writing to let you know that in Israel there are also other opinions," the advert says. "Thank you for your commitment to Palestinian human rights."

The advert comes on the heels of a letter signed by seven left-wing American Jewish groups, including J Street, the New Israel Fund, and the liberal rabbinic organisation T'ruah urging governors not to penalise Ben & Jerry's or Unilever for the settlement boycott.

"Using the full force and power of government to penalise those who exercise their rights in opposition to Israeli policy does nothing but generate further attention and sympathy for boycotts, and frames backing Israel as being in opposition to fundamental freedoms in the minds of many Americans," the letter says. "That is a strategic disaster for those, like us, who are trying to maintain and grow a healthy US-Israel relationship."



## Gauteng VAX Volunteers



Volunteers needed for admin Volunteer for shifts when you are available



## In the driving seat of the vacci-nation

**MIRAH LANGER** 

ictor Nkomo is one of the backstage heroes who is helping community members get vaccinated against

Over the past few months, Nkomo has become a pro at finding the shortest queues, best venues, and escorting those who need assistance to get their jab.

"I feel proud. I believe we are doing something good - we are saving lives," he says, estimating that he has helped dozens of people including elderly shul congregants, staff, and any others in need.

When he began escorting people, he kept returning to the same venue. But then he "started driving around and scouting which are the better places with less of a queue. Mostly my guesses have been good, and I will find I have made the right choice."

While many praise him, Nkomo reserves his admiration for the staff on site. "Once I took an elderly couple who were in wheelchairs to get vaccinated. Everyone in the queue was just so happy to let them through. Wherever we go, people are always so happy to

Nkomo officially works as a driver at the company, Legal & Tax Services. He arrived in South Africa from Zimbabwe in 1999 and, to begin with, worked as a gardener and doing newspaper deliveries. It was through the latter that he met one of the owners of the company, who encouraged him to pursue his dream for a better future. A few years later, he had obtained his driver's license, and was "hired on the spot" by the owners of the company,

both members of the community.

First, he helped company employees and their elderly family members get to their vaccination venues, then he expanded it to helping "whoever needed to be vaccinated and didn't have transport to get there or know how to [organise the process] themselves".

Recently, Sydenham Shul asked if Nkomo could help in getting its staff and some of its congregants to vaccination venues.

He performed this service with aplomb, said the shul's executive director, Jonty Cohen. "He does everything with such good grace. Besides the frontline heroes, Victor is one of my heroes. He goes out and assists the community without expecting anything in return; nothing is ever too much trouble for him. Victor is probably the kindest, gentlest, warmest soul that I

> to ensure proper social distancing at all times. Judge Ezra Goldstein said that although their encounters were brief, Nkomo made

when he took Goldstein and his wife to a vaccination venue.

"I liked him immediately. He was calm and warm, taking us there and back very kindly. He is obviously a mensch," says Goldstein.

Getting your COVID-19 jab is a duty, not a right

he drop in cases of new COVID-19 infection

in the community in the past week is like

of my colleagues and myself, and though we're

still diagnosing new cases daily, fear of a further

As we start to sigh the first breaths of relief, our

imagination has started to venture into the prospect

of a fourth wave, which as professionals, perhaps we

During this week, when my mind has wandered

into these overwhelming thoughts, I'm instantly

reassured that we now have a vaccine for COVID-19.

It's our golden armour in this disastrous pandemic,

and the single most effective tool we have to get our

Yet, I'm intrigued by the number of people I still

consult on a daily basis who are truly undecided as to

whether or not they will be enrolling for a COVID-19

vaccine. Some cite well thought-out arguments that

have, in fact, enrolled, but an emotional barrier with

fear at its foundation prevents them from taking the

To date, there has been no scientifically robust

available vaccines. When I'm posed a question like,

"Is it worth the risk of having a COVID-19 vaccine if it

can cause blood clots or infertility?", my logical reply

is almost always with the counter question, "Have you

considered the risks of COVID-19 pneumonia or being

a conduit for COVID-19 pneumonia in someone else?

risk that concerns you?" Life is fraught with daily risks,

and we navigate the best balance of these risks in our

daily routines. For example, we wouldn't accept the

risk of going without food against the risk of crossing

a busy road to collect the food, even though both risks

Six months into worldwide vaccine deployment,

This sample size certainly allows us to quantify risks.

One in 100 000 Johnson & Johnson and AstraZeneca

are real. The same logic should be employed here.

just less than four billion doses have been given.

recipients developed a clotting disorder called

thrombocytic thrombocytopaenia. The occurrence

of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart) in Pfizer

patients has been pitched at about one in a million.

Have you weighed those risks against that vaccine

data that has called to question any of the readily

deter them from enrolling for vaccination. Others

exponential increase has abated.

wouldn't mentally survive.

lives back to normal.

next step.

the loosening of a noose around the necks

These numbers are statistically so insignificant, it's almost more

responsible not to mention them at all in my opinion. The risk of complications of the anxiety caused by their discussion alone may be higher than the original risks themselves.

So, why are we still struggling to convince a significant proportion of the larger community to get the jab? German psychologist Professor Cornelia Betsch proposed five c's as factors that deeply affect vaccine uptake. All of these are important here.

Confidence: trust in the vaccine's efficacy and safety, and confidence in the people rolling them out. We are making great strides here, particularly with community and religious organisations now opening vaccine centres. We need to produce more paper reading material about vaccine safety in different languages, and rely less on digital education only.

Complacency: whether the disease is considered a serious risk. The third wave and its devastation has shifted most minds here. We need to focus on the appreciation that healthy young people can become significantly unwell too.

Calculation: weighing up the costs and benefits. We need to encourage those reluctant to be vaccinated to do this exercise themselves. The risks of COVID-19 complications are big. The risks of vaccines are, at most, little.

Constraints: availability and ease. Justifiable or not, we have failed here. However, South Africa can be proud of its catch-up and current stock availability.

Collective responsibility: the willingness to protect others from infection through one's own vaccination. will focus the rest of the article on this responsibility.

COVID-19 has taught us the paramount lesson that we are responsible for one another. This spans from the responsibility of informing contacts if you test positive, to the responsibility of supporting infected individuals with medication to prevent them from infecting others, to the responsibility of emotional support for bereaved families, to now, the biggest responsibility of getting vaccinated. This is your greatest moment of responsibility to others in COVID-19, even if you believe you are taking on

It's so clear to me that the only way out of this pandemic is for us to stop framing our COVID-19 lives as individuals, and embrace the responsibility of being a member of a community. We need to take up our duty to protect others. Getting vaccinated to protect others shouldn't be seen as a mere act of altruism. In fact, it's the only way we will rebuild our communal life and develop population immunity. Ironically, it's this focus on others will that will enable us as individuals to resume our own social interactions and a normal lifestyle. The true test of COVID-19 is seeing beyond one's own immediate protection.

If you are in still in doubt as to whether or not to get vaccinated, you aren't alone. You have every right to ask questions. But COVID-19 vaccinations aren't about rights. They are foremost about a deep responsibility and personal duty to society as a whole. No formidable soldier has stood at the frontlines of a battleground worrying about his rights. You have a responsibility to go out there now and fulfil your duty. Otherwise, you may want to consider "staying home and saving lives" for the rest of your life.

 Dr Daniel Israel is a family practitioner in Johannesburg.

know on this earth." He describes how Nkomo stays with people in queues when needed. At other times, he has shlepped back and forth taking people in separate

shifts throughout the day an immediate impression

### Pop-up vaccination site sets record

**Victor Nkomo** 

SAUL KAMIONSKY

pop-up vaccination site in Glenhazel carried out just more than 11% of the total 27 053 waccinations administered across the country on 25 July, setting what is believed to be a record.

Three thousand COVID-19 vaccinations were administered at the volunteer-run site at The Base Shul on Sunday.

"Discovery has exceeded the number of vaccinations we did at The Base in a day, but the district manager of Joburg told me at the site that they haven't exceeded more than 1 200 in any one of their sites in Gauteng," said 27-year-old Dr Menachem Hockman, popularly known as "Dr Menoosh".

Menoosh attributes the speed and efficiency of the process to the many volunteers who did the administration and all the other necessary procedures for vaccination.

"This is an initiative that we are trying to roll out at

the moment, and it just shows the impact of having those extra hands to volunteer," says Menoosh.

"Bara [Baragwanath Hospital] and other sites have as many nurses as we have, they just don't have those volunteers, and it shows what a difference they made. It was also something special at the site to show the impact of all our volunteers."

One of the volunteers, Dalya Gerson, a dietician, said, "My role prior to the day was recruiting volunteers, organising them, showing them what they would have to do on the day, and giving them specific roles. I was also a volunteer for the day."

According to the messages Menoosh has received, everyone was in and out within half an hour, including the 15-minute waiting time. "That's brilliant for any vaccination site," he said.

The speed came from the strategy of divorcing the administrative role from the vaccination role. "All the vaccinators had to focus on was administering vaccines, so they could push people through much

quicker. That was our strategy."

To help other government sites achieve a similar speed, volunteers may be dispersed through Gauteng VAX Volunteers (GiVV), a programme that operates at vaccine sites. These volunteers assist with, among other things, administrative tasks, filling out vaccination cards, registering individuals that are eligible for vaccinations, and updating and processing information once vaccinations have been administered.

"Running these sites is how we are helping the health department, which provided us with the vaccines," said Menoosh. "We want to maintain that close relationship with it to allow us to do more. I want it to be given the credit for allowing us to do it, and it's very important for it to continue to allow us

 To help out or be a part of GiVV, apply by completing the sign-up form on www.givv.co.za. GiVV can also be found on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

## Gauteng VAX Volunteers



Volunteers needed for admin Volunteer for shifts when you are available



## Antisemitism webinar banned by a bot

**MIRAH LANGER** 

recent webinar on antisemitism hosted by the *SA Jewish Report* was banned by YouTube as "hate speech".

Attempts to rectify this situation soon revealed that the footage of the event had fallen victim to artificial-intelligence (AI) algorithms that are used to monitor content on the social-media platform.

"The technology is astounding, but of course, these aren't sentient beings who are looking at the content," says Howard Sackstein, the chairperson of the SA Jewish Report. "Artificial algorithms check through the literally millions of hours of footage that are loaded up onto YouTube all the time because there is too much content for humans to actually watch."

Surveys posit that more than 500 hours of new footage is uploaded every minute on YouTube, creating a daily tally of more than 720 000 hours. While there are tens of thousands of people trained to monitor the findings of the AI systems, the interface between these processes isn't always smooth.

The AI system uses image recognition and voice-to text conversion to search for various markers that contravene YouTube's code of conduct.

"The machine hears 'Jews', sees 'swastikas', and then determines this is antisemitic, and we end up banned for hate speech," says

Sackstein of this ironic twist of fate.

Sunday 11 July 2021 at 19:00 SAST

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According to its advertisement, the seminar, titled, "Antisemitism: mutations of the eternal virus" dealt with how "in each generation, [racist antisemitism] mutates and changes to

fit the politically acceptable

nuance of the day" and included discussion of how "the recent Gaza conflict and the ubiquity of social media has unmasked an explosion of antisemitic hate in South Africa".

The panel included international professor in Jewish history and thought, Henry Abramson; Professor Adam Mendelsohn, the director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies & Research and associate professor of history at the University of Cape Town;

as well as Professor Karen Milner, the Gauteng chairperson of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD), and Wendy Kahn, the national director of the SAJBD.

In preparation for the webinar, which took place on 11 July, Sackstein cut together a trailer using a montage of historical and contemporary footage. "It had images of Adolf Hitler; Eugene Terre'Blanche; attacks on Jews in France; people being arrested in London for antisemitism; pictures of supporters of the campaign to stop antisemitism called 'the story must end'. It ended with a visual of a female Holocaust survivor with a tattoo, against an Israeli flag. Every single image was publicly

available and taken from YouTube."

The webinar then went ahead on a number of platforms, including YouTube, Zoom, and Facebook. Shortly afterwards, Sackstein received a warning that the trailer and webinar had been removed from YouTube for hate speech with details about how to appeal.

Sackstein immediately appealed, explaining that the webinar was about "countering racism and antisemitism, not promoting it" Within a few hours, he was informed that his appeal was rejected, and that no further appeals were allowed.

When he contacted Google South Africa, it too struggled to make contact with an American counterpart that could rectify the situation. However, they have since met Sackstein, and unbanned the content. They were "enormously apologetic" about the occurrence.

Sackstein said that even before the webinar,

Abramson warned that one of his previous talks had been banned by YouTube for the same reason.

In the aftermath of the webinar's banning, Kahn said that the SAJBD had experienced a similar situation in 2018, when the SAJBD posted on Facebook about criminal charges it had laid against Matome Letsoalo (later convicted in court on a charge of crimen injuria for his antisemitic tweets).

"In the post, we shared his tweet which included a swastika. Our SAJBD Facebook page as well as all our personal Facebook pages were closed. It took days to convince Facebook that we weren't ardent neo-Nazis propagating hate."

Like Sackstein, she noted that it was "a difficult process to overturn these situations". Eventually, overseas counterparts who interacted directly with the social-media companies were able to intercede on their behalf.

### Young and old on record-breaking aliyah flight

>>Continued from page 1

Johannesburg with family. "The aliyah department has worked really hard to get everyone on this flight," she says. "As much as I love South Africa and the comfortable life it offers, as a strong Zionist, my soul has always been drawn to Israel and the better life it can offer me socially and economically."

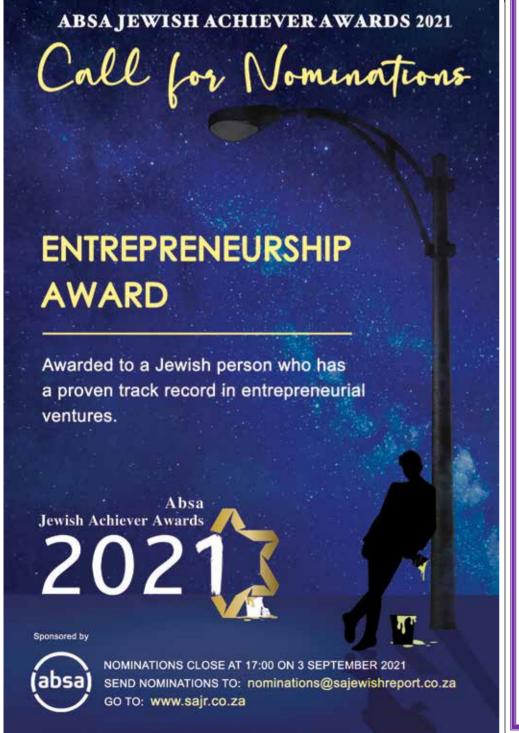
Sandra (Sandi) Shapiro says "growing up in a very Zionistic home" is one reason she's making aliyah. "My late father, Jack Shapiro, was the director of the Selwyn Segal home for 35 years. Although he never made aliyah, it was always his dream," she says.

Their family is slowly starting to make that dream come true. "My son made aliyah in February, and had the privilege of being part of a historic flight with 300 Ethiopian Jews," Shapiro says.

She's motivated by push and pull factors. "I have been

to Israel many times, and it has always been a lifelong dream to make it my 'forever home'. After a horrible experience in October last year, I decided that the timing was right, and started my aliyah process. There were quite a few challenges with our government services, and it took a few months to get all my documentation together. The war in Israel also delayed the process – frustrating but understandable.

"If one is deciding to make aliyah, my advice is to have lots of patience and trust the process," she says. "Eventually, at the end of June this year, I got approval. It was one of the happiest days of my life. Tears of joy rolled down my cheeks – I was finally going home. I'm filled with pride and so humbled to be a part of another historic flight. Being a part of such a large group is breathtaking. It's absolutely amazing that so many of us are returning home."





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## Tokyo has 76-year-old Olympics enthusiast in a pin

STEPHEN SILVER - JTA

id Marantz loves tradition so much that he spent 20 years as a board member of his family's Los Angeles synagogue.

So it's a big deal that he isn't in Tokyo this week for the start of the Olympics, the first Summer Games

he's missed since 1984. Marantz usually attends for three weeks: the 16 days of the games – with a few more days tacked onto the beginning and end to trade Olympic pins.

The 76-year-old retired businessman and Jewish philanthropist is one of the world's most committed pin traders, structuring his life around a subculture immortalised in *Boy Meets Curl*, a 2010 episode of *The Simpsons* in which Lisa Simpson becomes obsessed with collecting the year's commemorative *tchotkes*.

"Î'm in it basically just for the fun," said Marantz, who is vice-president of the board of directors of Olympin, which bills itself as "the world's largest Olympic collectors club".

A Los Angeles native, Marantz became an Olympics enthusiast – with a special interest in Jewish and Israeli athletes – at an early age. He was a teen when his family travelled to Europe for a vacation that ended at the 1960 Rome Olympics. "I just got blown away by the whole thing," he said. "I loved it."

The next time Marantz attended an Olympics was in 1976, when he travelled with his family – his wife, parents, and his toddler daughter – to the Montreal Games. It was there, he said, that pin trading first caught his attention.

"We bought a few, and we traded, and they were gone, and we bought more, and we bought more," he said. "That was my introduction to Olympic pin trading and collecting."

Olympic pins are the small commemorative

lapel pins, made and distributed at each Games, by national Olympic committees, host countries, and sponsors, which are meant to be traded among spectators from different countries. At about \$7 (R104) a pop, the tiny, colourful artifacts make ideal souvenirs, meaning that aficionados like Marantz and rank-and-file attendees tend to engage with each other, often in the official pin trading facilities that Coca-Cola has operated at each Olympics since 1988.



Marantz said that he "forgot about" the habit for a time, but the Olympics came back into his life in a big way in 1984, when the Games were held in his home town. His wife, who worked at the time for the United States Olympic Committee, wrote to all of the games' sponsors asking for pins as a birthday present for her husband.

The resulting haul brought him into contact with the founders of the Olympin club, launched around the 1980 Lake Placid, New York, Winter Olympics. His decades-long involvement has included an appearance in a 2008 documentary called *Pindemonium* about the pin-trading subculture. Attendees of the 2010 Vancouver Games frequently recognised him because Air Canada showed the movie on flights to the Games.

Marantz said he's traded pins with everyone from Olympians themselves to heads of state to celebrities. The biggest names among his trading partners include Prince Albert of Monaco, former Secretary

> of State Hillary Clinton, and gymnast Mary Lou Retton – but he said the vast majority have been locals who have dabbled in the hobby when their home towns have hosted the global sports gathering.

Marantz estimates that he's spent more than \$10 000 (R148 100) amassing a collection of more than 12 000 pins. (That doesn't include the considerate costs of Olympics attendance.) In one notable acquisition, he told the *New York Times* last year, he and some pin friends paid \$35 000 (R518 350) for 750 000 unsold pins after the

1996 Atlanta games. They each kept 40 000 pins and sold the rest to collectors.

Marantz specialises in collecting pins produced by countries seeking to host the Olympics, pins made by official host committees, and pins made by media organisations covering the games. But he tries to cast a wide net, even engaging in what's called "churning" by trading for pins he already has.

"The interaction with the people, the chasing of that next pin you want to get. I enjoy the hunt as much as I do having the collection," he said. "It's more about the people and the experiences."

Among Marantz's favourite pins is one he got in a trade with Gal Fridman, the first Israeli to win an Olympic gold medal (in windsurfing in 2004).

"I love to see Israeli athletes win," Marantz said. "I got to trade an Israeli team pin with him. It's in my collection, and it's meaningful to me."

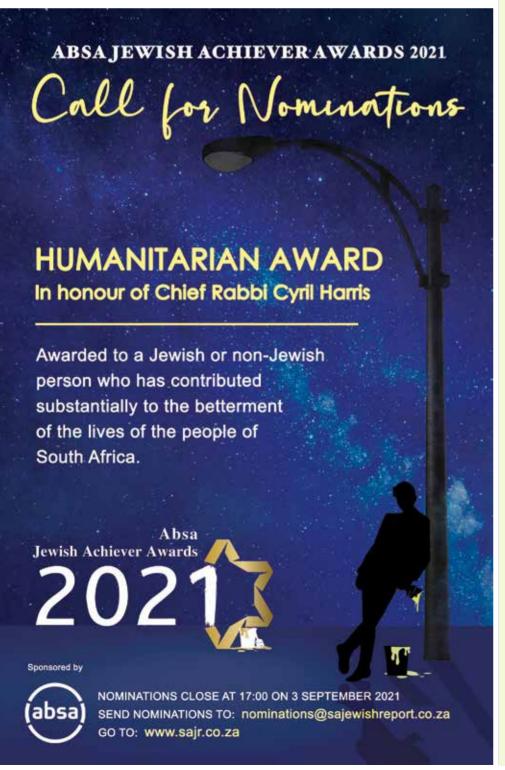
This year, Marantz said he'll be tuning in from home – and looking for ways to collect pins without being on site. Because some of the roughly 200 "hard core of international collectors and traders ... who go from Games to Games" work for the Olympics or for individual teams, including as doctors, they'll be able to purchase pins in person. Marantz expects to be able to trade for them or buy them on eBay.

The next Olympics is the Winter Games in Beijing in early 2022, and Marantz said he's hoping to go if he's allowed. But he's really looking ahead to 2028, when the Games will once again be held in Los Angeles.

Marantz's Olympics enthusiasm has not gone unnoticed. When the Olympics were held in Atlanta in 1996, Marantz's daughter had a job with the Olympic Committee, working on the opening and closing ceremonies. Marantz was tapped to serve, during a dress rehearsal, as a stand-in first for President Bill Clinton, and later for Juan Antonio Samaranch, then the International Olympic Committee head.

But even as his profile in the Olympics community has grown, Marantz said one of his favourite Olympic memories took place back in 1984 in Los Angeles, when he donned the suit of the Games' mascot, Sam the Olympic Eagle.

"Here's the thing: I wasn't blessed with athletic ability," Marantz said of his time in costume.
"Certainly not enough to be an Olympian. So if you're going to be more than just a spectator, you've got to jump in with both feet, doing as much as you can to wring out from your experience as much as you can."



### Is gold-medal swimmer Lydia Jacoby Jewish?

Lydia Jacoby, the 17-year-old swimmer from Seward, Alaska, surprised many when she came from behind to win the 100m breaststroke at the Tokyo Olympics on Monday, 26 July. Even Jacoby herself couldn't believe it: her jaw dropped when she saw her time of 1 minute, 4 seconds.

Jacoby's underdog status as the first-ever Olympic swimmer from Alaska, which has just one Olympic-sized pool, meant that Jewish viewers may have wondered for the first time: Is Lydia Jacoby Jewish?



Jacoby, also spelled Jacobi, is a surname of Ashkenazi Jewish or German origin. Ancestry.com lists the name as "Jewish, English, and German," a variant of Jacobi, and according to a baby names site, "Jacoby is most likely the transferred use of a patronymic Jewish surname derived from the Hebrew personal name Yaakov which was eventually Latinised to Jacob."

Some of the notable Jacobys in history were Jewish, including one who fled the Nazis in Germany to become an influential Israeli composer, but many others weren't. The swimming phenom doesn't appear to be Jewish.

Her parents, Richard and Leslie, are both boat captains and self-described "boat people". Leslie's

parents, Jerry Hines and Janet Hines (nee Miles), were active in St John United Methodist Church in Anchorage, according to their obituaries. While names cannot prove who is Jewish, public records show that Richard's father is also named Richard, and he has a brother named Christopher, both unlikely for Jewish men.

Jacoby's home town of Seward has a population of about 2 773 people. The majority of the state's Jews live in Anchorage.

### Lilia Akhaimova vaults Russia to top spot

Lilia Akhaimova, a Russian Jewish gymnast competing in her first Olympics, had the lowest all-around score on her team during the qualifying round for the finals, in part because of a balance beam fall.

But in the finals itself, she shone on the vault, her specialty, earning the top score among the 24 competitors and helping to propel the Russian Olympic Committee, aka Team Russia, to the gold medal

Russia's gold was made possible by a stunning turn of events in the women's team gymnastics competition – the withdrawal of United States superstar Simone Biles due to unspecified medical issues. Russia scored 169.528, 3.432 points ahead of the Americans, winning the country's first women gymnastics gold since the 1992 Olympics.

A Vladivostok native, Akhaimova is a two-time World Championships silver medallist and 2018 European champion with the Russian women's team. She was an alternate at the 2016 Games in Rio de Janeiro.

Akhaimova will compete in the women's individual vault competition on 1 August.

### Kayaker Jessica Fox wins bronze - again

Jessica Fox, considered by many to be the greatest paddler of all time, was heavily favoured to win gold in the Tokyo Olympics women's slalom K-1 competition.

Instead, the Jewish paddler took home a bronze medal on Tuesday, 27 July, as she did at the 2016

## From booking acts to pitching for Team Israel

**GABE FRIEDMAN - JTA** 

efore last November, Shlomo Lipetz already had his dream job. After drinking coffee and listening to a morning news podcast - The Daily from the New York Times - he would take the Ltrain from his Brooklyn apartment and head to his job as vice-president for programming at City Winery, a music venue and wine bar franchise headquartered on the Hudson River in Manhattan's Chelsea neighbourhood.

There he would dig straight into his emails – an estimated 500 to 700 per day - and get to work on lining up some of the thousands of shows that the City Winery franchise hosts in its more than 10 venues across the country each year. He recently booked, for example, dozens of post-rehab comeback shows for comedian John Mulaney and a cross-country tour for the provocateur pop star Sinead O'Connor (who promptly decided to retire from music after agreeing to the concerts).

But starting in autumn, Lipetz added a new routine to his morning schedule: baseball workouts.

That's because he is a member of the Israeli baseball team that's headed to the Tokyo Olympics, which started

The chilled out, baritone-voiced 42-year-old with a mullet happens to also be a 6-foot-4 pitcher who has been known as a pioneer in Israeli baseball since his teenage years in Tel Aviv.

"Anyone who's in the music business knows just how hardcore the job is. And I think I'm for sure living my dream," he said on the phone from his office last month. "But I'm probably living other people's dreams who wish they [weren't] just stuck in an office. I'm able to do both."

For people who are both music and sports fans, it does sound surreal - on a normal week, he interacts with music industry stars and insiders, and during international competition season, he plays against some of the best athletes from around the globe.

He's popular in both worlds, too – Rhett Miller of the country band The Old 97's and Peter Buck of R.E.M. (who plays in a side supergroup band called The Baseball Project) tell Lipetz that he's often the topic of conversation in a group text about baseball that they have with other well-known musicians. He also gets free vinyl from many of his musician friends, and in return, he sometimes gives back signed baseballs - they've been in high demand.

In Arizona, Team Israel player Ty Kelly – whose locker is normally next to Lipetz's because their numbers are close to each other - turned to Lipetz (and the team's few other Israel-born players) for insight into the recent violent Israel-Gaza conflict, which unfolded while the team was at

Keeping both gigs has meant a little less sleep than usual for Lipetz and some extra coffee. His typical morning from November until May became: coffee at 06:15, an hour drive north of the city to a baseball facility in Pleasantville, a 90-minute workout, a drive back to Brooklyn, a quick stop to change clothes, then a walk to the train. Some nights he would continue his workouts after finishing a day of work at about 20:00.

An intense competitive drive pushes him through it all,

"I just get into my own kind of baseball world, I don't check my phone. I just like competitiveness," he said. "I mean, I'll wake up at six o'clock in the morning, have a crazy, crazy week, and it doesn't matter - I'll wake up early, and go play a baseball game, a doubleheader in, you know, 100 degree [37C] weather, just because I love it. It's just this really purifying experience for me."

Lipetz isn't the only multitasker on the team. The Wall Street Journal recently profiled Eric Brodkowitz, a Yale graduate who has been able to keep working remotely as an analyst for Goldman Sachs. Many of the other players are current or former American minor leaguers who have earned Israeli citizenship in order to represent the country and keep their professional careers going. The team's trainer recently described the squad as "a combination

of the Bad News Bears and the Jamaican Bobsledding

But in spite of the fact that baseball isn't a popular sport in Israel, the team has a chance of winning a medal in Tokyo. Only six teams are competing in the sport, which hasn't been played at the Olympics since 2008.

And Team Israel has impressed the baseball

world in recent years, placing a surprise sixth out of 16 teams in the 2017 World Baseball Classic. They are led currently by former major league All-Star Ian Kinsler and Danny Valencia, a former MLB infielder with 96 career home

These days, the Israel Baseball Association, with funding from the nonprofit Jewish National Fund-USA, is deep into an effort to popularise the sport in the Jewish state, starting with building multiple baseball fields. IBA President Peter Kurz, a Mets fan and American expat who has lived in Israel for more than three decades, wants the fields being constructed in the central Israeli city of Beit Shemesh to host winter leagues in the near future, similar to those organised in Latin American countries, Florida, and other warm places where professional players go to hone their skills

during the MLB offseason.

Shlomo Lipetz

Kurz thinks winning a medal in Tokyo would open Israelis' eyes to the possibilities of baseball. It excites Lipetz, but he has some complicated feelings about his home country, in particular regarding its

> government and its views on diversity. "I'm not a nationalist. You know, I think I'm very liberal in my thoughts. I wish we had an Arab Israeli on our team. And I wish we had an Ethiopian Israeli on the team," he said. "For me, [Israel is] a mixed bag.

country that definitely fills me with pride, and you know, it reminds me in pitches for Team **Israel** a sense of being part of something that's

"But you're representing a

and I'm proud to be representing Israel." He's also proud to have the dual life that many

bigger than you," he added. "I love the country,

"I'm in this world where, you know, actors always want to be musicians, musicians want to be athletes, athletes always want to be something else," he said. "So anyone in the industry, in the music industry that I work with, and especially the musicians, just absolutely love this." Then it was back to the emails.

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Ahead of the final, Fox was the top qualifier with the fastest time in the semi-finals. Yet, her final race "didn't go to plan", Fox said. "I had to fight all the way down."

Fox, 27, burst into tears as her mom and coach, Myriam Jerusalmi, also an Olympic medallist in kayaking, comforted her after the race.

Fox told Australian media, "I'm disappointed that I made the mistakes I did that cost me the gold medal, but also happy to be on the podium. It's our sport. I'd obviously come dreaming of that gold medal, so when I hugged mum, that's when the floodgates opened."

### Olympics opener honours murdered

For the first time ever, the Olympic Games held a moment of silence during the opening ceremony for the 11 Israeli athletes murdered during the Munich Olympics in 1972.

There, the Palestinian terrorist group Black September attacked members of the Israeli Olympic team, ultimately killing six coaches and five athletes, as well as a West German police officer who participated in an unsuccessful raid to free the hostages.

Ankie Spitzer and Ilana Romano, the widows of two of the murdered athletes, have long advocated for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to acknowledge the massacre in the opening or closing ceremony. But the IOC has never before

heeded the call, at times suggesting that honouring the Israeli athletes could be divisive.

Ahead of the 2016 Rio Olympics, the first official Olympic ceremony was held to honour the victims -but not during the opening ceremony. Instead, it was held two days before.

Now, a year away from the 50th anniversary of the terror attack, the Olympics held a moment of silence. The event, which had not been previously announced, came a day after the opening ceremony's creative director, a Japanese actor and comedian, was fired over a Holocaust joke he made in the 1990s.

#### **Tokyo director fired over Holocaust skit**

Fired Tokyo Olympics Creative Director Kentaro Kobayashi, a popular comedian and actor, joked during a television appearance in the 1990s, "Let's play the genocide of the Jews," according to a video that began circulating early on Wednesday, 21 July.

By the end of the night, he had been fired, less than 48 hours before the opening ceremony for the beleaguered Olympics, which was rescheduled from 2020 because of COVID-19.

Kobayashi is the second Tokyo Olympics creative director to be fired over offensive comments. His predecessor was fired in March for mocking the weight of a female comedian. The composer for the opening ceremony stepped down this week amid revelations that he had bragged about abusing a child with disabilities.

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## Orthodox women make case for life beyond Netflix imagine how hard it is to understand someone else's." pro-feminism," says Sacks. "Anyone that knows even of a healthy society. "It's at home

s the spotlight shines on the introduction of the "Jewish Kardashians" in My Unorthodox Life, ordinary Jewish woman have begun to air their own stories under the title of #MyOrthodoxLife.

Their personal portraits are in response to the Netflix series, and other shows like *Unorthodox* and the documentary One of Us that depict people who reject Orthodox communities, and paint them as stifling and oppressive environments.

The SA Jewish Report invited six women in the South African Jewish community to add to the gallery of reflections that stretch beyond the streaming service.

As a starting point, many of them cautioned against trying to confine the complexities of Jewish identity into neat categories: "What does the word 'religious' mean? Keeping Shabbos and kosher and wearing a skirt? There are 613 other mitzvot. Why have we chosen those three as the barometer for religiosity?" asks Chaya Ross.

For her, the concept of "religious" is a social imposition. "I don't think Hashem makes such distinctions. In Hashem's eyes, I believe we're all Jewish, the Torah belongs to all of us equally, and His only expectation of us is for us to do our best and to try be better than we were yesterday," she says.

She suggests that Jewish identity isn't set, but an ongoing process. "In Judaism, growth is gradual, consistent, small steps to an eventual goal. Making these distinctions in Judaism can stop organic growth and close us off to what could be great spiritual and connecting experiences."

Breindy Klawansky, suggests that labels across the Jewish community can easily be misunderstood. "Your religious identity is your spiritual relationship and ties to Hashem and the Torah. No one can know how spiritual someone else is. If it's hard to understand your own relationship with Hashem, then

Adrienne Kay says that even within the concept of orthodoxy lies a "spectrum" of experiences. "It definitely depends upon where you and your community are holding. I can talk only from the South African perspective, and the level at which I'm holding. There are definitely more liberal and more stringent Orthodox communities."

These women celebrate the importance of communality, especially in South Africa. "South Africans Jews are extremely lucky," says Lesley Sacks. a little bit of Judaism, knows that it's not true that women are second-class citizens." Having become more religious since young adulthood, Sacks says it doesn't mean that she "didn't have meaning in [her] life before", but [becoming more religious] has brought joy to it. "It's now intrinsically part of who and what I am."

"I've never once felt subjugated as an Orthodox Jewish woman. In fact, I feel empowered and proud," says Kay. She gives examples of the extensive career

of a healthy society. "It's at home that the bedrock of our Judaism is set. The foundation of a home is the woman. She sets the tone, the environment, and the culture for the family. Judaism places much value and emphasis on women. I strongly believe that if you inspire a woman, you inspire a family. And if you inspire a family, you inspire communities!"

Ross notes how "when the Torah was given, Hashem said to Moshe that he must first go and talk to the women and instruct them about the ways of Torah, and then only after that instruct the

> men. The reason for this, amongst other things, is that women play a central role in giving over the Torah to their children, and imbuing their homes with it."

Far from feeling cut off from

**Breindy Klawansky** 

modern society, they describe how Judaism helps them find balance in what otherwise can feel like a frenetic pace. "The thing I wish everyone understood is the power of Shabbos," says Blumenthal. "I run my own business, and it often causes boundaries to be blurred, but when Friday afternoon arrives and I can turn off my phone and close my laptop, there's no greater feeling. Without having that distinct boundary between the work week and my down time, I wouldn't survive, and it's because of the gift of Shabbos that I'm able to push forward, keep going, and do the best work for my clients."

Kay concurs in the pleasures of life beyond Netflix in more ways than one. "In my personal Orthodox life, I have found a balance between modernity and the ancient traditions of Judaism. I love the fact that on Shabbos, I switch off from the modern world, including cell phones and TV, and find a unique peace with myself and a deep connection to G-d."



"We are unique in that even if you're not remotely frum, a lot of South African Jews consider themselves Orthodox and very traditional."

Rebbetzin Estee Stern, says that in her home, inclusivity was always embraced as "my parents instilled within us respect for each person, no matter their background or level of Jewish observance."

"The South African Jewish community is united," says Ross. "We have one Beth Din; we daven in the same shuls; and our lives are connected beyond the type of kippah our husbands and sons wear. Instead, we are connected in the way that we answer each other's questions on Joburg Jewish Mommies; in the way that we chat in the line at Moishies on a Friday; and in the way that our tehillim WhatsApp groups represent every type of kippah or non-kippah wearing Jew."

In addition, many express a deep sense of fulfilment in Jewish femininity. "Judaism is very opportunities enjoyed by Orthodox women.

"Rachel [Ruchie] Freier is a criminal court judge in New York from a religious Hasidic community. Beatie Deutsch, a frum Israeli woman, is considered to be amongst the top marathon runners in the world. She's a 31-year-old mother of six, and runs in modest clothing."

Klawansky is an award-winning musician and singer in her own right. Though she performs only to women, incorporating tehillim verses in her cutting-edge style, her expressiveness has such powerful resonance, it has even crossed cultural lines. Alongside her husband, the duo has received a Global Music Award and a South African Music Award nomination. Most recently, two of her poems have been selected for publication in an international anthology. Rather than feeling restricted, Klawansky asserts quite simply, "My music is in me..."

The women also say that we need to expand the way in which we measure success and fulfilment. Stern points out that the home is the beating heart

### rises to honour Hatzolah

n response to our community's continuing struggle with COVID-19, King David High School Linksfield recently ran a challah bake to pray for those in need and to honour the selfless work of Hatzolah

This organisation is a constant

The school raised nearly R22 000 for this unbelievable organisation. A huge thank you to everyone who made it happen, and of course, a



source of light and a pillar of strength in the community, and has helped nearly 6 000 people since the beginning of the pandemic.

massive thank you to Hatzolah.

### Yeshivah stories pack a message of hope

**Summerwood Primary School pupils** 

with their new reading packs

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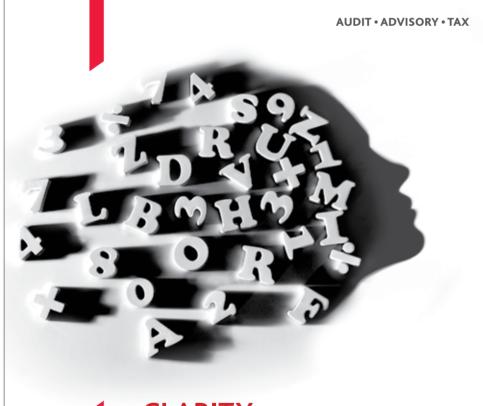
eshiva College Primary School staff started the term by partnering with Read for Hope to prepare and

distribute 20 story packs. Read for Hope is an educational initiative that offers readings to underprivileged communities and schools by

> people around the world, who record and share audio and video of children's stories.

Every pack included a video recording of a story, a worksheet, an activity relating to the story, and of course, a treat for every child. The teachers worked in pairs to create their packs.

The packs were received with gratitude and appreciation. A small amount of effort can have a lasting impact.



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### Freed of Fred

his is an apology to my daughter, Abby, to animal lovers everywhere, and to the late Yorkshire Terrier called Fred. May his memory always be for a blessing. I can't apologise for not getting along with him, but I can apparently apologise for writing an article less than two hours after his sudden passing. According to my wife, it was even too soon to

### **INNER VOICE**

Howard Feldman

be "too soon". In my defence, however, I was emotional and writing is cathartic. And I had a deadline.

----- A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

### Vaccination drive in our backyard

here was a welcome return to shul and school this week, as well as the reopening of restaurants and other facilities. While infection rates remain high, the worst of the dreaded "third wave" appears to be behind us. Thankfully, Hatzolah's latest figures show a significant decline in COVID-19 cases in our own community. That being said, the pandemic is still very much a part of our daily reality and won't go away by itself. What the past 16 months have shown is that the only way that people can protect themselves over the long term is to ensure that they are vaccinated as soon as possible.

Fortunately, there has been a steady uptick in vaccination rates countrywide. For the Jewish community, the process has been greatly facilitated by the availability of vaccination services within the community itself. This past Sunday, a pop-up vaccine centre at The Base in Glenhazel (the brainchild of Dr Menachem Hockman, who also headed up a vaccination drive at the Jabulani Mall) reported that 3 000 people had been vaccinated. Both the Chevrah Kadisha and more recently Hatzolah have set up vaccine centres, respectively operating at Sandringham Gardens and above KosherWorld (1 Long Avenue, Glenhazel). It's a reminder of how fortunate our community is to have so effective a communal infrastructure to assist and guide it during difficult times like these, along with so many dedicated volunteers, professionals, and benefactors who ensure that the wheels keep turning.

#### **Jewish helping hands**

In the wake of the devastating violence and looting in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) has prioritised the alleviation of hunger caused by the unrest. The SAJBD Food Relief

**ABOVE BOARD** 

Shaun Zagnoev

Fund, together with our partner, The Angel Network, is working with nongovernmental organisations on the ground to ensure that vital food aid is directly, efficiently, and timeously distributed. In KwaZulu-Natal, we are working on several projects, including partnering with the Union of Jewish Women in delivering food and other necessities to aged and children's homes in need, and with Rev Shlomo Wainer, who is working with Christian groups in Inanda and Phoenix.

In Gauteng over the past week, we have inter alia worked with the Clive Mashishi Foundation through its church network in distributing hundreds of food parcels in Eldorado Park, Orange Farm, Vanderbijlpark, and Kliptown. During the unrest, Ditau Primary School in Orlando East was looted, and all the food for children's meals stolen. Following an approach from the school, this week, we replenished its pantry so that the school feeding programme can continue. During our recent clean-up initiative at the Mayfield Mall in Daveyton, we realised that the hard-hit East Rand area is often neglected in terms of food-relief drives and thus this week, are arranging for food relief to be delivered to Daveyton.

We thank all our valued colleagues, partners, volunteers, and supporters who are making it possible for us as the representative face of the Jewish community to contribute on the ground and make a meaningful difference to those in need in our society.

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

 ${\it This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies}$ 

#### Letters

### PUBLICISING DISSENTION WITH CHIEF RABBI DESTRUCTIVE FOR COMMUNITY

Two disturbing letters dominated your letters page in the 15 July edition of the *SA Jewish Report*. The fact that they appeared on the eve of Tisha B'Av was of major significance.

Our sages address the reasons why the two Temples were destroyed on Tisha B'Av. Two of the reasons given are *sin'as chinam* (baseless hatred) amongst the Jewish people, and another – perhaps less well-known – reason is general disrespect for Torah.

Airing these two letters by two prominent people in our community regrettably compels people to take sides in the issue.

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein and the office of the chief rabbi represent Torah in our community. Over the years, Goldstein has filled an incredible leadership role. From the Sinai Indaba to the Shabbos Project, he has achieved prominence for South African Jewry in the world. His approach to the COVID-19 pandemic has enabled Jew and non-Jew to bring experts in the field into our homes through his webinars. Leading doctors, clinicians, and other experts have publicly praised Goldstein for this.

Medical experts, political commentators, and other

leaders in the wider community have been unapologetic in their criticism of the government's tardy handling of the epidemic – from the strange banning of cigarettes amongst other things to ineffectual law enforcement and the vaccine rollout.

The common theme running through both letters was criticism of the chief rabbi.

Perhaps a lesson should be taken from Moshe Rabeinu (Moses) in *parshas* Korach, who, when he encountered opposition within the community, humbly went and approached the dissidents in their own homes. The authors of these letters should have resolved these issues privately with the chief rabbi.

By airing these letters in public, the office of the chief rabbi and consequently rabbis in our community, whom he represents, have been undermined.

I appeal to people of influence in the community to consider whether their public statements will benefit the community or create further division.

Our community is going through a crisis. Let's move forward with *achdus* (togetherness) and unity, and *ahavas chinam* (baseless love).

- Monty Kaplan, Johannesburg

Some context. Fred died peacefully after 13 years of my suffering. Something that was bravely borne (by me). We never got along, but I treated with him kindness and respect, aside from the odd occasions when I might have suggested in front of him that if he didn't stop abluting under my desk or barking incessantly while we were eating dinner that I would have him put down. For the record, we never did that, and Fred died peacefully last Tuesday after eating thinly sliced chicken breasts that he had me cut up for him, as he didn't like to chew on his own.

As a family we are, of course, saddened by the loss, and may we know no more sorrow. But just because he's now dead, doesn't mean that I have to pretend that he was ever a nice person. He wasn't. And I have no doubt that had I "gone" before him, he wouldn't have had a kind word to say about me.

Such was our relationship.

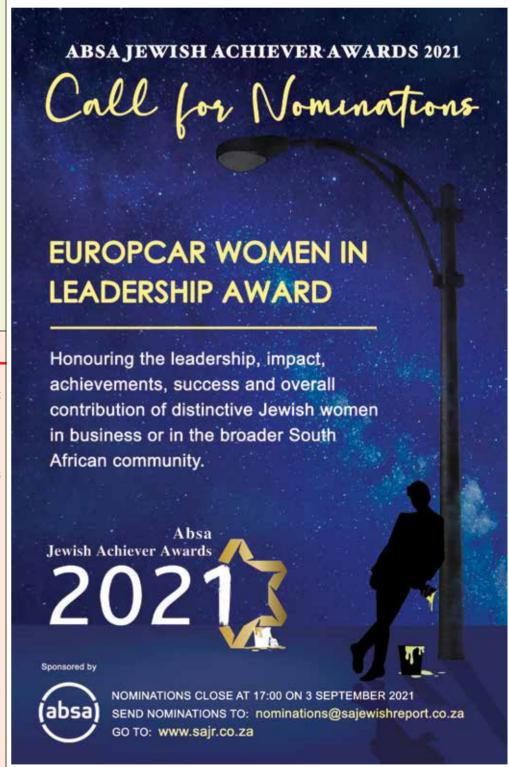
A well intentioned and kindly listener to my show messaged me to say that she had a magnificent pet cemetery to recommend for Fred. "It's a bit far out of Johannesburg, but it's worth it," she suggested. As thoughtful as that was, considering that I have both parents at Westpark and I can hardly find the time to visit them, I can't imagine dedicating an entire Sunday to spend time with Fred at his final resting place. Besides, I had seen the R450 invoice on the kitchen table

from the vet for "cremation of small dog", so that ship had clearly sailed.

He wasn't well loved by anyone other than my daughter, whom I suspect did so just to annoy me. So unpopular was Fred (may his memory be blessed), that around a year ago, a security guard, in the absence of alternatives, actually drew his gun and pointed it at him. It wasn't a pleasant event, and whereas I don't want to speak ill of the dead – G-d forbid – any more than I need to, it does illustrate the type of reaction Fred caused. After months of having his heels nipped at, the poor bloke finally almost lost it. And no one could blame him. Not even my daughter.

The reaction to my article was interesting. Whereas some enjoyed the take, others were deeply offended. Social etiquette demands that we mourn the loss of our pets. It demands that we call them our "fur babies", and that we post sad photos in happier times. And I would have probably done that if Daisy or Gatsby had suffered the same fate. Because they are, indeed, all of the above.

The offers we have had in the past week, not for meals to assist in our time of loss, but from people offering to give us their "Fred" to comfort us, suggest that I'm not alone in my experience. Where I might be alone, however, is in my foolishness in acknowledging it. Especially when I did so too soon even to be "too soon".



## Gauteng VAX Volunteers



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## From Chukar to Israeli baseball team

can say without fear of contradiction that the Idaho Falls Chukars haven't quite ascended to baseball's fields of heaven just yet. How could they? As a minor league baseball franchise, they play in Idaho's Eastern league, as far away from the hotbeds of United States (US) baseball as it's possible to be. (To give you an idea of where Idaho is, roughly-speaking, San Francisco lies 1 300km to the south west, while Salt Lake City is three-hour drive due south. To all intents and purposes, Idaho Falls



Mustangs and the Missoula Paddleheads. Once upon a time, they were called the Spuds, before being rethe Angels, the Eagles, and the Padres before the club owners finally settled on calling them the Chukars in

Their mascot is called Charlie the Chukar, a chukar

They are much-loved but little known, although things in this regard are changing very slightly for the better. This is because one of their players, a young New

being a pheasant like game bird not unlike a grouse.

York investment banker by the name of Eric Brodkowitz, used his experience pitching for them in the minor leagues as a springboard to becoming a member of the Israel baseball team. Brodkowitz thought he had played his last game of competitive baseball in 2018, when he pitched for Yale in a losing cause in an Ivy League game against Columbia. He had given the sport his best shot, and was now off to Goldman Sachs in

Holtz sketched a proposition. Israel was forming a baseball squad to take to the Tokyo Olympics in a couple of years' time. Would Brodkowitz be interested in taking out Israeli citizenship? More importantly, was he prepared to chase the dream? An arduous qualifying campaign in places as far afield as Lithuania, Bulgaria, and Germany beckoned. Oh, and before he forgot, would Brodkowitz be prepared to ask his employers if they could allow him to work remotely. Holtz rather fancied a furlough in Idaho with the Chukars would be good for Brodkowitz's fitness and pitching arm. What did he say? Brodkowitz said yes to all of the above as Israel set

about gathering up a baseball team, mainly raiding the minor leagues of the US for Jewish players who weren't yet Israeli citizens. During their odyssey, they have trained like demons, bonded like they didn't believe they could, and beaten far more fancied teams like Sweden, Italy, and the Netherlands. And they qualified for Tokyo with more than a year to spare, becoming the first Israel team to qualify for the Olympics in a team sport since 1976.

Truth be told, very few are expecting the Israelis to get a medal, but stranger things have happened. There are only six competing teams in the competition itself (the hosts, the US, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and South

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matches this week (South Korea on 29 July) and the US a day later, will be crucial if Brodkowitz and his colleague are going to get any traction on the competition. Baseball has a chequered Olympic history, a sport never quite sure of its foothold on the event. It was introduced as an official Olympic sport only at the 1992

Korea) so Israel have to be in with a shout. Their first two

Olympics in Barcelona, with Cuba taking gold from Taiwan (Chinese Taipei) and Japan. Cuba again won gold four years later, this time being followed by Japan and the US. The sport, however, hasn't been included since the Beijing Olympics in 2008, not appearing in either London or Rio, so the Israelis' qualification as the world's 24th-ranked team is even

more remarkable. It also has to be one of the stories of the games, full of the once-in-a-lifetime romance that

Hollywood moves are made of. Brodkowitz wouldn't have it any other way. "I thought my baseball career was probably over," he told the Wall Street Journal's Andrew Beaton in talking about the punishing loss to Columbia when pitching for Yale in 2018. That was three years ago, and so much has happened in-between. Perhaps there's a chapter or two left for the pitcher and his team.



After the game, Holtz approached Brodkowitz. He liked

his fast-ball very much, he said. Brodkowitz thanked him politely. Then came Holtz' pitch, "He was Jewish, right?" Intrigued and irritated in equal measure, the 25-year-

old pitcher replied that he was.



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